Celebrated for her compassionate theology and subtle, subversive imagery, Julian of Norwich (c. 1343 – c. 1416), the earliest known woman writer in the English language, is also an accomplished storyteller. This study explores and compares the narrative strategies found in her two accounts of her visionary experience, *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and *A Revelation of Love*. Reading these two non-fiction texts as narratives, this analysis brings Julian’s stories into dialogue with the narratives of her own time, Middle English literary theory, modern narratology, and the texts’ attention to their own telling. This reveals that *Revelation* includes, expands and transforms the plot, point of view, and characterization of *Vision*, while *Revelation* simultaneously implode these narrative structures to hint at greater, divine structures. By creating a poetics of developing and enveloping in *Revelation*, Julian strategically depicts herself, God and the reader as characters in each other’s narratives and as participating in each other’s storytelling: she authorizes her own story by making it God’s and the reader’s as well.

Cover: ‘St. Columba of Sens and St. Mary of Egypt holding books and palms,’ detail of early thirteenth-century French miniature in MS KB 76 F 5, f. 34v (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague).
Julian, God and the Art of Storytelling

A Narrative Analysis of the Works of Julian of Norwich

Godelinde Gertrude Perk
To ‘alle my evencristen’ from Pusey House, and my friends at work.
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Abstract
This study offers a narrative comparison of *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and *A Revelation of Love*, the two texts created by the first known English woman writer, Julian of Norwich (c. 1343 – c. 1416). It focuses Julian as a storyteller rather than as a theologian, mystic or visionary, concentrating particular on her narrative strategies, that is, on the strategic use of formal narrative features and the changes in these between *Vision* and *Revelation*. This dissertation therefore examines *Vision* and *Revelation* in terms of three narrative features: plot, characterization and perspective or point of view (termed ‘focalization’ here). These three narrative features are brought into dialogue with Julian’s theology.

Three analytical angles help shed more light on Julian’s innovative use of these structures in her works: modern narratology, Middle English literary theory and practice, and the texts’ own literary concepts and self-referential comments. Two central narratological methods are used throughout. The first is to make a distinction between narrator Julian, who tells about the events, and character Julian, who experiences the events. The second is distinguishing several hermeneutic layers or levels of signification in a narrative. Following narratologist Mieke Bal, this discussion distinguishes between fabula (the raw material), story (the content of the text) and text (the linguistic construct).

On the basis of this exploration, this study argues that *Revelation* includes, expands and transforms the narrative structures of *Vision*, and thereby consciously draws more attention to the structures themselves. At the same time, however, within *Revelation* a similar narrative reshaping can be seen as between *Vision* and *Revelation*. That is, *Revelation* reshapes its own new narrative structures, in order to hint at God’s greater structure and envelop its own in His. This greatest structure, however, is only glimpsed. As regards these narrative structures, this study argues that linear finite narrative desire driving the plot of *Vision* is taken up into an endless, greater narrative desire in *Revelation*, creating a circular plot. At the same time, narrator Julian constructs an omnitemporal, non-sequential plot. Moreover, this analysis shows that the focalization already found in *Vision* is made more demonstrative in *Revelation*, while the narrator directs this gaze more towards the apophatic and what is always hidden. Finally, this study explores how many of the characters from *Vision* are made twofold in *Revelation*, while *Revelation* at the same time foreshadows the union this doubleness will achieve at the end of time. *Revelation*, in short, utilizes *Vision*’s structures and its own to implode structure.

Julian’s poetics thus is one of continuous developing and enveloping, which allows her to depict God, herself and the reader as characters in each other’s narratives and as participating in each other’s storytelling: she authorizes her own story by making it God’s and the reader’s as well. This more conscious structuring and simultaneous reshaping of the new structure in *Revelation* forms Julian’s most innovative narrative strategy and the most striking interaction between her art and theology: narrator Julian depicts her own storytelling as simultaneously participating in that of God and foreshadowing God’s ultimate storytelling at the end of time.
Sammanfattning på Svenska
Julian, Gud och Berättarkonsten: En Narratologisk Analys av Julian of Norwich texter

Denna avhandling utgör en jämförande narratologisk analys av A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman samt A Revelation of Love - texter författade av den första kända engelska kvinnliga författaren: Julian of Norwich (ca 1343 – ca 1416). Inom ramen för min analys betraktas Julian of Norwich i första hand som en författare snarare än teolog, mystiker eller visionär och arbetets fokus ligger i synnerhet på hennes narrativa strategier: de narrativa strukturer som återfinns i hennes texter och hur dessa förändras från Visions till Revelation.


Utforskandet av Julians narrativa strukturer belyser hur medeltida narrativ approprierar och underminerar aspekter av andra narrativ så som bibelns, folksagornas och helgonlegendernas. Vidare ger studiet av medeltida narrativ djupare inblick i medeltidens skrivande och tankevärld som inte kan nås genom att begränsa sig till studier av medeltida argumenterande skrifter. Vision och Revelation kan betraktas som resultaten av ett medeltida narrativt tankesätt: de är återspeglningar av den
medeltida tankevärldens engagemang i frågor rörande livets förgänglighet, förkroppsligande och identitet. Studerandet och jämförandet av dessa två specifika narrativ möjliggör därför en ökad förståelse av den senmedeltida tankevälden och periodens kreativitet.


Avhandlingen fortsätter med en analys av texternas formella strukturer: handling, karaktärisering och fokaliserings. Dessa aspekter av *Vision* och *Revelation* omskrivs ofta som unika och är viktiga för likneslen *Lord and Servant*, vilken utgör ledmotiv för min diskussion.


*Visions* linjära struktur ger den samma *psychomachia-karakter* som också återfinns i moraliserande berättelser och helgonlegend. I *Revelations* blir dock handlingen cirkulär vilket också återspeglar hur karaktären Julian kontinuerligt återupplever sina visioner i loopande upprepningar. Handlingens får sin cirkulära natur då den linjära långtan


Istället, i sin dubbelhet blir berättaren ett tecken och en karaktär skriven av den störste auctor, Gud, vilket säkerställer auctoritas. Genom att framställa djävulen som avsaknad av så blir det manliga prästerskapets eventuella avfärdande av profetissan irrelevant. Både evencristen och profetissan är fullt kapabra till discretio spirituum på egen hand. Resultatet av denna karaktärisering blir att gränsen mellan berättare och läsare, text och uppenbarelse, suddas ut och att evencristen blir deltagande i både text och uppenbarelser med karaktären och berättaren Julian.

Avhandlingens avslutande kapitel erbjuder förslag på vidare forskningsområden för dem som söker kombinera studiet av medeltida religiösa texter med medeltida litteratur-teori och modern narratologi. Jag drar slutsatsen att en av de mest effektiva narrativa strategierna i Revelation är att den låter evencristen delta i utförandet av texten, fabeln och handlingen. Både formellt och tematiskt låter berättaren omstöpa evencristen i Julians avbild, sig själv i Guds avbild och vice versa, låter på så vis Gud och evencristen bidra till textens konstruktion och Julians berättande och omsluter därmed kärleksfullt hela evencristen i sin universumomspännande anakoretcell.
Introduction

Sometime in the second half of the fourteenth century, a young, devout woman listened spellbound to a preacher telling the dramatic legend of Saint Cecilia: ‘I harde a man telle of halye kyrke of the storye of Sainte Cecille, in the whilke shewinge I understonde that she hadde thre woundes with a swerde in the nekke, with the whilke she pinede to the dede’ (Vis. 1.36-38).1 [‘I heard a man of Holy Church tell the story of Saint Cecilia, from which account I understood that she had three wounds in the neck from a sword, through which she suffered death.’]2 This scene is found in the fourteenth-century text A Vision Showed to A Devout Woman, written by the anchorite and vernacular theologian Julian of Norwich (c. 1343-c. 1416).

The first book in the English language known to have been written by a woman, this work tells of a series of visions received in May 1373, when thirty-year-old Julian was seriously ill and believed to be on her deathbed. Unlike other accounts of visionary experiences, its first chapter situates the visions in the context of storytelling by including the event described above. The use of short stories such as these, and Julian’s precise recall of its exegesis, reveals that medieval thought paid close attention to the creation, communication and effect of narratives.

In this dissertation I argue that Julian in A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and in her later work, A Revelation of Love, her own expanded version of the earlier text, probably created inside the anchorhold, becomes a storyteller like the preacher. That is, she creates two narratives, two representations of a series of events,3 or more precisely, two ‘semiotic representations of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way’.4 I will show that these works can be studied and compared to each other not only as visionary texts or as works of vernacular literature and vernacular theology, but also as narrative texts. Such a comparison will reveal that Revelation includes and wholly transforms the narrative of Vision, yet also reshapes the resulting narrative to point towards God’s greater narrative. In spite of a large body of literary scholarship on Julian’s writings, no extensive discussion and comparison of Vision and Revelation as narratives seems to have been written before. This study, then, sheds

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1All quotations from Vision and Revelation are taken from The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006)
2Revelations of Divine Love, 4.
3Ryan, ‘Toward a Definition of Narrative’, 23.
4Onega and Landa, Narratology: An Introduction, 3.
more light upon ‘the first English woman of letters’ as a storyteller rather than as a theologian, mystic or visionary.

Narrative Strategies in Vision and Revelation

Both a cursory glance and a closer look at Vision and Revelation reveal a sensitivity to the many possibilities of storytelling. In Vision the narrator tells the ‘storye’ of St. Cecilia mentioned above, and in Revelation the narrator has God tell many short parables to Julian. This narrative sensibility is also suggested by the self-assured changes in events in Revelation. Although Vision and Revelation describe the same experience—both tell of thirty-year-old Julian falling ill and experiencing a number of visions—they also differ strikingly. For instance, in Revelation events have been added, while other events have been expanded or their order changed. The two works even end with different scenes. Revelation, consequently, is more than simply a revised and expanded version of Vision: it tells a different story. Furthermore, in Revelation the narrator’s self-awareness has increased. For instance, like many of the pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales, the narrator repeatedly comments on her own narrating. As a result, the narrator’s voice in Revelation is as impossible to ignore as that in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde. Revelation, thus, not only tells the story of the visions: unlike Vision, it also tells the story of its own telling.

In general, both Vision and Revelation can easily be described as narratives, whether using a medieval understanding or a modern understanding of the term. With their strongly noticeable sequence of events, they are as similar to the works of the Gawain-poet, Piers Plowman and The Book of Margery Kempe as they are to other works of vernacular theology, such as The Cloud of Unknowing or The Chastising of God’s Children. Cicero’s definition of narrative as ‘an exposition of events that have occurred or are supposed to have occurred’ pervaded medieval literary thought and applies to both Vision’s and Revelation’s detailed account of Julian’s illness and the series of supernatural events that followed it.

Likewise, when using Marie Laurie Ryan’s scalar conception of narrativity, with a spatial dimension, temporal dimension, mental dimension and a formal and pragmatic dimension, Vision and Revelation display a sufficient degree of narrativity to promise a fruitful reading as narratives. Both works fulfill the conditions of narrativity which Ryan lists.

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1 Underhill, ‘Medieval Mysticism’, 807.
2 Marion Glasscoe was one of the first to notice this narrative aspect, pointing out that ‘Julian belongs not only with Rolle, Walter Hilton and the Cloud-author…but with Chaucer [...] Langland [...] the Gawain-poet’. Glasscoe, ‘Means of Showing: An Approach to Julian of Norwich’, 176.
3 Cicero, De Inventione, I. XIX, 27, p. 55.
4 Ryan, ‘Toward a Definition of Narrative’, 29.
To begin, both works feature ‘a world populated by individuated existents’, namely the sickroom and by extension a house in fourteenth-century England, wherein feature Julian, her friends and family, clerical figures, and supernatural creatures such as demons and an angel.¹

The world of *Vision* and *Revelation* is ‘situated in time’ and ‘undergoes significant transformations […] caused by non-habitual physical events’.² That is, the events take place during a few days in May in 1373, and involve a transformation in Julian’s body — she falls ill, miraculously recovers and falls ill once more — as well as in the bodies and spaces seen in the visions.

Both texts show the mental dimension of narrativity, as suggested by how character Julian and those around her come across as ‘intelligent agents who have a mental life, and react emotionally to the states of the world’.³ For instance, in *Vision*, believing she will die, character Julian is ‘very sorry and reluctant to die’ (Vis. 2. 6) ['very sorry and reluctant to die'].⁴

These agents ‘enact purposeful actions’.⁵ The persons around Julian’s sickbed send for a priest, Julian’s persistent asking leads to God’s showing her more visions, and the devil aggressively trying to strangle her.

The sequence of events in both works forms ‘a unified causal chain […] leading to closure’.⁶ In both *Vision* and *Revelation*, Julian’s wishes for visions and a mortal illness result in both, which in turn leads to her fellow-suffering with Christ in both works, and in *Revelation* to a later vision of God telling her that his intention with everything is love. The visions and the events around them are ‘asserted as fact in the storyworld’.⁷ When Julian momentarily doubts and dismisses the visions as hallucinations, God has her experience a demonic assault in order to convince her of the factuality of the visions.

Both texts also express a concern about ‘communicat[ing] something meaningful to the audience’.⁸ For instance, the narrator frequently addresses the audience directly, describing what the events should communicate to the reader. To sum up, *Vision* and *Revelation* possess a large degree of narrativity, both from a modern and from a medieval perspective.

In spite of this self-conscious narrativity in *Revelation*, and narrative sensibility and large degree of narrativity in both, very few studies read or compare *Vision* or *Revelation* as narratives, although a small number make

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¹ Ibid. This is the ‘frendfulle mene’ (Vis. 16.18).
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁵ Ryan, ‘Toward a Definition of Narrative’, 29.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid.
mention of these aspects. Julian’s ‘narrative strategies’, to use Lynn Staley’s phrase, and their development have been noticed, but do not seem to have yet been fully explored.

The emphasis of most research has been on Revelation alone, and on this work as a visionary text or a work of vernacular theology, that is, as an argumentative text rather than a narrative work. This emphasis is understandable in the light of the differences between Vision and Revelation. The length of Revelation is more than four times that of Vision, and it contains more visions and more evocative imagistic details, including a harrowing yet poetic description of Christ’s body drying slowly. In Revelation, one also finds a bold, speculative theology, intelligently set out in subtle meditations that sometimes resemble prose poetry. These argumentative sections also include a particularly well-developed exposition of Christ’s motherhood. Given these striking images and accomplished vernacular theology, the attraction of many scholars to Revelation as a visionary or argumentative text instead of a narrative one, and to Revelation alone instead of to both works, is not surprising.

This emphasis on Julian’s works as argumentative, however, forecloses a number of other possibly fruitful readings. That is, it denies to the texts influences from the many narratives permeating late fourteenth-century culture. Roland Barthes famously wrote that ‘the narratives of the world are numberless.’ Numberless narratives were also available to any person in England in the late fourteenth-century. Vision and Revelation were created in a culture in which women read to each other saints’ lives, romances and imaginative retellings of the gospels. Julian’s age was one in which sermons, mystery plays, songs, and even the very walls of churches told tales. It was even thought that lay people could only remember doctrine when it was linked to a tale. Consequently, just as Margery Kempe’s autohagiography, her saint’s life of herself, is likely to have been influenced by legends and lives of female saints, it is probable that medieval narratives, such as those in affective meditation texts and mystery plays, shaped the form and content of Vision and Revelation.

In addition, when reading Vision and Revelation as mainly argumentative than narrative, the many ‘Julians’ found in these works are

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1 See the literature overview below.
2 Staley, Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions, 3.
3 Watson and Jenkins, Introduction, 2; Windeatt, Julian’s Second Thoughts: The Long Text Tradition, 101.
5 Riddy, “Women Talking about the Things of God”: A Late Medieval Subculture.’
easily conflated; Julian’s ‘fictional self-fashioning’ as Lynn Staley calls it, is likely to be overlooked. Vision and Revelation both feature a character alter-ego of the narrator, just as the narrator of the Canterbury Tales includes a character named Chaucer. Narrator Julian and character Julian differ significantly from one another in both Vision and Revelation. When studying both works as argumentative, however, such scholarship easily turns all ‘Julians’ into one detached wise woman, rather than several vividly realized characters with fluctuating states of wellbeing, on a par with Chaucer’s pilgrims. Staley claims in her study of the dissenting fictions in The Book of Margery Kempe that many scholars and readers admiring Julian prefer a single, unified figure to several conflicting creations: ‘her admirers are for the most part committed to the picture of a “Mother Julian,” whose serene faith can easily be accommodated within the bosom of the church.’ Staley writes of both Julian and Margery: ‘it seems grudging to define their achievements in terms of the stereotypes of gender: placidity on the one hand, and hysteria on the other […] Were the Book [of Margery Kempe] attributed to Geoffrey Chaucer or William Langland […] we would pay a good deal more attention to its narrative strategies, to its voices.’ While scholarship on Vision, Revelation and The Book of Margery Kempe has changed significantly in the twenty-two years since the publication of Staley’s study, Staley’s comment remains valid: the narrative strategies and many voices in Vision and Revelation need more attention.

Another effect of an overemphasis on Julian of Norwich’ works as argumentative rather than narrative is that it leads to a focus on Revelation only, which contains more argumentative sections than Vision. Many studies focus on Revelation only, instead of comparing Vision and Revelation. Such

1 Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority’, 109.
2 Staley, Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions, 3.
3 Ibid.
4 According to John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis, the last few decades saw ‘a veritable boom in the field of “Margery Kempe studies”’. Arnold and Lewis, ‘Preface’, xvii-
In these decades, many literary scholars have investigated Margery’s self-presentation in the Book, and like Staley, have paid attention to the different voices and strategies in it. Two recent studies of Margery’s self-fashioning are Laura Varnam’s examination of Margery’s performative use of devotional objects, and Juliette Vuille’s investigation of Margery’s self-authorizing imitation of Mary Magdalene. Laura Varnam, ‘The Crucifix, the Pietà, and the Female Mystic’; Juliette Vuille, “‘I Wolde I Wer as Worthy to Ben Sekyr of Thy Lofe as Mary Mawdelyn Was”’: The Magdalene as an Authorizing Tool in The Book of Margery Kempe’.
5 There are a number of exceptions, such as Laura Saetveit Miles’ analysis of how Revelation places the vision of Mary earlier in the visionary sequence. Laura Saetveit Miles, ‘Christine de Pizan and Julian of Norwich in Conversation’. Staley briefly discusses the same change. Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority’, 118, 119. Another exception is Barry Windeatt, who has been comparing Vision and Revelation since 1980, and does pay some attention to plot and focalization, but little to characterization. Barry Windeatt, ‘The Art of Mystical Loving: Julian of Norwich’, 55–
a comparison, however, provides a case study of fourteenth-century literary thought being developed and practiced. Revelation shows a marked increase in explicit structuring, use of vernacular literary terms such as mater and entent, and descriptions of narrative expectations. Its poetics, I argue, are as accomplished as that of Chaucer’s works. Both Vision and Revelation were created during a period of intense literary activity in Middle English. Studying Vision and Revelation in terms of their narrative differences, therefore, further illuminates how fourteenth-century vernacular literary theory developed and how it shaped literary practice.

A Poetics of Developing and Enveloping

This study focuses on Julian’s narrative strategies, that is, on the strategic use of formal narrative features and the changes in these between Vision and Revelation. Using medieval literary theory, modern narratology, and the literary thought found in the works themselves, I examine Vision and Revelation in terms of the narrative features plot, characterization and perspective or point of view (termed ‘focalization’ here). These are brought into dialogue with Julian’s theology. On the basis of this exploration, I argue that Revelation includes, expands and transforms the narrative structures of Vision, and thereby consciously draws more attention to the structures themselves. At the same time, however, within Revelation a similar narrative reshaping can be seen as between Vision and Revelation. That is, Revelation reshapes its own new narrative structures, in order to hint at God’s greater structure and envelop its own in his. This greatest structure, however, is only glimpsed. Revelation, in short, utilizes Vision’s structures and its own to implode structure.

Julian’s poetics thus is one of continuous developing and enveloping (figure 1).

This more conscious structuring and simultaneous reshaping of the new structure in Revelation, I suggest, forms Julian’s most innovative narrative strategy and the most striking interaction between her art and theology. According to Revelation’s theology, God dwells in humanity and humanity dwells in God. Similarly, by transforming Vision’s and its own narrative features, Revelation depicts

Figure 1. Poetics of developing and enveloping.

its narrative as simultaneously forming part of God’s greater narrative and containing part of that narrative in its own. Narrator Julian thus depicts her own storytelling as simultaneously participating in that of God and foreshadowing God’s ultimate storytelling at the end of time. Her statement about Christ’s parenthood emanating through earthly parents therefore applies to her understanding of storytelling as well: ‘it is he that doth it in the creatures by whom it is done’ (Rev. 60. 44). [‘[Y]et it is he who does it by the created beings by whom it is done.’].

Vision and Revelation provide an analogy of their poetics, namely the parallel images of the hazelnut-like little thing and God in a point. In one of the first visions, the narrator has character Julian hold a hazelnut-sized little thing in her hand, and while she is looking at it, has God tell her that it holds all of creation (Vision 4. 23-35; Rev. 4. 26-35). In a subsequent vision, character Julian sees God in a point, leading her to see that he is in the middle of creation and does everything (Vis. 8. 9-19; Rev. 11). Maud McInerney comments: ‘Julian expresses relationships between divine and human, body and soul, in terms of paradoxical enclosures. She constructs, as it were, an Escherian matrushka: the body of the last, smallest and most interior doll opens to reveal the first and the largest.’

Just as seeing the hazelnut and the point allows character Julian mentally to open these structures and see the greater whole they contain, the formal structures in Revelation are transformed to reveal the largest structure. Revelation’s envelopment or implosion of structure has been noted by previous scholarship, as is its tendency to make God enclose these. For instance, Laura Saetveit Miles points out that Julian’s spatial metaphors suggest physicality collapsing ‘in light of the mystical infinity of God’. In terms of characterization, Liz Herbert McAvoy suggests that, in spite of its pervasive ‘motherhood matrix’, Revelation ultimately unites male and female in the Godhead. Concerning visuality and sight, Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross have discussed how the images in Revelation become non-representational. As regards intertextuality, David Aers has observed how Julian’s ‘distinctive rhetorical strategies [...] resist, [...] unravel, and [...]
supersede’ dominant devotional commonplaces.1 However, the evolution from *Vision* to *Revelation* to this overarching narrative strategy of developing and enveloping has received little attention. This study therefore examines how this developing and simultaneous enveloping of narrative structures comes into being and how the different narrative structures relate to each other. By doing so, this study hopes to invite a reading of Julian of Norwich’s works as equally self-referential as those by Chaucer and the Gawain-poet, but also as featuring a confident interaction between art and theology. In Julian’s works, art and theology do more than simply reflect one another. Rather, they embody and animate each other.

**A Dialogue between Modern, Medieval and Julian’s Narratology**

In order to investigate this dialectic of developing and enveloping of narrative structures, my analysis uses several theoretical lenses, consisting of medieval and modern thought on narrative, as well as *Vision* and *Revelation*’s own. Approaching the texts from these three angles preserves the alterity of Julian’s texts while simultaneously discerning continuities between medieval and modern theory of narrative. Using these three angles also makes it possible to read the one framework through the other two and thereby problematize all three.2 Moreover, this allows Julian’s narrative strategies to be discussed both in and on her own terms and in dialogue with the twentieth and the twenty-first century.

Different concepts from different narratological theories inform the analytical chapters. Two central narratological methods, however, are used throughout the whole analysis, and therefore need to be introduced here. The first is distinguishing several hermeneutic layers or levels of signification in a narrative. This distinction is inspired by the common intuition that the events in a narrative seem to have a separate existence from their representation or telling.3 The sequence of events somehow seems to pre-

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1 Aers, ‘The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Julian of Norwich’s *Revelation of Love*’, 82.
2 This approach is inspired by the recommendations made in Wogan-Browne et al., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, 315.
exist the telling, yet the telling also produces the sequence of events. The exact terminology depends on the narratological theory. Following Mieke Bal, I distinguish between fabula, story and text (figure 2).

Text is a ‘finite, structured whole composed of signs’, also defined as ‘any semiotic construct, anything made of signs’. In the case of a verbal narrative, the text is ‘a finite and structured set of linguistic signs.’ The text is the only level that the reader encounters. The story is the signified of this text; it is ‘the content of that text, [which] produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and “colouring” of the fabula’. The fabula, the signified of the story, is ‘a series of logically and chronologically related events [...] caused or experienced by actors.’ The fabula lacks specificity; it is, as Onega and Landa write, ‘a synthetic abstraction [...] a bare scheme of narrative events which does not take into account any specific traits that individualize agents or actions into characters or concrete events.’ When the fabula elements are ordered into a story—a hypothetical activity, not the author’s or reader’s—several processes take place: the events are arranged into a particular order, which may differ from the chronological order; the actors are given traits and thus turned into characters, locations are given particular characteristics, and one or several points of views are selected.

Applying this division of three levels to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, a text contemporary with Vision and Revelation, may provide a helpful example. The text of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is the linguistic artefact, written by the Gawain-poet, which the reader can find in the bookstore and read. It consists of linguistic signs, namely the Middle English words. The story is the content of that text. This story centers around

2 In Russian formalism, for instance, story and text together are called zhujet, and the material of these is called the fabula.
3 Bal, Narratologie: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, 9. Diagram reproduced from Onega and Landa, 7, which is a simplified version of the one found in Bal, Narratologie: Essais Sur La Signification Narrative Dans Quatre Romans Modernes, 3.
4 Bal, Narratologie 5; Onega and Landa, 3.
5 Bal, Narratologie, 4; Onega and Landa, 7. Bal and many other narratologists see many forms of art as containing narratives that can be divided into fabula, story and text.
6 Bal, Narratologie, 5.
8 Onega and Landa, 7.
9 Bal, Narratologie, 8.
10 My choice of Gawain as an example is inspired by Tony Davenport’s example in his study of medieval narrative; his discussion uses a different terminology and a different division of levels. Davenport points out that such an application of narratological concepts to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight shows that structuralist approaches can fruitfully be applied to medieval narrative, bringing out the complexity and the richness of these works. His claim thus provides support for this dissertation’s approach to Julian’s works. Davenport, Medieval Narrative : An Introduction, 21–23.
Sir Gawain and his quest. Particular events have been selected: the events of
the hunt are juxtaposed with those of the bedroom scenes, but the story also
quickly moves through certain events while dwelling longer on others.
Characters, such as Sir Bertilak’s wife are seen from a particular point of
view, and this perspective is represented. For instance, when walking
towards Bertilak’s wife and his aunt, Gawain gazes (‘gly’t’) intently at
Bertilak’s wife, seeing many details of her appearance. 1 The fabula is the
‘bare scheme of events’ 2 of the story, connected by chronology and cause.
Consisting of all events of importance to the narrative, it begins with Morgan
le Fay transforming Bertilak by magic into the Green Knight and having him
ride to Camelot in order to frighten Guinevere to death. It also includes
Bertilak’s asking his wife to test Gawain by means of her wooing. The
usefulness of the distinction between story and fabula can be seen here: the
story conceals many of the fabula events, and at which point these are
revealed contributes strongly to the effect of the narrative. In other words,
the relation between text, fabula and story affects the narrative as a whole.
The distinction between fabula, story and text can therefore help uncover the
narrative strategies of Vision and Revelation.

This study also follows basic narratological methods by making a
distinction between character Julian and narrator Julian. The narrator
belongs to the level of text, and is the ‘fictitious spokesperson [...] the agent
who relates, who ‘utters’ the signs that constitute the narrative text’. 3
Character Julian is an aspect of the story; she is an agent whom the story has
individualized by giving her traits. 4 Watson and Jenkins make a similar
distinction; they distinguish between Julian the creature, who lives through
the visionary experience in 1373, and Julian the interpreter, who reflects and
comments on the visions and constructs her theology out of them. 5 Likewise,
Lynn Staley in her study of The Book of Margery Kempe makes a distinction
between Margery the character and Kempe the author function. 6 My
distinction between narrator Julian and character Julian is a narratological
variation on this.

Adopting these two key narratological distinctions and several
narratological concepts has a number of advantages. First of all, as
mentioned earlier, several ‘Julians’ speak and act in Vision and Revelation.
In Vision narrator Julian in the 1380s writes about thirty-year-old character

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1 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight ll. 945-970 in ed. Andrew, The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript : Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ll. 945-970.
2 Onega and Landa, 7.
3 Bal, Narratology, 9.
4 Bal, Narratology, 8.
6 Staley, Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions, 3.
Julian; in *Revelation* narrator Julian writes sometime between the 1390s and 1416 about thirty-year-old character Julian, but also about all ‘Julians’ between the visions in 1373 and the moment of telling. These narrators and their character alter-egos interact differently in the two texts. In *Revelation*, for instance, the narrator reveals less about character Julian than her equivalent in *Vision*, which contains more traits of character Julian, such as her gender and level of education. In addition, she treats character Julian more mildly. For example, character Julian’s wish to understand why sin was allowed is no longer judged harshly as ‘great pride’ (*Vis. 13. 38; Rev. 27. 8*). According to Watson and Jenkins, this complex interaction between the different ‘Julians’ has not yet been fully addressed: ‘the elusive relationship between re-creation and interpretation, desire and argument, experience and theology, imaged here as the relation between Julian the creature and Julian the interpreter has not even now been adequately articulated.’¹ By using narratology, this relation can be described in greater detail.

In addition to facilitating a comparison between the different ‘Julians’, a narratology-inspired approach enables this study to track the changes in chronology and the addition of events without having to postulate the existence of an original visionary experience. For instance, instead of needing to address whether or not *Vision* intentionally left out the parable of the Lord and Servant, or whether the original visions lacked many of the vivid details found in *Revelation*, both works can be seen as having arranged the fabula matter into two different stories.

Finally, dividing the narrative into text, story and fabula makes it possible to study the relation between the self-referential remarks in *Revelation*, which form part of the text, and the story. This distinction thus allows this analysis to compare the text’s telling of itself to its telling of the events.

My analysis also approaches the texts historically, discerning and discussing the narrative features using medieval thought on narrative and texts in general. Middle English discussions of poetics, such as those found in prologues, are particularly relevant. In these discussions Julian’s contemporaries use and define terms which also appear in *Vision* and *Revelation*, such as *mater*, *mening* and *knotte*. In addition, these prologues often contain vernacular equivalents of well-known rhetorical concepts useful for a narrative analysis.

Moreover, the literary comments that medieval narratives, such as the *Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, make about themselves also inform my discussion. My analysis draws on these vernacular discussions for two reasons. In the first place, such an approach reconstructs—to the extent that this may be possible—how the text may have

been read by a fourteenth-century reader. Secondly, it creates a common
ground for comparing Vision and Revelation to medieval narratives that
reflect on their own storytelling. Vision and Revelation are reticent about the
sources of their poetics. Other narrative texts, in contrast, engage with
vernacular literary thought more openly, suggesting that these discussions
strongly shaped these works. By comparing these works with Vision and
Revelation by means of vernacular literary theory, previously invisible
connections between Julian’s works and medieval literary theory reveal
themselves.

Like Julian’s most recent editors Watson and Jenkins and several
other scholars, I do not ascribe to historical Julian the expertise in medieval
rhetoric that earlier editors Colledge and Walsh ascribed to her. Nor do I
wish to claim that she was familiar with many vernacular prologues in which
such terms appear. Rather, just as several scholars consider it likely that the
theological knowledge in Vision and Revelation originates from devotional
compilations and the strongly oral vernacular literary culture of medieval
women, I consider it probable that the narrative skill and knowledge of
narrative terms displayed in both texts result from its author having heard
many narratives.

Finally, Vision and Revelation’s own attention to their formal
structures also informs my analysis. Revelation, in particular, pays attention
to its own telling, but Vision does so to a certain degree, as well. This study
draws on this self-referentiality in order to analyse the texts on their own
terms, by using the literary concepts found in Vision and Revelation, and by
letting the parable of the Lord and Servant form a leitmotif.

This parable or exemplum, a brief narrative illustrating or confirming
a general statement, is one of the most extensive additions in Revelation.
Described as both a vision and a narrative, it begins with a lord sending out a
servant, who falls painfully into a ditch. The lord unexpectedly promises to
reward him more than if he had not fallen. The narrator then has God tell
character Julian almost twenty years later to study the vision very closely,
which she does.

As a result of this close study, character Julian is not only able to
create an exegetical close-reading of the parable, but also discover many new
narrative elements. For instance, she sees in great detail what clothing the
servant wears, and finds out more about the task he was expected to do. The

1 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Introduction’, 3, 23; Sutherland, “‘Oure Feyth is Groundyd in
Goddes Worde’ – Julian of Norwich and The Bible.’ Colledge and Walsh, 47−49.
2 Dutton, Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations,
3 Joseph Albert Mosher, The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of
England, 1.
narrator thus lets the character simultaneously expand and close-read the parable.

The narrative structures of significance in *Vision* and *Revelation* as wholes are of significance to the parable as well. Character Julian reflects extensively on the lord’s and the servant’s actions (plot and characterization), their manner of looking at one another (perspective) and their appearance and their inner and outer attitude (characterization) and provides a reading of these narrative elements. *Revelation* thus creates a narrative analysis itself; that analysis forms a leitmotif and analytical principle for my analysis of the narratives of *Vision* and *Revelation*. Using *Vision* and *Revelation*’s own terms and *Revelation*’s analysis of the narrative of the Lord and Servant allows for a discussion of *Vision* and *Revelation* on and in their own terms, while also revealing how these works respond to contemporary literary theory and transform it into their own. Such a discussion, in short, shows how *Vision* and *Revelation* practice their own poetics.

In addition to discussing *Vision* and *Revelation* on their own terms, this study contextualizes the narrative features in these texts with those in several groups of roughly contemporary narratives. The first group of narratives are those found in women’s vernacular literary culture, represented by Saint Birgitta of Sweden’s influential and sizeable collection of visions *Liber Caelestitis*, translated into Middle English in the early fifteenth century; Nicholas Love’s *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, which is the Middle English version of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*; Jacobus de Voragine’s thirteenth-century encyclopaedic collection of saints’ legends *Legenda Aurea*; the narratives found in the thirteenth-century anchoritic rule *Ancrene Wisse*, also read by lay people, and one narrative that firmly draws upon women’s vernacular literary culture, *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The second group of narratives consists of late medieval English drama, represented here by the fifteenth-century N-Town cycle. The third group of narratives is formed by works contemporary with *Vision* and *Revelation*: Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Piers Plowman*, and the works of the Gawain-poet.

**Envisioning Medieval Storytelling and Creativity**

Exploring the narrative features and strategies of *Vision* and *Revelation* illuminates how medieval narratives appropriate and subvert aspects from other narratives, such as the Bible, folk tales and saints’ lives. Furthermore, studying medieval narrative provides further insight into medieval writing and cognition in a way that studying medieval argumentative writing cannot. Narrative is sometimes said to be a ‘deep structure’ innate to humanity, like
The narrative mode of thinking is one of the principal ways in which human beings organize their experience of the world. For instance, it is a central principle for how our species understands time and even the self. Vision and Revelation can be seen as the results of a medieval narrative mode of thinking: they reflect a medieval cognitive engagement with the temporality of existence, embodiedness, and identity. Studying these two particular narratives, and tracing the differences between them, will therefore allow for an increased understanding of late-medieval cognition, and medieval creativity.

Julian’s Plotting, Focalizing and Characterizing.
In order to introduce the reader to the world of Vision and Revelation and facilitate the reading of this dissertation, I will first provide a brief overview of the few things known about the creation of these texts and the historical Julian. It should be stressed here, however, that this analysis does not pay much attention to the historical author, but rather focuses on the author as a function of the text. I then provide these texts with a literary context as well as a historical context, to provide a background against which to see the social and literary issues with which Vision and Revelation engage. After this, I summarize previous scholarship on Julian.

My discussion then moves on to an analysis of the formal structures: plot, characterization and focalization. These aspects in Vision and Revelation are often described as unique or unusual. For example, a plot change, the added event of a great deed that will make all well, has fascinated many. Julian’s intense gaze has likewise attracted much attention, and her characterization of God as a mother has inspired many scholarly and devotional writings. In addition, these narrative structures are of importance to the parable of the Lord and Servant. By letting character Julian re-see the parable, Revelation expands the plot of this parable, its focalization, and its characterization, and thereby gives the original narrative more layers of significance.

The first chapter focuses on plot, that is, the ordered arrangement of events in both fabula and story, as well as on the causal, chronological or other relations between these events. Discussing plot first provides the reader with an overview of the narrative contents of Vision and Revelation and the differences between these two as narratives. Concerning the overarching plot of Vision and Revelation, I argue that Vision features a linear quest for seeing Christ’s body, both for the sake of achieving fellow-

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suffering with Christ and because of character Julian’s love for Christ’s body. Both text and story follow the order of the fabula, that is, the chronological order, creating a linearity that reflects Vision’s entent of ‘Herewith is the fende overcomen’ ['In this way is the devil overcome’] and ‘Thowe shalle nought be overcomen’ ['You shall not be overcome’] (Vis. 8.22; 22.26,22). This linearity of the plot in Vision gives it a psychomachia-character similar to that of morality plays and saints’ lives. In Revelation, however, this linear plot becomes circular, narratively mirroring how character Julian, after the visionary experience, experiences a continuous, loop-like re-seeing of the visions. This circularity is created by incorporating the linear desire for fellow-suffering with Christ into a desire for God’s perspective, approximately in the middle of the story. This change pushes the psychomachia to the background and creates an interaction between God’s narrative desire and Julian’s. The text emphasizes this circularity by what I call ‘knitting in the round’, added cross-references that lead the reader cyclically through the text. Revelation, however, also implode its circular plot and makes the plot omnitemporal and non-sequential, by disrupting its own chronological and sequential connections and that of the Passion narrative. The narrator underscores this omnitemporality at text level by adding exempla which make the parable of Lord and Servant present in the reader’s mind before it is told. The narrator thereby stresses God’s transtemporal perspective in which all events are one.

Having thus discussed what character Julian and others see, the analysis then focuses upon how the characters see, in the second chapter. I argue that whereas Vision still resembles affective meditation texts such as the Meditationes Vitae Christi and The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ in telling the reader how to see, Revelation shows its reader how to see. That is, the focalization has become more demonstrative. At the same time, the focalized object is hidden more. Narrator Julian, thus, more strongly directs all characters’ focalization but towards the apophatic and towards what is constantly hidden. By directing the focalization towards what cannot be seen, Revelation invites the reader to do the same continuous re-seeing as character Julian does, while also illustrating its theology that the negative human ‘beholding’ of the self is flawed and blind compared to God’s unchanging, loving perspective.

The third chapter focuses on the characterization of God, the devil, character Julian and the evencristen, that is, the contemporary addressee and implied reader, who is also a character on story level. This narrative structure is likewise more developed in Revelation, while simultaneously reshaped and enveloped in a greater structure. Drawing on medieval theories of character, medieval characterization practices, and narratological

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1Revelations of Divine Love, 12, 31.
approaches, I argue that *Revelation* makes character Julian, the *evencristen* and God twofold in their being, reflecting its model of the human soul as having two levels, substance and sensuality. The devil is made to lack this doubleness so that he becomes an easily recognisable perversion of the double nature shared by God and humankind. In their use of characterization, I suggest, *Vision* and *Revelation* respond to two discourses associated with the construction of text and with female visionaries: *auctoritas*, ['authoritativeness'], and *discretio spirituum*, reliably discerning a true, God-sent vision from demonic deception. The changes in characterization in *Revelation* allow the narrator to establish *auctoritas* and facilitate *discretio spirituum* more. By making God and humanity more double, the narrator subverts misogynist stereotypes which saw women as naturally double, and therefore as lacking authority. Instead, in her doubleness, the narrator is turned into a sign and character written by ultimate *auctor* God, which establishes *auctoritas*. By making the devil recognisable by his lack of doubleness, the approval of a female visionary’s experiences by male clerical figures is made redundant. Both *evencristen* and visionary are perfectly capable of *discretio spirituum* themselves. As a result of this characterization, the boundary between narrator and audience and text and vision is blurred, making the *evencristen* co-create and co-perform both text and visions with narrator and character Julian.

The concluding remarks offer suggestions for further research that seeks to combine medieval religious texts, medieval literary theory and modern narratology.

‘The ‘Happy Virgin’ or a Grieving Widow and Mother

Though this dissertation focuses on character Julian and narrator Julian as functions of the text, a few remarks on the historical Julian and the history of *Vision* and *Revelation* are nonetheless necessary. Assumptions about historical Julian not only affect how a modern reader constructs character Julian and narrator Julian, but also with which texts and contexts *Vision* and *Revelation* can be contextualized.

Unfortunately, very little is known about historical Julian; both the autobiographical details in the texts and historical evidence are scant. This absence of autobiographical details has struck readers since the first printed edition, published in 1670. In the preface to this edition, Serenus Cressy, Julian’s earliest editor, writes ‘I was desirous to have told thee somewhat of the happy virgin, the Compiler of these Revelations: but after all the search I could make, I could not discover anything touching her, except what she

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occasionally sprinkles in the book herself.'

Nevertheless, because of narrator Julian's confident and individual voice, many scholars and readers have been tempted not only to make extrapolations from the textual data but also to speculate about historical Julian's socio-economic background, education and personal life. Consequently, there is a continuum with on the one end the few biographical details found in the texts and in historical evidence, upon which most scholars agree and on the other educated speculation, upon which Julian scholars disagree most.

Some autobiographical information can be found in the text: Revelation gives 8 May or 13 May 1373 as the date of the visions, and Julian's age at that time as 'thirty yere old and a halfe'. Consequently, she was born in 1342 or 1343, meaning that she lived through several outbreaks of the bubonic plague, both as a child and as an adult, namely, around 1349, 1361 and 1369. The rubric—probably written by a scribe—to Vision mentions her name, profession and that she is still alive in 1413, the year in which the rubric is written and added to Vision: 'Hir name es Julian, that is recluse atte Norwiche, and yit is on life, anno domini 1413.' [Her name is Julian, and she is a recluse at Norwich, and is still alive in the year of our Lord 1413.]

The explicit or closing rubric in Revelation similarly ascribes the text to a Norwich anchorite named Julian: 'Explicit liber revelation Juliane anacorite Norwiche.' ['Here ends the book of the revelations of Julian, anchorite of Norwich']. The date of 1413 is particularly relevant for a literary context, as several continental visionary texts such as those by Birgitta reached England at the turn of the century. These texts may have inspired Julian. The small amount of historical data that can be culled from the text, then, is a year of birth of 1342 to 1343, a name, and a profession, that of a recluse or anchorite, an independent religious living in a small walled room in a church.

Julian's status as a recluse is corroborated by four wills, ranging in date from 1393 or 1394 to 1416, which refer to Julian as an anchorite. One of these also gives the Norwich parish church of St. Julian's as the church in which Julian was enclosed. Julian was therefore enclosed as an anchorite before 1393. Most scholars put her date of death after 1416 because of this

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1 Cressy, 'To the Reader', A3.
2 Rev. 2. 2; 'Textual Notes' Watson and Jenkins, 'Textual Notes', 387; Rev. 3. 1.
3 Dunn, 'Trade', 213, 214; Crampton, 'Introduction.'
4 'Rubric' ll. 1.2.
5 Revelations of Divine Love, 3.
6 Rev. 86.24, 25; Watson and Jenkins, 'Sidenotes', 380.
7 Watson, 'The Composition of Julian of Norwich's Revelation of Love', 682.
8 For a discussion of Julian as an anchorite, legatee and counsellor see Jones, 'Anchoritic Aspects of Julian of Norwich.'
last will; however, some wills bequeathing money to an unnamed anchorite in 1423 or 1428 have been found as well. These could either refer to a successor or mean that Julian lived into her eighties.

Even Julian’s name is a matter of dispute. The traditional assumption of Julian studies has been that ‘Julian’ was not her given name, but rather a male name given to her when she was enclosed in her anchorhold in St. Julian’s.\(^1\) In that case, she was named after the patron saint of the church, either Saint Julian the Hospitaler or Saint Julian of Toledo. E.A. Jones, however, has questioned this common assumption, demonstrating that no rites for enclosure mention or imply a changing of name, and showing that Julian was used as a girl’s name in the fourteenth century, ‘equivalent to modern “Gillian”’.\(^2\) The name of the anchorite and that of her church being identical may therefore be a coincidence.

Julian the anchorite also makes an intriguing appearance in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, in which Margery, a laywoman from King’s Lynn, visits Julian in order to receive spiritual counsel on visions.\(^3\) The counsel which Margery receives contains some echoes from *Vision* and *Revelation*, and the *Book* describes ‘dame Jelyan’ as an anchoress but also as a known expert in *discretio spirituum*.\(^4\) What is known with some amount of certainty, then, is that a locally well-known female anchorite with the name of Julian was living in St. Julian’s in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. The scribes adding the opening rubric to *Vision* and the closing rubric to *Revelation* connected these texts to this anchorite.

As soon as extrapolations need to be made from the text, especially regarding Julian’s life before her enclosure, uncertainty creeps into the discussion. Based on certain northern features in the dialect, some scholars have suggested that Julian may have grown up in northern England rather than in Norwich.\(^5\) However, these features could also have been introduced by early copyists.\(^6\) The setting of the visions is equally ambiguous. Character

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1 See for instance Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book*. Several other studies assuming this are listed in Jones, ‘A Mystic by Any Other Name: Julian(?) Of Norwich’, 1.
2 Jones, ‘A Mystic by Any Other Name: Julian(?) of Norwich’, 9.
3 Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe: Annotated Edition*, bk. 1 ch. 18 ll. 1335-1375 119-122. Lynn Staley, however, suggests that this may have been a textual conversation rather than an actual one. Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority’, 131.
4 Georgia Ronan Crampton points out that although “dame” is a title often given to nuns, the wills do not use this title for Julian; Margery giving her this title therefore does not necessarily suggest that Julian was a nun before becoming an anchorite. Crampton, ‘Introduction’.
Julian is in a ‘chamber’, surrounded by several unspecified people, including a figure—only mentioned in Vision—referred to as ‘my modere’.¹ This woman may be her natural mother or her mother superior. It is uncertain whether this setting implies that Julian was not yet enclosed, or simply that the rules of enclosure had been waived because of her serious illness, or whether these events take place in a convent or in a home.² However, most scholars seem to agree that Julian had not yet been enclosed at that time.³

These few, intriguing references in the text to historical Julian’s pre-enclosure life have invited the most speculation. In one vision, Christ thanks Julian for her service and suffering in her youth.⁴ Traditionally this has been interpreted that Julian became a nun at an early age, for instance by her 1970s editors Colledge and Walsh, as well as by her more recent editors Jenkins and Watson.⁵ The latter claim, for example, that although ‘her profession and state of life at the time of the revelation is not known […] there is a strong possibility she was a nun at the Benedictine convent at Carrow’.⁶ However, Benedicta Ward’s 1988 essay ‘Julian the Solitary’ was the first to challenge this assumption, arguing instead that Julian was a wife and mother at the time of the visions, perhaps even having lost her husband and a child to the plague.⁷ This suggestion has led to a number of new responses to, and perspectives on, Julian’s texts.⁸ The imaginative reconstructions of Julian’s pre-enclosure life range from a nun of affluent background from Carrow priory to an unmarried woman, perhaps of aristocratic background,⁹ living in her parents’ house or in service in another family,¹⁰ to a merchant widow who lost her husband and one or several children in the Plague, as E.A. Jones calls her ‘plain Conisford Jill’.¹¹ To sum up, there is, in Liz Herbert McAvoy’s words, ‘fragmentary and contradictory evidence on both sides of

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¹ The ‘chamber’ is mentioned in Vision 2. 29 and Revelation 3. 24, Julian’s ‘modere’ in Vision 10. 26.
⁴ Vis. 8:54.
⁵ Colledge and Walsh, 43; Watson and Jenkins, ‘Introduction’, 4.
⁷ Ward, ‘Julian the Solitary.’ This is taken one step further by Rolf, Julian’s Gospel: Illuminating the Life & Revelations of Julian of Norwich.
¹⁰ Diane Watt, Medieval Women’s Writing: Works by and for Women in England, 1100-1500, 97.
¹¹ Jones, ‘A Mystic by Any Other Name: Julian(?) of Norwich’, 10. Conisford is a subdistrict of Norwich; the parish of St. Julian’s formed part of Conisford.
the argument’ of whether the historical Julian was a nun or a laywoman before becoming an anchorite.¹

Closely related to this argument are the many discussions clustering around historical Julian’s education and how she might have acquired her knowledge of theology.

The texts give no explicit information about the sources of Julian’s knowledge. Whereas Margery Kempe’s Book features a veritable syllabus of devotional and visionary works, which clergy read out to illiterate Margery, Vision and Revelation only cite the Bible; even these citations are not literal citations, but instead creative and allusive ones, fully integrated into the text.² In this, Vision and Revelation differ from the Ancrene Wisse, which directly cites the Vulgate. In Vision the narrator describes herself as ‘lewed’ [uneducated], and in Revelation as ‘a simple creature unletterde’ or, ‘a simple creature that cowde no letter’.³

Yet Revelation contains many echoes in Revelation of Saint Augustine, Boethius, contemporary vernacular theology as well as continental mysticism.⁴ Early editors Colledge and Walsh considered these self-descriptions therefore a modesty topos, that is, the narrator intentionally misrepresents herself as simple and with little education. For example, they made the influential claim that in spite of this self-characterization, historical Julian possessed extensive knowledge of Latin theological works, patristic writers and classical rhetoric.⁵

However, Denise Nowakowski Baker questioned this reading of ‘unlettered’ as illiterate, pointing out that both ‘unlettered’ and ‘simple’ can denote merely not knowing Latin.⁶ Annie Sutherland similarly has claimed that these self-descriptions indicate that Julian could write in English.⁷ She has suggested that Julian was closely familiar with works of vernacular theology, such as those by Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton, and may have achieved her learning as a result of being embedded in oral devotional culture, that is, by hearing such vernacular works being read out and by oral translations of the Vulgate. Participating in this oral devotional culture,

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² Sutherland, 1–14.
⁴ Pelphrey, Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich, 72, 73. Pelphrey nevertheless warns that ‘to say that Julian studied Augustine, or has an Augustinian point of view, is both an obvious point and a relatively meaningless one which may even be misleading’. Dutton is one of several scholars discerning resonances of continental mysticism. Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 73–75.
⁵ Colledge and Walsh, 43.
⁶ Baker, 10.
⁷ Sutherland, ‘Oure Feyth is Groundyd in Goddes Worde’, 1–20.
incidentally, does not imply illiteracy: many literate people preferred to hear texts read aloud.\(^1\)

Most scholars have adopted these last two assumptions about Julian’s education, while still seeing the self-descriptions as modesty *topoi* to a certain extent. For example, the edition by Watson and Jenkins, which I use here, places Julian’s writings in this context of vernacular theology and oral devotional culture. Regarding education, those claiming Julian became a nun early in life usually suggest this may have given her the chance to acquire a thorough education, while others propose that she may have learned to read and write inside the anchorhold.\(^2\) Possible sources of theological knowledge include compilations of patristic extracts and the vibrant preaching culture of Norwich.\(^3\) Furthermore, many devout laywomen, especially gentlewomen, and nuns lent each other religious works and read these together.\(^4\)

This shared literary culture forms a possible source for Julian’s theological knowledge and makes the question if Julian was a laywoman or a nun less central to discussions about her education. According to Felicity Riddy ‘the literary culture of nuns in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that of a devout gentlewoman not only overlapped but were more or less indistinguishable [...] The question of whether Julian was a laywoman or not is in any case largely irrelevant if we acknowledge that nuns and devout gentlewoman were part of the same textual community.’\(^5\)

My analysis also situates *Vision* and *Revelation* in this culture by comparing their narrative structures to those in other narratives from that culture, such as saints’ lives (represented here by the *Golden Legend*), affective meditation texts (the *Meditaciones Vitae Christi* and *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*) and visionary writings (Birgitta’s *Liber*). The narrative features of her writings, I argue, are inspired by this culture and these narratives rather than by medieval rhetoric, as Colledge and Walsh suggest.

Yet another source of narratives, narrative theory and theology was also available to historical Julian: religious drama, such as mystery plays and morality plays. Highly popular, mystery plays were performed annually in

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1 Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France*.
2 The first possibility is, for instance, described by Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 15–20.; Watson and Jenkins, ‘Introduction’, 4. The second possibility is, for example, mentioned in Robertson, ‘Julian of Norwich’s Modernist Style and the Creation of Audience’, 151.
4 Riddy, “Women Talking about the Things of God”.
many medieval cities in northern England and East Anglia, including Norwich. These mystery play cycles showed a large amount of biblical narratives, from Creation through Christ’s life to the Last Judgement. In spite of the popularity of medieval drama, few studies contextualize Vision and Revelation with this art form. These narrative works of art, I argue, have also shaped the narrative structures of Vision and Revelation.

In addition to sources of Julian’s learning, a similar point of contention is whether historical Julian wrote her texts herself, dictated them to a scribe, or created them in collaboration with a scribe or another clerical figure such as a spiritual adviser. Unlike Margery’s Book, Vision and Revelation do not explicitly refer to a scribe or to such collaboration. Yet there is an oral quality to the writing, as if the narrator remembers telling the same narrative through the anchorhold window. Elizabeth Robertson, for instance, points out that although no signs of a scribe are found in the works, the texts may have been produced in collaboration with a spiritual adviser by means of oral communication. Watson, however, disagrees, arguing that any scribe would have made his presence more felt in the body of the text, while Lynn Staley Johnson sees Julian as representing herself as becoming her own scribe in Revelation. Felicity Riddy, however, suggests that although literate, Julian may have had one of her servants act as an amanuensis, since it was common for literate persons of affluent background to dictate their texts or letters. Riddy also discerns a male clerical presence in the chapter headings of Revelation. This leads her to suggest that in the final stages of its creation, Julian may have collaborated with a male clerical figure, making the writing of Revelation a social process rather than a solitary one. In short, it is not known if and to what extent others participated in the creation of Revelation and Vision. Consequently, we cannot know if, and to what extent, this possible collaboration shaped the theology and formal features of the text.

1 Mullini, ‘The Norwich Grocers’ Play(s) (1533, 1565): Development and Changes in the Representation of Man’s Fall.’ Unfortunately, the Norwich cycle of mystery plays is lost.
2 Elizabeth Koenig is one of the few to do so. Additionally, Watson and Jenkins in a contextual note compare Julian’s description of the visions as happening “by processe”, to mystery plays. The self-representation of Julian’s contemporary Margery Kempe, however, is often contextualized with medieval drama. Koenig, ‘Julian of Norwich, Mary Magdalene and The Drama of Prayer’; Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 328. Sponsler, ‘Drama and Piety.’
3 Several scholars have noted this oral quality, for instance Glasscoe, ‘Introduction’, xv–xvi.
4 Robertson, ‘Julian of Norwich’s Modernist Style and the Creation of Audience’, 141.
Such a spiritual adviser or female amanuensis, however, must have agreed with Julian’s rather heterodox theology at a time when such heterodoxy would be viewed with suspicion.\(^1\) Furthermore, he or she apparently did not shy away from transcribing imagery which later scribes found problematic and removed, such as the description of God guiding the process of defecation.\(^2\) Historical Julian and her scribe—if any—then, are sufficiently similar in background and thought to allow the texts to come across as the coherent expression of a single mind. Although I also consider a female amanuensis a possibility, the precision with which Vision is incorporated in Revelation and the careful attention to lexical items do suggest historical Julian’s close engagement with the texts themselves. Furthermore, a scribe or amanuensis might have emphasized Julian’s identity more, drawing on her local fame as an anchorite and discretio spirituum expert, instead of removing almost all autobiographical information like Revelation does. Nevertheless, these issues are of less relevance to my analysis, since it focuses on Julian as a function of the text.

**Revising a Vision by Revealing a Revelation**

In order for this analysis to focus on Vision and Revelation rather than on historical Julian, some further description of these texts may be helpful. As mentioned, two works are ascribed—or more accurately, ascribe themselves—to Julian of Norwich. These are a shorter text, often called the Short Text or A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman, and a work almost four times as long, the Long Text or A Revelation of Love.\(^3\)

It has been generally accepted by Julian scholars that Vision was written before Revelation, and that Revelation forms an expanded, fully revised version of Vision.\(^4\) More specifically, before 1993, Julian scholarship

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1 Instances of this heterodoxy are her doctrine of God not seeing humanity as sinful, humanity not needing forgiveness and a part of the self being like God. Other instances are her claims about God being unable to experience wrath, and the possible universalism of the great deed that shall make everything well.

2 McAvoy, “‘For We Be Doubel of God’s Making’: Writing, Gender and the Body in Julian of Norwich’, 176.

3 Like many medieval texts, the works do not have a title; consequently, the title depends on the edition: Cressy called his edition XVI Revelations of Divine love, Colledge and Walsh call theirs A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich, dividing it up into The Short Text and The Long Text, and their translation Showings. Crampton calls her edition of the longer work The Showings of Julian of Norwich, Glasscoe her edition of the same A Revelation of Love and Beer her edition Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Divine Love. This dissertation uses Watson and Jenkins’ synoptic edition and therefore also adopt the titles used in this edition. For a comprehensive overview of editions of Julian’s texts throughout the centuries, see Barratt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Her Children Today: Editions, Translations, and Versions of Her Revelations’, 18.

4 Ibid.
assumed that Vision was written quite soon after the visionary experience, and that Revelation was written about twenty years later. However, one influential study postulated that Vision was written in the 1380s and Revelation between the late 1390s and Julian’s death. This makes it an early fifteenth-century text rather than a fourteenth-century one. According to the critic, Julian may have been revising it until she became too old to continue. It may also imply that Revelation could not be circulated because of the heretical associations attached to vernacular writing at that time and the Arundel constitutions.

The later date of the early 1400s provides Revelation with a larger vernacular literary context, since more continental mystical and visionary works had arrived and been translated in England by this time. More works of vernacular theology were available as well. These continental texts include works by other female visionaries such as Birgitta’s Liber, Catherine of Siena’s The Orchard of Syon, and The Booke of Gostlye Grace, describing the visions of Mechthild of Hackeborn. Though not centering around a single experience like Vision and Revelation and therefore lacking a central narrative framework, the Liber and The Booke of Gostlye Grace display narrativity to a certain extent. I argue that just as these works may have provided Julian with models of female authorship and with exemplary visionaries, they may also have inspired some aspects of the narrative features of Revelation.

These two texts appear in a number of manuscripts; yet no autograph version of Julian’s writings has been found. Consequently, there is no such thing as a definitive version of Julian’s writings, especially because the manuscripts of Revelation sometimes differ significantly. Vision is found in a single manuscript, British Library Additional MS 3779. Produced in the mid-fifteenth-century, this manuscript is a compilation of mystical works; Julian’s text in it is, according to Watson and Jenkins, ‘a copy of a copy’ of

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2 Watson, ‘Composition’.
3 Watson, ‘Composition’, 681.
4 Watson, 681.
5 Wogan-Browne and others, 288. Watson suggests that these may have given Julian ‘a good deal of encouragement’. However, as Alexandra Barrat points out, the Middle English translator of The Booke of Gostlye Grace seems have thought its author—most likely Gertrude the Great—a man, so this work cannot have given her encouragement as a writer. Watson, ‘Composition’, 682; Barratt, Women’s Writing in Middle English, 51.
6 Dutton, 113; Watson, ‘Composition’, 682; Temple, ‘Returning The English ‘Mystics’ To Their Medieval Milieu: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe And Bridget of Sweden.’
7 Glasscoe, ‘Visions and Revisions: A Further Look at the Manuscripts of Julian of Norwich.’
the autograph. The two complete extant seventeenth-century manuscripts of *Revelation* were both produced by English nuns in Cambrai or in their sister house in Paris. One of these manuscripts, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Fonds Anglais No. 40, is often referred to as ‘Paris’; the other, British Library Sloane MS 2499, is often referred to as ‘Sloane’ or ‘London’. There is also an early eighteenth-century manuscript, British Library MS Sloane 3705. These manuscripts contain only Julian’s texts. Several scholars describe Sloane as closer in dialect to Julian’s language, while Paris is sometimes thought to preserve the logical and rhetorical structures of Julian’s prose better. Glasscoe, however, claims these rhetorical structures are the result of scribal editing. The edition by Watson and Jenkins, which this dissertation uses, synthesizes these manuscripts. Using Paris as their primary manuscript, this edition includes variant readings in the textual notes, and my analysis discusses these when deemed necessary.

Because one cannot speak of any definitive version of Julian’s writings, and in manuscript studies such definitiveness is problematic in general, it is wise to keep Alexandra Barratt’s warning in mind: ‘textual scholars have a duty to emphasize that our concept of “Julian of Norwich” can be no more than that of a group of texts of obscure and uncertain history.’ While this dissertation focuses on the different ‘Jullians’ as produced by the text and necessarily affected by editorial practices, it avoids the question of definitive versions. That is, for the sake of an accessible narrative comparison of *Vision* and *Revelation*, this analysis does not include more variables than are analytically useful.

**The World Outside the Anchorhold of the Text**

The historical Julian was a contemporary of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, John Gower, the Gawain-poet and the dissenting Oxford theologian John Wyclif. *Vision* and *Revelation* form part of, and were undoubtedly shaped by, the growth in vernacular literature between 1300 and 1420. Especially the period between 1380 and 1410—to which *Vision* and *Revelation* also belong—was one of intense literary activity in Middle English. In these decades Chaucer wrote a number of works, including *The Canterbury Tales*, while Langland wrote the C-version of *Piers Plowman*.

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The fourteenth century in general saw the appearance of a larger amount of vernacular texts in a variety of genres, and although these texts often explain why they are written in Middle English rather than Anglo-Norman, French or Latin, they are nonetheless quite confident in their use thereof.

Confidence about what kind of works could be produced and what topics could be addressed in Middle English also increased: the texts produced range from medical texts and courtly romances to religious literature such as psalters and theological discussions. Additionally, in the late fourteenth century, a group of Oxford theologians with a number of heterodox views, associated with John Wyclif, produced two Bible translations, the first translations of the whole Bible into English. The fourteenth century also saw an increase in literary technical innovation, for instance in long narrative poems such as *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*. In short, *Vision* and *Revelation* were written at a time when the vernacular was acquiring a higher status and allowed for technical innovation.

The vernacular also became an instrument for expressing original theological thought. A large amount of theological discussions and other texts in a wide range of genres were produced by the loosely connected dissenting groups associated with John Wyclif. Some of these groups were academic and some more popular; although quite diverse, all these movements eventually came to be called ‘Lollard’. In addition to wishing to translate the Bible, one of their unorthodox tenets was that any devout person—even a woman—could be a priest and perform the sacraments, and that the common, orthodox practice of adoring religious images, including statues, should be abandoned. As Margery Kempe’s being suspected of Lollardy shows, Lollards were not only seen as a sect and heretical, but also as a threat to orthodoxy and the established order. This meant that their views were condemned by the church and that both church and state actively tried to suppress them. However, many non-Lollards held similar views and read Lollard works without perceiving them as such. Although thirty years earlier the church encouraged the use of the vernacular, in 1409 Thomas Arundel, the archbishop of Canterbury, promulgated his *Constitutions*, as a

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2 The classic study of Lollardy is Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*.
part of his campaign against Lollardy. These constitutions made almost all forms of religious writing in the vernacular illegal, as well as the possession of such works. The Constitutions thus associated vernacular theological works with heresy and limited the production of such texts.

Not only could the vernacular express heterodox theology, but it could also be an instrument of expressing social dissatisfaction and even of creating revolt. It was the language of the ‘commons’, that is, the artisans, agricultural workers, townspeople, minor gentry, priests and Londoners taking part in the Great Rising or ‘Peasants’ Revolt’ of 1381. This was a widespread violent rebellion with multiple causes, directed against aristocratic and monastic landowners, which also took place in East Anglia. In Norwich, rioters clashed violently with forces led by the bishop; the rebels also threatened Carrow Abbey, which may have been Julian’s convent. One contemporary narrative in particular, Piers Plowman, was of importance to this revolt: propaganda in the form of letters and speeches alluded to the poem, and the name of the eponymous character became a rallying cry.

In sum, Revelation and Vision were written at a time when the vernacular was used to create and express social subversion and original theology, yet was also associated with the threat of violence and heresy, all of which may have affected these two texts.

In spite of this social upheaval, Vision and Revelation never explicitly refer to these events or contexts. To a new reader, both works therefore come across as curiously ahistorical. Nor do they mention another horrific series of events which must have affected the writing of Vision and Revelation, perhaps in its depiction of suffering bodies. During historical Julian’s lifetime the bubonic plague broke out thrice in Norwich, in 1349, when Julian was around 8, and in 1361 and 1369. Norwich likely lost half its population to the plague, and England around one third.

Nor do Vision and Revelation refer to the war between England and France (1337–1453) which later came to be called The Hundred Years’ war. This series of conflicts caused both political and financial turbulence, as increased poll taxes were necessary for financing the war, which may have

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1 Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England’.
2 However, several scholars have recently questioned whether the negative effect of the Arundel constitutions on vernacular theology was as severe as Watson suggests. Gillespie and Ghosh, After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England.
5 Crampton ‘Introduction’.
6 Hudson, ‘Piers Plowman and the Peasants’ Revolt.’
led to the Great Rising.¹ Vision and Revelation, then, were created in a period of social, religious and political upheaval. Consequently, the apparent absence of references to these historical and social realities should perhaps not be taken at face-value; rather, this ahistoricity should be read as a topos of devotional writing, similar to the narrator’s depicting herself as ‘simple’. The texts thus present themselves as telling a universal narrative containing eternal truths for all humanity instead of an individual narrative of the horrific realities of the fourteenth century.

Revelation may have been written inside the anchorite’s cell. Several scholars therefore see a similarity between these spatial circumstances and the narrator’s use of enclosure imagery.² An anchorite was a male or female professional religious, who would spend his or her life enclosed in an anchorhold, a room or small building attached to a church or other sacred space. Anchorites did not belong to a particular order, but many of them may have followed a rule with a version of the canonical hours. The Ancrene Wisse is one example of such a rule for female anchorites. Devoting their lives to prayer as well as to the spiritual counselling of others, they could acquire a certain amount of local fame. Records show that laypeople as well as nuns and monks would become anchorites.³ Just as the date of historical Julian’s enclosure is unknown, the size and the precise location of her anchorhold are unknown as well. A reconstruction of the cell has nonetheless been created in in St. Julian’s in the 1950s. It is also possible, however, that historical Julian’s anchorhold was a freestanding structure.⁴ In other words, historical Julian’s cell is equally impossible to reconstruct as her biography or a definitive version of her texts.

³ Hughes-Edwards, 142.
⁴ This is suggested by a description of St. Julian’s by an eighteenth-century antiquarian, quoted in Phillips, ‘Femininities and the Gentry in Late Medieval East Anglia: Ways of Being’, 19, 20. However, from such a freestanding structure outside the church the anchorite would not be able to see the altar, which was one of the main reasons for being enclosed. The reconstructed cell and St. Julian’s has become something of a cult site. Close-by, one finds a visitor/study center (doubling as a gift-shop) with an extensive collection of scholarship on Julian. For descriptions of representations of the reconstructed cell and the Julian-center see Law, ‘In the Centre: Spiritual and Cultural Representations of Julian of Norwich in the Julian Centre.’
Scholarly Responses to Vision and Revelation

Since the second half of the twentieth century, scholarship on Vision and Revelation form roughly two groups: those studying these two texts as theological or mystical works, and those discussing them as works of medieval literature, in particular in the context of medieval women’s writings. However, the literary readings, often feminist, often address theological aspects, so there is an overlap between the two groups.

Though Evelyn Underhill already in 1932 described Julian as the ‘first English woman of letters’, responses focusing on the texts’ mystical theology have the longest history. The first book-length study on Julian discussed the validity of her visions and her theological discussions. The 1970s saw an increase in Julian scholarship in general as well as in scholarship on the literary aspects of Vision and Revelation. The first study to do so compared Julian’s prose style to that of Margery Kempe. Some years later, Edmund Colledge and James Walsh discerned a multitude of rhetorical figures in the text, arguing that Julian used these to support her accomplished scholastic and orthodox thought. Marion Glasscoe, however, created an entirely different picture from that of Colledge and Walsh, that of ‘an author thinking aloud’. Glasscoe was also one of the first to suggest that Julian’s works should be read as medieval imaginative literature, arguing that ‘not to read Julian’s showings as medieval literature is to miss a whole dimension of their relevance and artistry’.

Around the same time, Barry Windeatt started comparing Vision and Revelation, for instance studying how Revelation

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1 Marion Glasscoe also suggests this division in ‘Contexts for Teaching Julian of Norwich’, 185.
2 Turner, Julian of Norwich, Theologian; Baker, Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book.
4 Christina Maria Cervone, for instance, addresses both poetic and theological aspects, as does Jennifer Bryan. Most theological appraisals, in contrast, pay relatively little attention to, for instance, the highly intricate and poetic use of language in the texts. Cervone, Poetics of the Incarnation : Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love; Bryan, Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England.
5 Underhill, ‘Medieval Mysticism’, 807; Molinari, Julian of Norwich; Knowles, The English Mystics.
6 Stone, Middle English Prose Style: Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich.
7 Colledge and Walsh, 'Introduction', 43-59.
8 Glasscoe, 'Introduction', xv–xvi.
creates a larger audience and changes the relation between vision and commentary.¹

Studies of Revelation and Vision as works of medieval literature can be grouped in a number of clusters. One of these reads Revelation in terms of medieval gender discourse. Several studies, such as those by Sandra J. McEntire, Liz Herbert McAvoy, Maud Burnett McInerney and Sarah McNamer, explore Revelation’s positive and subversive attitude towards the (female) body and its ascribing of female bodily features to Christ.² These aspects of Revelation are often seen as proto-feminist and as subverting hegemonic male discourse.³ Others claim that Revelation does more than simply feminize Christ, suggesting that Revelation instead detaches motherhood from gender binaries.⁴

Studies of Revelation from a gender perspective have often adopted both a historicizing and a psychoanalytical feminist angle. Here, the works of Caroline Walker Bynum, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray are important sources of inspiration.⁵ One of Bynum’s central arguments, often used in these readings of Julian, is that medieval thought associated Christ’s humanity with women, allowing women to use their physicality to approach Christ.⁶ This angle on Julian’s works has been one of the most popular approaches in the last two decades. Many have discussed the narrator’s use of imagery of blood, wounds and wombs and the centrality of these images to her thought, or have read Revelation with medieval medical writing. Likewise, her feminization of Christ has also attracted academic attention.⁷

¹ Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Her Audience’; Windeatt, ‘The Art of Mystical Loving: Julian of Norwich.’
² McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body, in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe; McInerney, ‘In the Meydens Womb: Julian of Norwich and the Poetics of Enclosure’; McNamer, ‘The Exploratory Image: God as Mother in Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Divine Love.’ This is only a small selection.
⁵ See for instance McAvoy, ‘For We Be Doubel of God’s Making’: Writing, Gender and the Body in Julian of Norwich.’ Miller, Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body, 93–135.
⁶ The shortest version of this can be found in Bynum, ‘... And Woman His Humanity’: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages.’ This is further developed in Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women and Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion.
⁷ Sprung, ‘We Neyer Shall Come out of Hym’: Enclosure and Immanence in Julian of Norwich’s Book of Showings’; McNamer, ‘The Exploratory Image: God as Mother in Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Divine Love’; Donohue-White, ‘Reading Divine Maternity in Julian of Norwich’; Robertson, ‘Medieval Medical Views of Women and
This increase in attention to Julian’s use of motherhood imagery is mirrored by theological discussions paying more attention to her motherhood theology, which was first considered only a minor aspect of her work. However, some scholars object to applying Bynum’s ‘empowerment thesis’ to Julian, claiming that she instead sets aside the feminization of Christ’s body.

Similar to these literary discussions of Julian’s proto-feminism or lack thereof are the opposing views regarding the text’s relation to affective meditation texts. Affective meditation consists of an imaginative and emotional engagement with gospel events, often by reading texts that describe biblical events in rich detail and with highly specific emotional instructions. Some see Revelation with its detailed descriptions of Christ’s suffering as creating a similar emotional script. Others, in contrast, see Revelation as blocking such affective engagement and describing a more cognitive, detached response instead, or a communal response rather than an individual one.

The highly detailed descriptions, evocative imagery and vivid comparisons in Revelation in particular have led to literary discussions on how to read these images. These images, some studies suggest, are naturalistic, vivid and almost cinematic and invite a representational reading. Alternatively, they should not be read as images as all, but rather as abstract ‘gateways into the apophatic’, with the earthly representations allowing the narrator and audience to enter an imageless space. Yet others place these images in the context of medieval visual culture.

In addition to these thematic tendencies in literary Julian scholarship, specific aspects of the texts as literature have been addressed as well. The poetic, innovative quality of her language has been discussed by Ena Jenkins

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Female Spirituality in the Ancrene Wisse and Julian of Norwich’s Showings.; Barratt, ‘In the Lowest Part of Our Need’: Julian and Medieval Gynecological Writing.

1 This is one of the most popular topics in scholarship on Julian as a theologian and mystic. An early study is Bradley, ‘The Motherhood Theme in Julian of Norwich.’ Jantzen discusses it at length in her study of Julian as a mystic and theologian (115-124). A recent example is Soskice, ‘The Kindness of God: Trinity and the Image of God in Julian of Norwich and Augustine.’

2 Aers 78-83.

3 Lewis, ‘A Picture of Christendom: The Creation of an Interpretive Community in Julian of Norwich’s A Revelation of Love’, 86; Lochrie, Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh, 86; Baker, Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book, 40–51.

4 Aers, 86; Bryan, 156, 157.

5 Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich’, 73; Magill, 79.


and Vincent Gillespie. Furthermore, Glasscoe’s suggestion of reading Julian alongside other narrative works has been taken up by Barbara Newman, who has compared the use of time in Piers and Revelation. Characters in Revelation have also received some attention, especially Julian’s depiction of Christ as mother. Nonetheless, only a few studies have compared characterization in Revelation to those in other medieval narrative works. Finally, reflecting the ‘cognitive turn’ in the humanities, a number of studies pay attention to cognitive aspects in Revelation, such as attention and memory.

In these trends, two overarching trends can be discerned. First, Revelation has in general received more scholarly attention than Vision, which is usually regarded as merely a first draft. Secondly, relatively little comparative work has been done, with the exception of that of Barry Windeatt and a few others. Watson and Jenkins’ synoptic and analytic edition, in which passages of Vision are printed below their Revelation equivalents, aims to redress this lack of attention to Vision and to the relation between Vision and Revelation. To this scholarship, this dissertation contributes a more detailed narrative comparison of Julian’s works, while at the same time following Glasscoe’s suggestion to read Vision and Revelation as similar to Pearl and Piers Plowman, that is, as medieval narratives.

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2 Newman, ‘Redeeming the Time: Langland, Julian, and the Art of Lifelong Revision.’
6 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Introduction’, 57.
7 In spite of Revelation’s androgynous portrayal of Christ and its possibly proto-feminist theology, this dissertation will refer to God as ‘he’. This is narrator’s Julian’s practice as well, and will prevent possible confusion between character God and character Julian. Narrator Julian, however, will not be referred to as ‘it’, as Bal recommends doing (Narratology, 15). Instead, the narrator will be referred to as ‘she’ in order to emphasize historical Julian’s status as the earliest known woman author in the English language.
1. Plot: ‘I Lede All Thing to the End that I Ordaine it To’

When in Revelation God tells Julian the parable of the Lord and the Servant for the first time, the narrative emphasizes events over characters or setting:

[O]ure curteyse lorde answered in shewing, fully mistily, by a wonderful example of a lorde that hath a servant [...] I sawe two persons in bodily liknesse, that is to sey, a lorde and a servant [...] The lord sitteth solemnly in rest and in pees. The servant stondeth before his lorde reverently, redy to his lords wille. The lords loketh upon his servant full lovely and sweetly, and mekel y sendeth him into a certaine place to do his will. The servant not onely he goeth, but soddenly he sterteth, and runneth in gret hast for love to his lords and wille. And anon he falleth in a slade and taketh ful great sore. And he groneth and moneth and walloweth and writheth. But he may not rise nor helpe himselfe by no manner of weye (Rev. 51. 1, 2, 6-14).

Although the characters and setting in this narrative may not be as fleshed out yet as in the retellings following it, this exemplum has a plot, or a chain of causally and temporally connected events presented as an ordered arrangement of events. First the lord sits, with the servant standing in front of him; then the lord sends out the servant. Because of the errand, and because of his great love and willingness to serve, the servant runs rather than walks. This running in its turn leads to the servant’s falling. The narrator pays particular attention to how cause and time connect the events to each other: she stresses the motivation and how the servant ‘anon’ falls

1Revelations of Divine Love, 106.
into the hollow or ditch. Given how Julian connects, orders and arranges the events in this short narrative with such care, one also expects her to pay a similar attention to the plot in the narratives of Vision and Revelation themselves.

The overarching plots of Vision and Revelation, indeed, show signs of such careful attention, with significant differences between the events of Vision and Revelation. The narrator of Revelation adds important new events and changes earlier ones. For instance, the final events on text level differ: Vision ends with character Julian recovering from the third and last demonic attack. Revelation, in contrast, ends with a vision of God speaking to her fifteen years later, telling her that love is the meaning of the visions and their intentio, or entent, the abstract truth behind the text\(^1\). If ‘th’ende is every tales strengthe’, ['the end is the strong point of every tale']\(^2\), this change is highly significant. It raises the question of how the events of Vision and Revelation lead to such different final scenes.

The narrator frequently has God pay attention to the arrangement of events and to what these events consist of, creating a parallel between her narratorial activity and divine providence. In both Vision and Revelation the narrator claims that from God’s eternal perspective there is no ‘aventure’. ‘Aventure’ denotes not only fate or fortune, but also a narrative without causal linkage.\(^3\) From God’s perspective, then, human history is a narrative with a meaningful plot.

The Revelation narrator comments further: ‘And so wele as the best deede is done, and the highest, so wele is the leest deede done, and all in the properte and the order that our lord hath ordained it to from withoute beginning’ (Rev. 11. 34-35). ['The least deed is done as well as the best and the most exalted; and all in the manner and order that our Lord has ordained from without beginning.']\(^4\) ‘Properte’ can also be a narrative term meaning the particular qualities and details of an event or character.\(^5\) The narrator lets God use the term in this sense when he instructs Julian to investigate the parable: ‘It longeth the to take hede to alle the propertes and the conditions that were shewed in the example’ (Rev. 51. 73, 75). ['You need to pay attention to all the particular properties and attributes that were shown in the parable.']\(^6\) According to Revelation, then, both history and narratives

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\(^1\) Glossary: Middle English’ in Wogan-Browne et al., The Idea of the Vernacular : An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520, 407, 419.
\(^2\) Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, bk. 2, l. 260, p. 492; Windeatt, Troilus and Criseyde, 28.
\(^3\) Vitz, Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology : Subjects and Objects of Desire, 124.
\(^4\) Revelations of Divine Love, 56.
\(^5\) ‘Proprete (n.)’, MED 4a, 4b, 5c.
\(^6\) Revelations of Divine Love, 108.
consist of events with certain qualities. These events have been arranged in a particular order by a higher power. Thus, Revelation provides its own conceptualization of plot.

Owing to these changes in events and careful attention to the events and their connections, this chapter compares Vision and Revelation in terms of plot, provisionally defined here as a chain of causally and temporally connected events which is presented as an ordered arrangement of events. I suggest that the finite, linear plot of Vision, created by Julian’s desire for a sight of Christ’s body and for co-Passion, becomes a circular, endless plot in Revelation, driven by a desire for seeing from God’s perspective. However, Revelation also uses this new structure to hint at an omnitemporal, non-sequential plot. By arranging the events, mater in medieval rhetorical terms, in such a linear or circular shape, the narrator has this form mirror the entent or mening of the visions; the narrator thereby facilitates the evenecristen’s remembering of both mater and entent, and presents herself as a reliable scribe and visionary.

A Plot Instead of Chance or ‘Aventure’

Plot, however, is often seen as a property of fictional narratives, and Revelation and Vision do not present themselves as a fictional story like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight for instance, which defines itself as a ‘lay’, a romance. This may explain why scholarship on Vision and Revelation has paid relatively little attention to plot. Critics have even questioned whether plot can be discerned in either text at all. In her book on Julian’s writings, Denise Nowakowski Baker, for example, claims that both texts have ‘no plot in the usual sense’. A small number of studies, however, recognize some plot features in Revelation and briefly address these. Discussing how the devil attacks Julian as soon as she starts doubting, Judith Dale suggests that ‘in terms of plot, the arrival of the Devil is generated by the Narrator’s lapse in faith.’ Yet this plot is only mentioned in passing. Similarly, Vincent Gillespie states that both texts have the same ‘metanarrative,’ but does not elaborate.

The studies which most resemble a discussion of plot are Barry Windeatt’s comparisons of Vision and Revelation. Windeatt sees Revelation as having broken its chain of events. Both texts share the same ‘framework of

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1 Modern ‘compassion’ no longer denotes the sharing of suffering to the extent that the Middle English term did. Therefore I use the term co-Passion to indicate fellow suffering with Christ’s Passion (hence the capital in co-Passion).
2 Gawain fitt I, l. 30, in The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript : Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. Malcolm Andrew,
3 Baker, Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book, 34.
first person narrative’, with Julian in Revelation still ‘attempt[ing] to maintain the semblance of a narrative account of a first day’s experience’.¹ This narrative framework, he claims, is ‘decisively broken’ with Julian ‘losing the thread of her narrative’.² An alternative reading is also possible. I suggest that narrator Julian subsumes character Julian’s earlier desire for visions into a desire for (in)sight,³ and represents the events of the visions as happening eternally. She thereby incorporates the earlier plot into a new one. To use Windeatt’s terms, she makes the earlier ‘narrative framework’ part of a greater, more encompassing framework. Windeatt discerns a central narrative principle in Revelation, which is ‘the struggle for contemplative understanding’ or a ‘protracted and anxious spiritual journey towards understanding.’⁴ I argue that the plot of Vision becomes part of this journey-framework in Revelation. Furthermore, I argue that Revelation depicts the visionary events as continuously happening and eternally available to character Julian and the evencristen.⁵ This claim therefore expands the suggestion made by the editors of The Idea of the Vernacular, who describe the Passion events in Vision and Revelation ‘not as occurring at a moment in the past but perpetually available to Christ’s lovers, if they can enter the necessary state of ‘belevande’.⁶ Thus, in Revelation the narrator gives her own experience the same omnitemporal quality as Christ’s experience on Calvary has in Vision.

¹ Windeatt, ‘The Art of Mystical Loving: Julian of Norwich’, 60.
² Ibid., 59.
³ The term '(in)sight' is used in this dissertation to refer to both vision and cognitive insights described by the narrator as the result of years of meditation. Though unique in her distinguishing between bodily, ghostly and intellectual visions, the narrator frequently blurs these distinctions. Similarly, she uses ‘to see’ to refer to experience, reflection, and interpretations achieved after many years. Denys Turner has observed this polysemy of ‘to see’ in his study of Julian’s theology, noting that ‘the elasticity of the word has been made to extend, in practice, across a vast semantic range, heedless of any distinctions we might think fit to make between experience and its meaning, or between the immediacy of the visual and its theological mediation.’ Turner, Julian of Norwich, Theologian, 78.
⁵ Evencristen, fellow Christian, is a term very frequently used by narrator Julian. In Vision and Revelation, the evencristen is the addressee or implied reader, but also a character: the evencristen belongs to both the text level and to the story level, since the narrator lets him or her take part in the events described and in the interaction between her and Christ. Two non-narratological aspects of the evencristen should be noted here. Though grammatically singular, Revelation and Vision often use evencristen in a semantically plural sense, like the biblical term ‘neighbor’. Both texts for instance use the plural pronouns ‘ye’ and ‘thaye’ to refer to the evencristen. Furthermore, the evencristen is neither a modern believer nor a modern reader, but rather a contemporary of narrator Julian and her character alter-ego, and equally situated in fourteenth-century England and in the text.
⁶ Wogan-Browne et al., The Idea of the Vernacular, 82.
From Classical Mythos to Modern Plot

It was only in the seventeenth century that ‘plot’ came to be used in the sense used here. Neither Julian nor her contemporaries Langland and Chaucer would have used the term in this sense. Nor were medieval authors or rhetoricians familiar with Aristotle’s influential discussion of *mythos*, often translated as ‘plot’, referring to the ordered arrangement of incidents with a beginning, middle and end. Naturally, this does not mean that medieval literary works were not expected to have an overall design, or that authors did not pay attention to narrative process.

In order to discern which medieval concepts overlap with plot and can be used to study the events and the connections between them in *Vision* and *Revelation*, the concept of plot first needs a more precise definition. So far I have used H. Porter’s Abbott’s definition of plot as ‘the chain of causally connected events’, which Abbott locates at fabula level, and to which I have added temporal connections as well. Such a definition can be described as Aristotle’s skeletal definition ‘the ordered arrangement of the incidents’ with its beginning, middle and end, to which temporal connections and causal connections have been added. However, ‘plot’ is notoriously difficult to define, especially within narratological contexts. Abbott, for instance, gives two other definitions. The first is ‘that combination of economy and sequencing of events’ which makes a narrative a narrative rather than raw material;’ the second is the organizing principle which serves a narrative ‘by departing from the chronological order of its events, or expanding on some events, while rushing through others, or returning to them, sometimes repeatedly’. Although Abbott helpfully emphasizes that all of these definitions concern ‘the distribution of narrative parts,’ the last two overlap confusingly with ‘story’ as used by Bal and in this dissertation. I would therefore like to return to the provisory definition once more, yet expand it by adding Aristotle’s *mythos* and a teleological orientation to it. Here I agree with Michal Beth Dinkler’s summary in her narrative study of the gospel of Luke, who—drawing on many theories of narrative—uses Aristotle’s definition of *mythos* for its definition of plot, and adds the dimensions of causal connections, temporal succession, and a unifying teleological purpose. Plot, then, is the ordered arrangement of

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1 Aristotle, ‘Poetics’, 64, 66 (ch. 6,7). Aristotle’s *Poetics* was available in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, but only in Hermannus Allemannus’s version of Averroes’ version and commentary. Both differ significantly from the original, and in both the discussion of *mythos* had become a discussion of metaphors in poetry. Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375: The Commentary-Tradition*, 287.
2 Aristotle, ‘Poetics’, 64 (ch. 6).
3 Abbott, ‘Story, Plot, and Narration’, 43.
4 Ibid., 44.
events forming a causally and temporally related chain or sequence – with a beginning, middle, and end – oriented and moving towards a particular goal. When plot is outlined thus, it is found at both fabula and story level. More importantly, the plot of a narrative can differ between story and fabula: new causal and teleological connections between events may appear when the fabula events are ordered into story events.

With this working definition of plot, it becomes possible to discuss plot in *Vision* and *Revelation*, and decide which medieval concepts to use for a more historicist literary analysis. Useful concepts are those that involve one or several of the elements events, ordering, arranging, causal connections, temporal succession, and teleological purpose. Medieval literary theory and medieval authors reflected on these. Medieval literary theory, for instance, recommended giving the text a particular ductus or ‘form of proceeding’, that is, the way in which a work leads the reader through its parts. Similarly, Chaucer’s Pilgrims promise that in their telling they will not delay the knotte, or denouement, of the events any longer.

Uniquely medieval plot features also inform this analysis. As Tony Davenport notes, in some medieval narrative genres, such as romance, plots are frequently episodic, with the events displaying a symbolical correspondence or juxtaposition, like a diptych.¹ As A.C. Spearing warns in his study of *Troilus and Criseyde*, medieval long narratives are more likely to consist of a series of episodes, each of which will be developed independently; consequently, ‘we shall be unable to find in the complete work the Aristotelian kind of unity which has a single plot as its centre or soul’.²

With their series of visions, *Vision* and *Revelation* seem episodic to some extent; yet the narrator also emphasizes the formal unity of the visions. Bringing the text into dialogue with both a modern understanding of plot and a medieval conceptualization reveals how the narrator resolves this tension.

**The Uses of Plot**
A focus on plot allows for the examination of the interaction between form and content in *Revelation* and *Vision*. Such an investigation captures how the narrator depicts herself as imprinting the mening (or entent) of the visions on the evercristen’s memory, and how she presents herself as reliably turning the mater and mening of the visions into the mater and mening of the texts.

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² Spearing, *Criticism and Medieval Poetry*, 25.
For centuries, memory, plot and the human capacity for comprehending and creating narrative have been thought to affect one another. Aristotle wrote that the *mythos* of a play should be ‘of reasonable length, so that [it] may be easily held in the memory.’\(^1\) Medieval handbooks on preaching frequently stressed the importance of using short narrative sermon illustrations, or *exempla*, to imprint the doctrine of the sermon upon the hearer’s mind, especially when addressing the laity. Thirteenth-century Dominican preacher Stephen of Bourbon, for instance, thought that *exempla* enter a layperson’s heart more easily and imprint themselves more firmly on the memory than argumentative expounding of doctrine.\(^2\) In *The Canterbury Tales* the Pardoner states that ‘ensamples’ and ‘tales olde’ are the only thing a lay mind can ‘reporthe and holde’ ['repeat and hold'].\(^3\) Twenty-first-century cognitive narratological research suggests that the appearance of narrative capability in children coincides with the onset of autobiographical memory. In fact, memory itself may be dependent on the capacity for being able to create a narrative, that is, a representation of a plot.\(^4\)

Both of Julian’s writings display a similar attention to the workings of memory, both her own and that of her *evencristen*.\(^5\) In Vision she describes how, when the ‘bodily sight’ part of the first vision is over, the ‘gastely sight’ ['spiritual sight'] remains in her understanding (Vis 5. 19). In Revelation she depicts God as renewing character Julian’s memory of the visions by ‘lightenings and touchinges’ (Rev. 65. 30) ['moments of illumination and inspiration'].\(^6\) The narrator herself reminds her hearers of earlier visions by frequently providing them with cross-referencing recapitulations: ‘For God is never out of the soule, in which he shall wonne blisfully and this was said in the sixteenth shewing, where it seyth “the place that Jhesu taketh in oure soule he shall never remeve it.”’ (Rev. 55. 24) ['For God is never out of the soul in which he shall dwell blissfully without end. And this was seen in the sixteenth revelation, where it says: “The place that Jesus takes in our soul, he will never vacate.”']\(^7\) Moreover, Susan K. Hagen observes that particular literary aspects of *Vision* and *Revelation*, such as the vivid imagery, can be

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7. Ibid., 121, 122.
read as having a mnemonic function.\(^1\) Thus, the narrator makes her character-alter ego and her *evencristen* constantly engage in processes of remembering. Since medieval thought often linked memory to moral virtue, such focus on memory is telling. Mary Carruthers writes that ‘the ability of memory to re-collect and represent past perceptions is the foundation of all moral training and the excellence of judgment’.\(^2\) Only by maximizing the memorability of the plot can *Vision* and *Revelation* spiritually transform the *evencristen* like character Julian was transformed by the visions.

Medieval readers were particularly encouraged to remember the text’s *mater*, or subject matter, and *entent*,\(^3\) the import, purpose or ‘abstract truth behind the text’.\(^4\) These two terms, frequently occurring in vernacular prologues, are derived from the Latin terms *materi*a and *intenti*o, often found in formal academic prologues in the thirteenth century. *Mater*ia and *intenti*o are two of the four causes of a text, as described by Aristotle.\(^5\) The fifteenth-century Middle English *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* for instance refers to *mater* and *entent*; in the proclamation the narrator tells the audience that ‘We be ful purposed with hart and tho wght/off our mater to tell the entent’ [‘we fully intend with heart and thought/ to tell the import of our subject matter’].\(^6\)

Narrator Julian in both *Vision* and *Revelation* uses the concepts *entent* and *mater* as well. She describes her text as having subject matter, namely the visions: ‘And that shalle ye welle see in the same mater that followes after’ (Vis. 6. 42, 43). [And you will see this clearly in the material that follows.]

*Revelation* ends exuberantly with God’s proclamation of the ultimate, all-encompassing *intenti*o\(^8\) of both visions and text:

> And fro this time that it was shewde, I desyerde oft entimes to witte what was our lords mening. And fifteen yere and mor, I was answered in costly understanding, seying thus: ‘What, woldest thou

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1 Hagen, ‘St. Cecilia and St. John of Beverley.’
4 Evans, ‘The Notion of Vernacular Theory’, 328.
8 Watson and Jenkins read *mening* as referring to *intenti*o, commenting that this meaning of love ‘provides *A Revelation* not only with its peroration but also with a justification of its hermeneutic’. This suggests that they also read *mening* in the sense of ‘sense, interpretation’ and ‘the significance of an event or a circumstance’). Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 378. ‘entente’ (n), def. 3a,d, *MED*.
wit thy lordes mening in this thing? Wit it wele, love was his mening.’ […] Thus was I lerned that love is oure lordes mening. (Rev. 86. 11-12, 16, 17)

[And from the time that this was revealed, I often yearned to know what our Lord’s meaning was. And fifteen years and more later I was answered in my spiritual understanding, and it was said: ‘Do you want to know your Lord’s meaning in this? Be well aware: love was his meaning. […] So I was taught that love was our Lord’s meaning.]

With such urgent repetition of ‘love’ and the shift from ‘thy’ to ‘oure’, the narrator depicts herself as strongly imprinting God’s entent or mening upon her hearers’ minds.

In addition, examining the plot of a narrative reveals the narrative strategies by which a narrator depicts herself as authoritative and reliable. In both Vision and Revelation, the narrator depicts herself as transferring her supernatural experience to the page as faithfully as possible. In Vision, she states: ‘For the bodely sight, I haffe said them as I sawe, als trewely as I can. And for the words fourmed, I hafe said them right as oure lorde shewed me thame’ (Vis. 23:51-53). [Concerning bodily sight, I have said what I saw as truly as I can; and as for the words formed, I have reported those words just as our Lord revealed them to me.] The ineffability of the visions, however, problematizes this desire to represent them reliably: ‘And for the gastelye sight, I hafe saide somdele, bot I maye never fully telle it’ (Vis. 23, 53-54). [‘As for the spiritual vision, I have said something but I can never disclose it in full.’]

In their anxiety about translating the visual, aural and the ineffable into text, these passages resemble prologues to fourteenth-century Middle English works that draw upon, or claim to draw upon, Latin or French works. These prologues often address their own vernacular nature, and the relation between the text in front of the reader and the source text (which may not exist). In particular, the narrator’s self-portrayal as a passive scribe evokes some of Chaucer’s narrators. Wogan-Brown, Watson, Taylor and Evans argue that when Chaucer’s narrators describe the work as a translation or adaptation, they depict themselves as passive:

When [the narrator] chooses to identify one of his own texts as dependent on a source, he tends to emphasize passivity, and such

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 164.
2 Ibid., 34.
3 Ibid.
passages are usually attached to works that themselves have particularly passive, receptive, or suffering protagonists whose situations are mirrored in the narrator-translator’s passivity, lack of free will, and powerlessness to change the preordained plot.¹

Thus, how the narrator positions himself or herself in relation to the original work reflects power structures within the translated work. Narratorial claims of passivity and dependency should therefore not be taken at face value. Instead, they should be seen as a conscious self-fashioning that emphasizes or contradicts certain features in the work. Prologues sometimes describe this dependency in terms of obediently transferring the *mater* and the *entent* from one language to another. That is, the narrator will assure the reader that the *mater* in the translation has been shaped in such a way that it reflects the *entent* which they discern in its source.² Consequently, how a narrator structures the events and presents himself- or herself as structuring the sequence of events form part of the narratorial self-portrayal.

**From One Vision to Sixteen Revelations**

Although both texts claim to be inspired by the same series of visions, *Vision* and *Revelation* differ dramatically in terms of events, especially in the second half. The simplified outline below shows a comparison between the visionary and non-visionary events in *Vision* and *Revelation*.³ It also visualizes how the rather fluid visions in *Vision* have been divided into separate, numbered revelations in *Revelation*. This division may have been created by the author.⁴ The parable of the Lord and Servant, however, does not belong to any of the numbered revelations. Heavily expanded sections have been indicated in *italics*, additions in *bold*. The transition from visionary to non-visionary state and vice versa have been marked with a dotted line.

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<th><strong>Vision:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><em>(Section 1)</em> Young Julian wishes for three things: a bodily sight of Christ’s Passion, a mortal sickness and three wounds</td>
<td><em>(Chapter 1-3)</em> Young Julian wishes for three things: a bodily sight of Christ’s Passion, a mortal sickness and three wounds (contrition, co-Passion, and</td>
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³ Other outlines can be found in Windeatt’s translation, 166, and in Barbara Newman, ‘Redeeming the Time: Langland, Julian, and the Art of Lifelong Revision’, 7.
⁴ Dutton, *Devotional Compilations*, 50.
(contrition, compassion, and active longing for God.) Years later, aged thirty, she falls seriously ill. A priest puts a crucifix in front of her.

(2-7) Julian sees blood trickle down from under crucifix, a spiritual sight of God’s homely loving, Mary at the time of the Annunciation, and all of creation as a hazelnut in her hand.

(8) Julian sees brief fragmentary visions of Christ’s face discolouring, God in a point, by which she sees that he is in all things and does all things and that sin is nothing, followed by Christ’s body bleeding profusely, and words being formed in Julian’s soul that the devil is overcome by Christ’s Passion. God thanks her for her service.

(9) God has Julian alternate between positive feelings, such as comfort and joy, and negative ones, such as hopelessness and sorrow.

(10, 11) Christ shows Julian a

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<td>1</td>
<td>(4-9) Julian sees blood trickle down from under crucifix, Mary at the time of the Annunciation, a spiritual sight of God’s homely loving and all of creation as a hazelnut in her hand. The blood reminds her of pellets, scales of herring and rain on the eaves of a house.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>(10) Julian sees brief fragmentary visions of Christ’s face discolouring; her understanding is led down to the sea, and God shows her an image resembling Veronica’s veil.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>(11) Julian sees God in a point, by which she sees that he is in all things and does all thing and that sin is nothing.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>(12) Julian sees Christ’s body bleeding profusely, with the blood descending into hell, overflowing earth and ascending to heaven.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>(13) God forms words in her soul, telling her that the devil is overcome by Christ’s Passion.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>(14) God thanks her for her service and suffering; Julian’s understanding is lifted up into heaven.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>(15) God has Julian alternate between positive feelings, such as comfort and joy, and negative ones, such as hopelessness and sorrow.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>(16 – 21) Christ shows Julian a</td>
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part of his Passion, before his death, (consisting of his body dehydrating) Julian achieves compassion and sees Mary in a co-passionate state; a voice tempts her to look away from the cross but Julian refuses. Christ’s expression changes suddenly to joy.

(12) Christ asks if she is satisfied, Christ tells her that he would have suffered more and for each person individually, Julian’s understanding is taken up into heaven.

(13) Christ’s looks into his wounded side, followed by a spiritual vision of Mary as she is in heaven.

Christ shows himself in more glory than before, speaking words that surpass Julian’s understanding. Christ brings to Julian’s mind her earlier longing for him, which makes Julian wonders why the beginning of sin, that is, all forms of evil, was not prevented, Christ answers that sin is ‘behovely’ [‘befitting and necessary’]¹ but that all things shall be well.

(14-19) Julian wonders once more about sin, Christ answers that he has made the greatest

¹ *Revelations of Divine Love*, 167.
harm well and so will also make the lesser harm well. Christ responds to Julian’s questions and doubts by telling her that he can, wants to, knows how to, and shall make all things well. Julian wishes to see friend’s wellbeing or future afterlife fate, is denied that wish. Christ tells her that that he is the foundation of her prayers. The narrator briefly meditates on how prayer unites the soul with God.

wondering persists, asks once more about sin, Christ replies that he has made the greatest harm well and therefore will also make the lesser well. Christ responds to Julian’s questions and doubts by telling her that he can, wants to, knows how to, and shall make all things well;

 Julian sees that God at the end of time shall do a deed which will make all things well.

 Julian wishes to see hell and purgatory. and to know a friend’s wellbeing or future afterlife fate, is denied both wishes. God shows yet another unknown future act, done for Julian’s sake and by means of her.

14 41-49 Christ tells her that he is the foundation of her prayers.

 Julian struggles greatly with reconciling experience and dogma of human sinfulness with God in the visions not blaming humanity; God replies by showing her a puzzling parable of a Lord and a Servant, which is only fully understood after a secondary vision years later (in 1393) has given instructions how to re-see the parable and start deciphering it.

Extensive meditation, including meditation on humanity’s essence (‘substance’) being in God, and God being in our lived experience (‘sensuality’), and on Christ’s motherhood.

(20) Julian wishes to die to be with God, but he tells her she will

15 (64-65) Julian wishes to die to be with God, but he tells her she
suddenly be taken from her pain and suffering and have Him as her reward in heaven. **Julian sees a body lying on earth, without shape or form, with a child getting out of it and ascending to heaven**

(21) Julian’s illness returns; she declares to a priest that she has hallucinated. Just when she is falling asleep the devil tries to strangle her but fails. Julian sees smoke and smells stench, but derives comfort from memory of visions.

(66-67) Julian’s illness returns; she denies the authenticity of her visions to a priest. *Just when she is falling asleep the devil tries to strangle her but fails.* Julian sees smoke and smells stench, but manages to derive comfort from memory of visions.

(22) Christ shows Himself reigning in her soul in the middle of her heart, confirms the authenticity of her visions, and tells her that she shall not be overcome.

16 (68) Christ shows Himself reigning in her soul in the middle of her heart, confirms the authenticity of her visions, and tells her that she shall not be overcome.

(23-25) The devil attacks her again with heat, stench, jangling, jabbering and muttering ‘as if of two bodies’ until early morning. Julian fights it by speaking and praying aloud and by keeping her eyes on the cross. The narrator scorns sin, and warns the reader against four fears and against evil spirits disguising themselves as angels.

(69) The devil attacks her again with heat, stench, jangling, muttering ‘as if of two bodies’ until early morning. Julian fights it by speaking and praying aloud and by keeping her eyes on the cross. *(70-85: Extensive meditation.)*

(86) Ever since the visions, Julian wants to know what God’s meaning was; 15 years and more later (in 1388), Julian is answered in her understanding: God tells her that love was his meaning, and that love is why, what and who showed her the visions.

Even such a simplified outline shows that the plot, or in Julian’s terms ‘the properte and order’ of events, has undergone a transformation. The narrative skeleton of the first half of Revelation is roughly similar to its Vision equivalent.
In the second half, in contrast, the added events, such as the two great deeds, give the narrative a different overall character (‘properte’), goal and ending. In Vision, the last event in the fabula is the last attack; in Revelation, this is the great deed which will make all well.

Furthermore, some visions from Vision appear in a different order in Revelation. The vision of Mary now follows the sight of the bleeding head, making the Crucifixion happen before the Annunciation. Moreover, new visions have been added to the original experience, as well as several shorter exempla told by God (not included in the overview).

Two later visions have been included in the narrative as well, with the vision from 1393 appearing earlier in the text than the vision from 1388, with which the text ends. Consequently, the fabula in Revelation covers more time, and both human history and the story end on a more hopeful note in Revelation than in Vision. In Julian’s terms, the ‘properte’ as well as the ‘order’ of events have been changed.

Revelation also both adds and creates new causal connections. For instance, Christ’s reassuring promises that all shall be well, found in both Vision and Revelation, make Julian wonder anxiously how this is possible. Both Vision and Revelation describe this response, but it lasts longer in Revelation and leads to God showing her the two great deeds. These in their turn make Julian see a disturbing discrepancy between God’s perspective and human perspective, and so on. Revelation thus incorporates earlier visions and their causal connections into a new chain of causal connections, that is, a new plot.

**From Passion to Daily Psychomachia: Vision’s Linear Plot**

The first event the reader encounters in both works is Julian’s act of wishing. Vision opens boldly with ‘I desired thre graces by the gifte of God. The first was to have minde of Cristes Passion. The seconde was bodyle syekness. And the thrid was to have of Goddes gifte thre woundes’ (Vis. 1:1-3). [*I asked for three graces by the gift of God. The first was to relive Christ’s Passion in my mind; the second was bodily sickness; and the third was to receive three wounds, by the gift of God.*]¹

Revelation, after the summary of the revelations, likewise opens with Julian desiring more ‘minde’, recollection or consciousness of Christ’s Passion, a mortal sickness and three spiritual wounds: ‘Which creature desired before thre giftes by the grace of God’ (Rev. 2. 3). [*This person had already asked for three gifts by the grace of God.*]² These three wishes have

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¹ Ibid., 3.
² Ibid., 40.
Trinitarian and folkloric overtones, reminiscent of the different forms of triple trials in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.1

More importantly, they testify to the importance of narrative desire in *Vision* and *Revelation*. Character Julian wishes for ‘thre graces’, and the reader wishes to find out if her wish is fulfilled in the end.

This gives the narrative the teleological orientation that forms part of my definition of plot. Peter Brooks in his structuralist, psychoanalytic study of plot describes narrative desire as ‘a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text. Narratives both tell of desire—typically present some story of desire—and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification.’2 In *Vision* narrative desire forms a line, but in *Revelation* this line is made part of a circle or a spiral. I argue that *Vision* linearly fulfills narrative desire, and creates a sense of closure. *Revelation*, in contrast, includes this narrative desire into a greater narrative desire, which is constantly only partly fulfilled; only the beatific vision and God’s unknown action at the end of time will fully fulfill it.

**Medieval and Modern Narrative Desire**

Characters and readers’ wishes, longing, and expectations are often central to the plots of both modern and medieval narratives, according to many narratologists. In her narratological study of medieval narrative, Evelyn Birge Vitz writes that in these works ‘the relationship, through desire or urgent need, between someone (a literary character, the self, or the soul) and someone or something is […] a central preoccupation.’3

Medieval narratives thought of readers as experiencing narrative desire, as the comments from one of Chaucer’s pilgrims illustrate. Approximately in the middle of his winding tale, the Squire promises that he will start wrapping up his tale and quickly move on to its *knotte*, its gist, conclusion or its point:4

> The knotte why that every tale is told,  
> if it tarried til that lust be coold  
> of hem that han it herkned yore,

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4 ‘knotte (n.)’ *MED*; note to ‘The Squire’s Tale’, l. 401, p. 174. The squire actually does not start wrapping up his tale. In general, the Canterbury pilgrims referring most to their own telling seem to be the least in control of it.
The savour passeth ever lenger the moore,
For fulsomnesse of his prolixitee;
And by the same resound, thynketh me,
I sholde to the knotte condescende
and maken of hir walking soone and ende.

[The knot and gist of every tale that’s told,
If lingered out till all desire be cold
In those that listen and the moment’s past,
Savours the less the longer it may last
By fulsomeness of its prolixity,
And for that reason as it seems to me
I ought to reach that knot of which I’m talking
And make an end, and quickly, of her walking.]¹

According to the narrator, the *knotte* has several effects on narrative desire. First of all, the *knotte* makes the tale worth telling, and causes the tale to exert an emotional pull. In other words, it creates narrative desire, giving the tale its taste. Secondly, the point at which the knot is made strongly shapes the fulfillment of this desire, according to the Squire. Postponing the knot too long diminishes the readers’ enjoyment of the tale and their willingness to continue listening. The Squire’s claim that the knot should not be drawn out too long anticipates Brooks’ psychodynamic description of narrative desire. According to Brooks, plots need ‘minimally complicated detours’, such as subplots, to make the tale reach the *knotte* at the perfect moment:²

‘The desire of the text is […] desire for the end, but desire for the end reached only through the least minimally complicated detour the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of narrative.’³ Thus, medieval literary thought and literary practice reflected upon how to fulfill and frustrate characters’ and readers’ desires, and how these desires affect the plot and the listener’s attention.

However, the object and quality of narrative desire in medieval religious narratives may differ from those of other medieval genres, and even more from those of modern fiction. Troilus wanting Criseyde, or Gawain wishing to preserve both his life and honour, and a reader wishing to find out if they do so, perhaps cannot be compared Julian’s desire to see from God’s perspective. Comparing the Object of desire in secular narratives to the God as the Object of desire in religious narratives, Vitz addresses this difference in her discussion of the mid-eleventh-century Old French saints’ legend *La

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² Brooks, 104.
³ Ibid.
Vie de Saint Alexis. She argues that unlike the secular Object, one can never ‘possess’ God, yet by loving God one nevertheless does so. Furthermore, she suggests that whereas secular narrative desire, *concupiscientia*, ‘eager and passionate desire’ may create closure and fulfillment, this sacred narrative desire, *caritas*, cannot.¹ Sacred narrative desire thus would seem more complex and contradictory than profane narrative desire.

Yet I would like to suggest that both profane and sacred narrative desire drive *Vision* and *Revelation*. Vitz observes out that narrative expectations, that is, the readers’ profane narrative desires, shape religious narratives. She notes that medieval narrators preferred tales of martyrs with their dramatic deaths to uneventful tales of confessors.² Furthermore, several scholars have pointed out a number of echoes of romance, a secular narrative genre, in *Vision* and *Revelation*.³ Because of these echoes, the texts create profane narrative desire as well. Thus, the *evencristen* desires to be brought closer to God by means of the narrative and character Julian wishes to be brought closer to God by means of the *exempla*; yet Julian and the *evencristen* also wish to hear a gripping and emotionally satisfying tale.

In addition, the profane desires of characters and readers that carry readers forward through the text can manifest as forms of longing other than *concupiscientia*. Here I would like to expand Vitz’s claim by drawing on Caroline Walker Bynum. Bynum consistently warns against the twentieth-and twenty-first-century tendency to eroticize the bodies and bodily experiences found in medieval culture.⁴ She recommends reading these instead in terms of other bodily experiences, such as eating, nurturing, feeding, suffering, illness and death, as they would have been understood by medieval readers and viewers.⁵ A character’s desire for Christ in a religious narrative, then, can also be read as a maternal wish to feed the Christ child or to embrace Christ as he suffers pain on the cross.⁶ Similarly, it can also resemble a longing for the company and closeness of a friend, or a child’s longing for its mother to cuddle and feed it. Thus, when character Julian wishes to see Christ bodily, she not only longs for her heavenly Bridegroom,
but also wishes to see her ‘homely’ [close] friend Christ, whom she thinks of as a brother.

Both Vision and Revelation refer to characters’ desires; Revelation does so in particular. Both texts therefore provide concepts for investigating these wishes in these works. For instance, just as character Julian ‘desired thre graces’, the narrator ascribes to the character of the Servant a ‘gret desyer’ to serve his lord. This desire causes his fall: ‘for only his good will and his gret desyer was cause of his falling’ (Rev. 51. 31). ['for his good will and the greatness of his longing were the only cause of his fall'][1]. Thus, the narrator gives a character in an embedded narrative, a narrative within the primary narrative, a desire comparable to that of her character alter-ego, and makes it a driving force behind events.

Furthermore, in both Vision and Revelation, the narrator seems to distinguish desyer and its synonym ‘longing’ from active searching. In both Vision and Revelation, the narrator assures the evenecristen that although she longed for visions and an illness ‘to the dede’, that is, mortally severe, she did not seek this second wish or this longing: ‘For the secunde [gift], come to my minde with contrition, frelye without sekinge: a wilfulle desire to have of Goddes gifte a bodelye syekenes’ (Vis. 1. 20, 21). [‘The second gift came to my mind with contrition, freely and without any seeking: a willing desire to be given a bodily sickness by God.’][3] Thus, desyer is an act of the will, not necessarily implying agency, while sekinge is to act upon this longing. However, in Revelation the narrator characteristically blurs the boundaries between these two terms. For example, the puzzling vision of Christ’s face being covered in blood makes her both seek and long for Christ: ‘And thus I saw him and I sought him, and I had him and I wante d him’ (Rev. 10. 10). [‘And so I saw him and sought him, and I had him and I wanted him.’][4] What is more, narrator Julian in Revelation even seems to distinguish between ‘longing’ and ‘desyering’. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this analysis, I separate seking from desyer, and use desyer and ‘longing’ as a single concept.

In addition, Vision and Revelation display sensitivity to the teleological orientation of narratives, in particular to what the narrative requires in order to be complete. Revelation and Vision often indicate the latter with the verb ‘behoveth’ [‘to need’, ‘to be necessary’] and the adjective ‘behovely’ [fitting, appropriate’, ‘requisite, necessary’, but also ‘beneficial’].[5] Denys Turner has discussed Revelation’s attention to necessary narrative

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2 Bal, Narratology, 57.
3 Ibid., 3.
4 Ibid., 53.
5 ‘Hoven, v.(2). MED.
elements in relation to Julian’s celebrated ‘sin is behovely but alle shall be wele’ (Rev. 27. 9, 10) and her theology. Turner understands ‘behovely’ to suggest ‘narratival fittingness’. The term, he argues, sums up how in retrospect all events of a narrative seem fitting yet neither contingent nor necessary: ‘For even if everything in a narrative could have, logically, been otherwise, when we say of what does happen that its happening was behovely, it is because it was just right that it should happen so, and not otherwise, as if with a kind of narratival necessity.’ The beginning of the tale does not necessitate nor require its further events and its end, but these are not contingent either.

Naturally, Turner’s narrative understanding of Julian’s terms can be applied back to the narratives of Vision and Revelation. For example, in Revelation, having seen Christ’s body dehydrate for a long time, character Julian thinks that in order for the traditional Passion narrative to be complete, Christ needs to die now: ‘the life might no lenger laste, and the shewing of the endes behoved nedes to be nye’ (Rev. 21. 7, 8). ‘[L]life could last no longer and there must be a revelation of his end’[2]. The narrator, however, lets Christ defy character Julian’s narrative expectations: instead of dying, Christ changes his expression to joy. According to Revelation, then, Christ’s ability to share humanity’s suffering and joy is more narratively fitting than his death.

What is more, God rewarding sin is narratively necessary to salvation history, according to Revelation. Having described the Servant’s fall, narrator Julian lets God show her character alter-ego an inner, spiritual revelation of the Lord’s intention (‘mening’). This makes character Julian notice to her surprise that ‘it behoveth nedes to be [...] that his deerworthy servant [...] shulde be hyely and blissefully rewarded withoute end, above that he shulde have be if he had not fallen’ (Rev. 51. 46-49). ‘[I]t must needs be that his beloved servant [...] should be truly and blissfully rewarded forever, above what he would have been if he had not fallen.’[3] Instead of guilt, a great reward is appropriate. Thus, the narrator once more defies character Julian’s (and the evenchristen’s) narrative expectations, offering a story in which neither the plot nor dogma demands a penalty, and does so by using the term ‘behoveth’. Like with desyer, the narrator uses this term in the explicitly narrative context of the exemplum, which suggests it can be used in an examination of plot as well.

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1 Turner, 44.
2 Revelations of Divine Love, 68.
3 Ibid., 108.
Linear Plot at Fabula Level

After introducing the three wishes, *Vision* structures the gospel events of the Passion around seeing more of Christ’s body, creating a linear plot at fabula level. The first, most central wish is for a bodily sight of Christ’s Passion, that is, a vision resembling actual sight, showing the body of Christ:¹

I woulde have bene that time with Mary Maudeleyne and with othere that were Cristes loverse, that I might have sene bodilye the passion of oure lorde [...] I desired a bodilye sight, wherein I might have more knawinge of bodelye paines of oure lorde oure savio ur. (Vis. 1. 6,7, 12-13)

The visions of Christ gradually fulfill this narrative desire of seeing more of Christ’s body, by gradually revealing more of it. For instance, the visions of Christ do not begin with a full sight of him, as is the case in Margery Kempe’s and Birgitta’s visions. In one of Birgitta’s childhood visions, found in a Latin *vita*, ten-year-old Birgitta is shown all effects of the Passion on Christ’s entire body:

Round about her tenth year on a certain occasion, she heard a sermon preached in church about the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The following night she saw, in a dream, Christ as if he had been crucified in that same hour, and he said to her: ‘In such a way I was wounded.’ And she thought it had happened at that hour, and answered in her sleep: ‘O Lord, who has done this to you?’²

The young saint’s dream shows a confusingly complete image of the body of crucified Christ. In *Vision*, in contrast, the first bodily sight is a vision of Christ’s forehead only, and references the moment in the Passion narrative when Pilates’ soldiers put a crown of thorns on Christ’s head:

¹ Sight in late medieval thought was thought to entail a meeting between two bodies. Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, 4.
I sawe the rede blode trekille down fro under the garlande alle hate, 
freshlye, plentefully, and livelye, right as methought it that it was in 
that time that the garlonde of thornes was thyrsted e on his blessed 
hede. (Vis. 3. 10-13)

[I suddenly saw the red blood trickling down from under the crown 
of thorns— hot and fresh, plentiful and lifelike— just how it seemed 
to me that it was when the crown of thorns was thrust on to his 
blessed head.]

The next vision shows Christ’s face being beaten, an event earlier in the 
Passion narrative, and then it being covered in blood. The next two bodily 
visions show Christ’s body, one of the moment after the scourging and the 
second when Christ has been crucified. The narrator in Vision reads these 
bodily visions as a gradual revealing of Christ’s body: ‘After this I sawe, 
behaldande, the body plenteously bledande [...] right as I saw before in the 
hede’ (Vis 8. 20, 21). ['And after this I saw, as I watched, the body bleeding 
profusely [...] just as I saw the head bleeding before.'] In other words, the 
narrator lets God show different parts of Christ’s body separately affected by 
the crucifixion, with the visions sometimes moving back in the Passion 
narrative in order better to show how that body part reached that state. The 
narrator thus subjects the Passion plot to that of Vision.

By having God fulfill Julian’s wish for a sight of Christ’s body 
somewhat more with each bodily vision, rather than immediately revealing a 
suffering Christ, the narrator strategically emphasizes that God’s acting and 
God’s desire to show her the visions lie behind the visions, rather than 
Julian’s wishes.

The narrator’s comparison of two bodily sights with ‘After this I sawe, 
behaldande, the body plenteously bledande [...] right as I saw before in the 
hede’, also reveals another another connection between several visions. That 
is, in both Vision and Revelation the narrator creates causal links between 
the several bodily visions by making each display a phase in the continuous 
process of Christ’s body as it loses blood and moisture. The narrator deviates 
from the biblical narrative and affective meditation narrative here as well, 
instead creating a series of events connected logically by the changes in 
Christ’s body.4

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 6.
2 It occurs earlier in affective meditation texts, such as the MVC; in the Gospel of John 
(19:1) the beating and the crowning with thorns happen simultaneously.
4 Glasscoe, however, argues that the visions map onto the liturgical hours. Glasscoe, 
English Medieval Mystics : Games of Faith, 222.
The second bodily sight, for instance, shows Christ’s face—after being beaten and spit upon—being covered by dry blood: the blood which poured from Christ’s forehead in the first vision has begun to dry. The bodily sight that follows it features the body ‘plenteously bledande’ (Vis. 8. 20), ['bleeding profusely']\(^1\) with fresh blood. The head having bled out, this scene suggests, it is now the rest of Christ’s body which starts to bleed.

The last bodily vision consists of ‘the dryinge of Cristes fleshe’, Christ’s body dehydrating. In particular, character Julian sees that Christ’s face is ‘drye and bludyelesse with pale dying’ (Vis. 10. 2) ['dry and bloodless with the pallor of death'] while the nose ‘claungede and dried’ (Vis. 10. 7) ['shriveled up and dried'].\(^2\) Having lost all blood, his body now begins to lose its moisture. The bodily visions, then, are visions of changes in and of Christ’s body. The Vision narrator breaks up Christ’s body into easily memorable parts in her visions. Each vision shows sequential changes and contributes to character Julian’s wishes being fulfilled, while the internal logic of these changes facilitates the memory of this suffering and its imprint on the visionary’s body.

The linearity of the fulfillment of this wish is emphasized by how the other visions interrupt the revelation of Christ’s body. These non-Passion visions come out of, or appear within, the visions of Christ’s Passion. Annie Sutherland and Denise Nowakowski Baker have drawn attention to the fragmented character of Vision and Revelation’s Passion narrative, and to how the presence of non-Passion visions makes Christ’s suffering fade in and out of narrative focus.\(^3\) I would add that when this fading in and fading out is related to Julian’s wishes, the non-Passion visions interrupt the process of the fulfillment of character Julian’s wishes. For example, after the vision of the forehead bleeding, she wishes for more bodily sight, that is, more sight of Christ’s body:

And the bodily sight stinted [...] and I abade with reverente drede, joyande in that I sawe, and desirande as I durste for to see mare, if it ware his wille, or langer the same time. (Vis. 5. 19-21)

[And the bodily vision ceased [...] And I waited in reverent awe, rejoicing in what I saw, and wishing as much as I dared to see more if that were his will, or else to see the same vision for longer.]\(^4\)

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\(^1\) *Revelations of Divine Love*, 11.

\(^2\) Ibid., 14.


\(^4\) *Revelations of Divine Love*, 8, 9.
The next vision is indeed bodily, and seems to offer this ‘mare’, yet frustrates character Julian’s wishes more than it fulfills them. Moreover, the narrator makes God explicitly deny her alter-ego’s wishes for further clarity; this denial stresses God’s control over the visions:

I sawe with bodely sight the face of the crucifixe that hange before me, in whilke I behelde continuely a party of his passion [...] This I sawe bodilye and hevelye and derklye, and I desired mare bodelye light to hafe sene more clerly. And I was answered in my resone that if God walde shewe me mare he shulde, botte me neded na light botte him. (Vis. 8. 1,2,5-8)

[And after this I saw with my bodily sight in the face on the crucifix which hung before me—at which I was looking continuously—a part of his Passion [...] I saw this bodily and sorrowfully and obscurely, and I wished for more natural light to have seen more clearly. And I was answered in my reason that if God wanted to show me more, he would—but I needed no light but him.]

Narrator Julian once more underscores her alter-ego’s complete dependence ‘on the goodenes of God,’ as the rubric says. She thereby stresses that the visions result from God’s desire to give them rather than from character Julian’s desires.

Similarly, the next vision, of God in a point, does not offer the ‘mare bodilye light’ desired. Instead, it surprises character Julian, so that she needs to pay close attention to the unexpected sight: ‘I behelde with visement [...] I merveylde in this sight’ (Vis. 8. 10, 11). ['I looked attentively [...] I marvelled at that sight']. In response to the vision of God in a point and her realization that sin lacks being, character Julian continues to gaze at the Christ figure: ‘I [...] behalde oure lorde’ (Vis. 8.17, 18). ['I [...] looked at our Lord']. She still hopes to see what she wishes to see. By frequently deferring the complete fulfillment of character Julian’s wishes in this manner, the narrator depicts the visions as directed, in all senses of the word, by God. Character Julian’s wish for co-Passion and a sight of Christ is granted, but only on God’s terms.

By letting God’s desires prevail over those of her character alter-ego, the narrator underscores her orthodoxy; moreover, she makes her text evoke other vernacular narratives in which the human character’s wishes are fulfilled on the terms of God only. The Ancrene Wisse offers several exempla

1 Ibid., 11.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 12.
in which this is the case, for instance an exemplum with a far more problematic portrayal of mother God than later used in Revelation:

> When our Lord allows us to be tempted, he is playing with us like the mother with her little darling. She runs away from him and hides herself, and leaves him sitting on his own, looking about anxiously, calling ‘Mummy! Mummy!’ and starting to cry; and then she jumps out laughing with open arms, hugs and kisses him and wipes his eyes.¹

The child seeks its mother with its eyes and its voice: it wants its mother. Yet the mother does not respond to this; her laughing suggests that she does not stop hiding in order to comfort him, but rather because she simply wishes to appear again. In this exemplum, like in Vision, the narrator locates all control over how the wishes are fulfilled outside of the wisher.

**A Divine Reluctance to Fulfil Julian’s Wishes**

Vision also makes the plot a linear quest for a sight of Christ’s body by only fulfilling character Julian’s initial wishes wholeheartedly. Other wishes are either frustrated, claimed to have already been fulfilled, or dismissed as sinful.

For example, after the Passion visions, character Julian remembers her long-time wish to know why the Fall was allowed to take place: ‘Ofte I wondrede why, be the grete forseande wisdom of God, sin was nought letted’ (Vis. 13. 34, 35). [‘I had often wondered why [...] through the great foreseeing wisdom of God, sin was not prevented.’]² Before letting Christ respond with ‘sin is behovelye’, the narrator criticizes her alter-ego harshly for this desire for more understanding:³ ‘This stirring was mekkille to forsayke, and mourning and sorrowe therfore withouten resone and discretion of fulle grete pride’ (Vis. 13. 37-38). [‘I should have given up such thoughts, yet I grieved and sorrowed over this, unreasonably and without discretion, out of very great pride.’]⁴ The use of ‘stirring’ indicates that this wish is as ardent as Julian’s initial wishes. Even more telling, however, is the use of ‘fulle grete pride’: narrator Julian condemns her alter-ego’s wish for more understanding as a capital sin, and what is more, as the capital sin sometimes considered the first and root of all sins.⁵ Vision thus implies that

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³ This harshness is reminiscent of the penitential self-loathing recommended by the *Ancrene Wisse*, Part 5:10.
if character Julian’s desires wander off into another direction than that of Christ’s salvific body, they become mortally dangerous.

Likewise, both the narrator and Christ attempt to overwrite character Julian’s new desires with the initial ones. For instance, although told that ‘sin is behovely’, character Julian continues to wonder anxiously but stubbornly how everything can ever be well:

Bot in this I stode, behalde drerelye and mournande, sayande thus to oure lorde in my meninge with fulle grete drede: ‘a, goode lorde howe mighte alle be wele for the grete harme that is common by sinne to thy creatures? And I desired as I durste to hafe sum mare open declaring wherewith I might be hesed in this (Vis. 14. 1-4).

[But I stayed contemplating this generally, sorrowfully, and mournfully, addressing our Lord in this way in my thoughts in very great awe, ‘Ah, good Lord, how could all be well, in view of the great harm which has come upon your creatures through sin?’ And I wished, as much as I dared, to receive some clearer explanation to set my mind at ease about this.]

A new desire seems to appear. Character Julian asks for nothing less than an explanation for the existence of evil, since by ‘sin’ both Vision and Revelation mean evil in all its forms, ‘alle that is not good’ (Rev. 27. 13; Vis. 13. 44).

The narrator then makes God direct character Julian’s gaze back to familiar dogma and the earlier visions: ‘oure blissede lorde […] shewed me that Adames sinne was the maste harme […] this is openly knawen in alle haly kyrke […] [H]e lered me that I shulde behalde the glorious ase the’ (Vis. 14. 5,8). [‘And our blessed Lord [...] and showed me that Adam’s sin was the greatest harm [...] this is openly acknowledged throughout all Holy Church [...] [H]e taught me that I should contemplate the glorious atonement.’]

The use of ‘behalde’, ‘to contemplate’ as well as to ‘to gaze upon’, suggests that the narrator has God overwrite character Julian’s new wish with the older one. Instead of wishing to see new (in)sights, the narrator suggests, character Julian should behold Christ’s suffering body once more.

A similar frustration of character Julian’s wishes, this time both by Christ and the narrator, is found later, when character Julian wants (‘desired’) a vision revealing what fate will await a friend in the afterlife (Vis. 16. 13); such visions are a genre convention of visionary texts. As several critics have observed, Revelation differs from other visionary texts in

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 21.
2 Ibid.
denying Julian this sight. The narrator, however, again criticizes her alter-ego and her desires, claiming that ‘in this desire’ her alter-ego ‘letted’ herself, stood in her own way, because she was not yet as spiritually wise as the narrator is now (Vis. 16. 14).

The denial of this wish has an ambiguous effect on the plot, as do the denials of other visionary wishes. On the one hand, only the initial wishes being fulfilled suggests anxiety about character Julian’s narrative desires. It implies that if character Julian wishes for a vision not included in the initial wishes, such a wish can easily become sinful. On the other hand, it strategically emphasizes her visionary passivity, and therefore increases the validity of the visions. In fact, these denials of Julian’s wishes makes the visions exactly match the disclaimer given before the visions:

Thus me thought that I might, with his grace, have his woundes that I hadde before desired. But in this I desired nevere ne bodely sight ne no manere shewinge of God, botte compassion. (Vis. 3. 5-7).

[So it seemed to me that, through his grace, I might have the wounds which I had wanted before. But in this I never asked for any bodily vision, or any kind of revelation, but for compassion.]

Character Julian did not wish for any unique visionary knowledge, but for co-Passion by means of a sight of Christ’s body only. Co-Passion and such a sight was what God gave her, to which he kindly added some bonus visions and a sight that exceeded her expectations, namely a non-suffering, handsome Christ sitting in her soul. With this linear, neat fulfillment of character Julian’s initial wishes, the narrator thus increases her alter-ego’s reliability as a visionary.

Furthermore, when character Julian’s wish for co-Passion is finally fulfilled, the reaction the narrator ascribes to her also suggests distrust of character Julian’s wishes, but strategic positioning as well. When character Julian experiences co-Passion, she immediately regrets the wish that has driven the plot so far: ‘I feled no paine botte for Cristes paines. Than thought me, I knew full litlle whate paine it was that I asked’ (Vis. 10. 29, 30). [‘I felt no pain except for Christ’s pains. Then I thought to myself, ‘I little knew what it pain that I asked for’.] Christ’s pain is of such ineffable greatness, the narrator suggests, that character Julian could never have imagined it

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1 See for example Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 2008, 113; Watson, ‘Composition’, 649.
2 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 96.
beforehand. Only Christ is capable of letting the believer experience such sublime suffering. By making the co-Passion exceed character Julian’s expectations, the narrator on the one hand warns against wishing impulsively for co-Passion like young Julian. On the other hand, she draws attention to God’s agency, and thus validates character Julian’s visions.

In sum, the narrator demonstrates by means of the plot that God’s, rather than Julian’s, desires lie behind both the visions and the narrative. Like in her apologia, in which the narrator stresses that the reader should ‘behalde Jhesu that is the techare of alle’ (Vis. 6. 45), the narrator locates all control over the events in God. According to the narrator, Christ is not only the great teacher, but also the great plotter; character Julian, caught up in this plot, is thus made a reliable vatic channel and translator.

**Psychomachia on Fabula Level**

Falling ill once more, character Julian dismisses the visions as hallucinations, which has frightening consequences. The devil or devils attack her thrice, possibly because God allows them to do so, since he does not wish character Julian to remain in a state of ‘grete sinne’: ‘Botte herein walde nought oure curtayse lorde leve me’ (Vis. 21. 20). ‘[But our courteous lord would not leave me like this.’]¹ I suggest that these scenes give a psychomachia-character to a significant part of Vision’s plot. From Julian’s fall onwards, a battle between divine and demonic powers for Julian’s well-being and soul can be seen.

Several studies, such as those by McAvoy and Tinsley have shown how these scenes reinforce or explicate character Christ’s words ‘Herewith is the fende overcomen […] thowe shall noughte be overcomen’ (Vis. 8.22; 22.26,27). ‘[In this way is the devil overcome […] You shall not be overcome.’]² Complementing these claims, I argue that the narrator makes the fiend attempt to undo, to ‘overcome’ the visions and their effects. She thereby gives the visions an ontologically precarious character and emphasizes the need for their continuous mental re-performance. When character Julian spiritually loses sight of God, the narrator implies, she runs the risk of losing her visions to the fiend.

**Wele and Wo**

Some aspects of medieval literary practice help reveal how the narrator has the evil spirits try to blot out both the visions and their positive effect on character Julian’s well-being.

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¹ Ibid., 30.
With the vision consisting of Julian’s emotional state fluctuating between joy and sorrow, and with Julian’s illness disappearing and re-appearing afterwards, Vision adheres to a common medieval narrative expectation: that is, plots are to show both changes to wele [well-being of any kind, good fortune] and wo [misery, misfortune]. The Canterbury Tales provides an example of this feature of medieval storytelling. Noticing a mind-numbing repetition of changes to wo, the knight interrupts the Monk’s Tale. Instead of the Monk’s list of characters who undergo a ‘sodeyn fall’ ['sudden fall'], the knight would rather hear a tale about a character who ‘hath been in poovre estaat and clymbeth up and wexe th for tunaat and there abideth in prosperitee’ ['of low estate, who climb aloft and growing fortunate, remain secure in their prosperity']. The knight, then, wishes to hear a tale that starts with wo and then changes to wele.

According to medieval literary thought and practice, illustrated here by Chaucer, these changes serve several functions. They shape the plot, that is, they lead the narrative to either a happy ending, in which case the narrative would be called comedy, or to an unhappy one, making the narrative a tragedy. The narrator of Troilus and Criseyde, for instance, sums up the plot as consisting of ‘how [Troilus’] aventure[s] fellen/from wo to wele, and after out of joie’, ['how his fortunes [...] rose and fell from misery to joy, then afterwards out of joy']. Troilus’ fortunes first change for the better, then for the worse, making it a tragedy.

Moreover, variety of wele and wo was thought to make the tale more emotionally effective and engaging, and as a result facilitate the audience’s remembering of it. According to The Canterbury Tales, alternating changes to wele and to wo keeps the audience interested. For instance, the Host claims to be so bored by the monk’s repetitive tales of classical figures who encounter only changes to wo, that it makes him fall asleep and nearly tumble off his horse.

In this fascination with events as involving changes for the better or the worse, medieval literary thought overlaps with twentieth- and twenty-first-century narratology. French narratologist Claude Bremond, for instance, divides series of events in the fabula into processes of amelioration and processes of deterioration. The former can lead to the amelioration

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1 ‘wele’, n.(1) MED.
2 ‘wo’, n., MED.
3 Chaucer, ‘The Prologue of the Nun’s Priest’s Tale’, ll. 27773. 2777 p. 252; Coghill, The Canterbury Tales, 213.
4 Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, bk. I ll. 3,4 p. 473; Windeatt, Troilus and Criseyde, 3.
being achieved or not achieved, the latter to expected deterioration occurring or not occurring.¹

Application of this model to character Julian’s favourite hagiographic tale, as found in thirteenth-century collection of saints’ lives The South English Legendary, reveals the complexity of a dialogue between medieval texts and twentieth-century narratological models. From the perspective of the secular critic and the tormentors, Cecilia’s pains are a process of deterioration not prevented. Partially beheaded, she hangs between life and death, like Julian before and after the visions: ‘hire heued half of-smyte/ʒ was half quik ʒ half ded’. ['Her head half off-smitten/ she was half alive and half dead.'][² However, from the perspective of the saint and the devout reader, her suffering and her martyr death form a process of amelioration, both communal and individual. They allow her ‘to Ihesu Cryst many a god man wende’ ['convert many a good person to Christ'] and to fulfill her wishes of doing good deeds and finally reach heaven: ‘the mayde [...] seyde “now ich habbe i-do al þat my wille is to/wende I wile Ihesu/ʒ ṣe schule also”’.³ ['The maiden [...] said “Now I have done all I that wished to/ I will go to Christ now/and you should also.”'] Likewise, Julian’s sudden recovery and the survival which it implies would be considered a process of amelioration by most modern readers and critics. Yet to character Julian it is a process of deterioration, as implied by the narrator ascribing to her a desire ‘to be delivered of this warlde and of this life’ in order to be with God (Vis. 20. 1, 2).

Therefore, it is possible that certain discrepancies occur between what modern readers and critics consider processes of deterioration, and what medieval readers would have considered as such.

Returning to Vision, the narrator depicts the demonic episodes as attempts to reverse the changes from wele to changes to wo. In Bremond’s terms, the devil tries to bring about a process of deterioration that annihilates the process of amelioration formed by the visions. The events after the first two demonic experiences provide an example.

First, a number of changes to wele occur, or a process of improvement. After a lapse in faith and during the second demonic assault, character Julian once more derives comfort from remembering the visions. This recollection increases character Julian’s physical and emotional wellbeing: ‘I was brought to gret reste and peese, withoute seknes of the bodye or drede of conscience’ (Vis. 21. 34-35). ['I was brought to a state of great rest and peace, without sickness of body or troubled conscience.'][⁴ The narrator then lets

¹ Bremond, Logique Du Récit, 134.
² Horstmann, ‘Vita & Passio Sante Cecilie Virginis & Martiris’, l. ll. 243, 244 p. 496. My translation.
³ Ibid., ll. 247, 255, 256.
God gives her character alter-ego a vision of Christ sitting in her soul. Seeing this, the narrator claims, is ‘a delectable sight and a restful’ (Vis. 22.13), ['a delectable sight and a restful one']. During this vision and afterwards, character Julian believes in the visions once more. Thus, character Julian is in a state of wele again, and the amelioration Christ wants to achieve, Julian’s renewed belief in the reality of her visionary experience, has been accomplished.

Afterwards, however, a process of deterioration begins, which is also a set of changes to wo. The fiend appears once more, attempting to change Julian’s physical and spiritual wellbeing for the worse:

After this, the fende come again with his heete and with his stinke, and made me fulle besye. The stinke was so vile and so painfull, and the bodely heete also dredfulle and travailous. [...] Alle this was to stirre me to dispaire, as methought (Vis. 23. 1-3, 6).

After this the devil came back with his heat and his stench and preoccupied me: the stench was so foul and so unbearable, and the physical heat was frightening and troublesome too. [...] I thought this was to drive me to despair.]²

The ‘physical heat’ suggests that the assault gives Julian a fever; her physical wele changes to wo once more. The assault also creates a state of emotional unrest (‘full besye’), the opposite of the peace and rest given by the vision of Christ. The attempt to drive her to despair, however, is the greatest threat. The narrator earlier described despair as the greatest spiritual pain experienced by the damned in hell. In medieval religious culture, despair is ‘a sense of blankness, an absence of experience [...] the lack of any awareness of God at all’.³ This stirring to despair, then, is meant to erase the entire visionary experience, and the previous vision in particular, which assured character Julian of Christ’s eternal presence in her soul. In other words, the fiend tries to remove the awareness of God’s presence, experienced almost continuously during the visions. The narrator thus lets the fiend aim to create a painful absence of God in Julian’s soul, similar to God’s absence as experienced in hell. The ‘bodely sight’ which character Julian wished for so ardently is elusive and fragile, always at risk of being lost by human unbelief or demonic violence.

It is also possible to see these frightening events as the fiend twisting Julian’s wishes, making them escalate. This risk of perversion likewise hints

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¹ Ibid.
³ Watson, ‘Despair’, 342.
at the narrator’s anxiety about character Julian’s desires. The fiendish appearances form part of the second of the initial three wishes: ‘In this sekenes I desired to hafe alle maneres of paines [...] alle the dredes and tempestes of feyndes’ (Vis. 1. 24, 26). [‘In this sickness I wanted to have every kind of suffering [...] with alle the terrors and tumults caused by devils.’] Julian’s wishes for visions therefore carry within them the possibility of their being twisted. The frightening experiences to which this request ultimately leads, however, are more extreme than she expected or can bear. Although Julian’s sickness is explicitly described as sent by God, the demons crowd around Julian’s bed and the cross as soon as the visions start, scaring character Julian to the extent that she does not dare to look away from the cross. They continue to crowd around her sickbed during the entire visionary experience, leading to an undercurrent of demonic threat throughout the whole narrative.

Moreover, when character Julian realizes that her wish to ‘be delivered of this warlde and this life’ (Vis. 20. 1, 2) will not be granted, the devil grabs his chance at visionary-slaughter with both claws. He attempts to strangle character Julian in a nightmare and sends a frightfully convincing vision of ‘a bodely fyer that shuld have burned us all to deth’ (Vis. 67. 15). Julian wishes to die, and the fiend is all too willing to help her.

Thus, the narrator depicts character Julian’s desire for a sight of Christ’s body as spiritually hazardous. She creates a catch-22 both divine and diabolical: if character Julian denies her narrative desire and its fulfillment, this fulfillment is undone, yet these desires can also be twisted and exploited by evil powers. Only God’s wishes, the narrator suggests, are safe.

God’s wishes, however, have ambiguous effects on Julian’s wele and wo, these scenes suggest. God does not wish to leave Julian in her state of unbelief: ‘Botte herein walde nou oure curtayse lorde leve me’ (Vis. 21. 20, 21). [‘But our courteous Lord would not leave me like this.’] Vision, then, implies that it is God who lets the fiends—which have been surrounding the crucifix and Julian’s sickbed for hours—finally approach character Julian. Julian’s lapse in faith becomes an act of filial disobedience. This is also suggested by narrator Julian calling her alter-ego’s fall ‘a gret unkindnes’ (Vis. 21. 17), ‘unkindness’ denoting among other things ‘a lack of respect for one’s parents’. The demonic assaults form a harmful punishment from a strict father: instead of coming across as ‘curtayse,’ God’s actions suggest both strictness and a need for controlling the plot.

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 4.
2 Vis. 2. 1; 2. 32,
3 Revelations of Divine Love, 30.
4 ‘unkinden(es) (n.)’ def.1a MED.
A comparison of this frightening episode to similar moments in other visionary texts shows how central Julian’s desyer for visions is to the events surrounding her lapse in faith. Julian describes her visions as her having ‘raved’ ‘hallucinated’; she dismisses them as illness-induced hallucinations rather than a supernatural experience. According to Augustine’s tripartite division of sight, both were forms of spiritual sight, but hallucinations were produced by the body only, and the other by spirits, both good and evil. Character Julian claims that instead of a true visionary experience, including the wished-for ‘bodily sight’ of Christ, she has merely experienced a fever dream, produced by her sick body.

There is no such denial in the Liber or the Book. Instead the visionaries doubt the source and content of the visions. For instance, Christ chides Birgitta for thinking his words those of an evil spirit: ‘I am þi maker and þi againebier. Whi was þou ferde of mi wordes, and whi thought þou doute wheþir þai ware of a gude spirit or euell?’ ‘I am your maker and your redeemer. Why were you afraid of my words, and why did you doubt whether they were from a good spirit or an evil one?’ Birgitta admits her sin: ‘þe spouse answered […] “All you have said is true, and I have erred wickedly.”’

Margery also briefly thinks her supernatural experiences are sent by an evil spirit. When she does not believe it is God who shows her damned souls, Christ sternly but fruitlessly tries to convince her of the divine source of her vatic knowledge:

Owr Lord blamyd hir therfor and badde hir belevyn that it was hys hy mercy and hys goodnesse to schewyn hir hys prevy cownelsys, seying to hir mende, ‘Dowtyr, thu must as wel heryn o f the dampnyd as of the savyd.’ Sche wolde gevyn no credens to th e cownsel of God but rathyr levyd it was sum evyl spiryt for to deceyvyn hir.

[Our Lord blamed her for this and asked her to believe that it was his high mercy and His goodness to show her His private counsel, saying to her mind, ‘Daughter, you must hear about the damned as well as the saved.’ She would give no credence to the counsel of God, but rather she believed that it was some evil spirit sent to deceive her.]

1 Augustinus, De Genesi Ad Litteram Libri Duodecim, bk. 12.21.
As in *Vision*, this unbelief is depicted as requiring divine intervention in the form of unleashed demons.

*Vision* differs, however, from both the *Book* and the *Liber* in that character Julian’s rejects her visions as hallucinations, instead of as visions with a demonic source. This difference suggests that the fulfilling of her desire for a sight of Christ’s body is crucial to the plot. That is, by denying the existence of her visions, character Julian denies that her wishes were ever granted.

The narrator also implies this momentary non-existence of the visions and of the fulfillment of her wishes by describing character Julian’s state as ‘baran and drye as I had never had comforth before bot littile’ (*Vis*. 21. 4, 5). [‘barren and dry as if I had only ever had little comfort before’].¹ This reference to ‘comfort’ evokes the words of the priest in the beginning, who tells Julian to ‘comforthe the’ by looking on the crucifix (*Vis*. 2. 22). When character Julian does not believe in the visions any longer, it is as if she has never received any supernatural comfort and her wishes have never been fulfilled. The narrators of the *Liber* and the *Book* do not doubt the capacity of their alter-egos as visionaries; they only fear accidentally channelling a message from the wrong source. Narrator Julian, in contrast, is anxious about her alter-ego losing the visions and thus becoming a non-visionary.

Unlike character Julian, the *evencristen* is not allowed to put the visions out of his or her mind: with these changes to *wele* and to *wo*, the narrator gives her narrative what Cicero called ‘festivitas’, ‘vivacity’.² That is, the narrative becomes highly dramatic and vivid. As Mary Carruthers has shown, attention-grabbing vivacity was a common aim of medieval texts and medieval sermons, since it facilitates memory and meditation.³ Just as the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* are expected to keep the other pilgrims interested by giving their tales a diversity of changes in fortune, narrator Julian creates a similar vivacity in the conflict between the devil’s actions and those of God and Julian. She thereby makes both mater and entent easier to remember for the *evencristen*. Character Julian may doubt the visions for some time and deny the fulfillment of her wishes, but the narrator does not let the *evencristen* forget her desire that the *evencristen* ‘might [...] see and knawe the same that I sawe’ (*Vis*. 6. 9,10).

**Linear Plot at Story Level**

The narrator underlines the linearity of the fulfillment of character Julian’s longing by making the order of events in the story and text equally linear and

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finite. The events are represented chronologically in the text, starting with young Julian’s wishes and ending with the last supernatural event. In narratological terms, the order of events in the story and text matches that in the fabula.

To use the terms found in Revelation, just as God ordains all events in a ‘properte and order’, the narrator gives the mater in her ‘shewing’ or ‘saying’ a ‘properte and order’ which she claims to have discerned in God’s shewing. In one of the last sections of Vision, the narrator describes how this homogeneity testifies to the reliability of the text and story:

For the bodely sight, I haffe saide as I sawe, als trewlye as I can. And for the wordes fourmed, I hafe saide tham right as oure lorde shewed me thame. (Vis. 23. 51-54)

[Concerning bodily sight, I have said what I saw as truly as I can; and as for the words formed, I have reported those words just as our Lord revealed them to me.]

The subject matter being finite and linear, she has told the story linearly, and must therefore now also start bringing the text to an end. Since the narrator’s words, by definition linear and time-bound, match Christ’s, the evencristen’s reading becomes as finite and time-bound as Julian’s visions.

This finite, time-bound quality of text and story stresses the psychomachia-character of the plot. That is, the visions and text end, making each evencristen individually responsible for following the advice Julian gives to herself ‘keep the fro sinne’ ['keep yourself from sin'] in order to be ‘fulle saife fra all the fendes of helle’ (Vis. 23:15, 17) [completely safe from all the fiends of hell]. Such finiteness of a text may seem quite self-evident: books cannot go on endlessly. However, as I argue later in this chapter, the text of Revelation differs from Vision in this. Revelation invites continuous rereading, creating a text that is as endless as the Revelation narrator claims the visionary experience was. The textual finiteness of Vision, then, is closely linked to its theology.

Forthleding Character Julian and the Evencresten: Ductus and the Paths of Nature and Art

The chronological order, I suggest, should not be read as simply the most self-evident manner in which to present a text, and therefore as devoid of thematic significance. Contextualizing Vision with several late medieval discussions about arranging material suggests that Vision orders the event in

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 34.
2 Ibid.
the story and text in a way that makes *mater* and *entent* formally mirror one another.

Useful discussions on this topic centre around the concept of *ductus*. Medieval discussions about composing texts often compare the ordering and arranging of the material including that of the events, to creating a trajectory or travelling along one. The rhetorical term for this trajectory or travelling process is *ductus*. Mary Carruthers, in her discussion of the omnipresence of this concept in medieval thought, defines it as ‘the way by which a work leads someone through itself: that quality in a work’s formal patterns which engages an audience and then sets a viewer or auditor or performer in motion within its structures, an experience more like travelling through stages along a route than like perceiving a whole object.’¹ Beth Williamson describes *ductus* as ‘[t]he arrangement and selection of elements within a speech could lead its hearers to a particular conclusion, or a particular mental, emotional or devotional state.’²

The *ductus*, or leading along a trajectory, could take different forms: the trajectory could be travelled according to a mimetic principle such as chronology, or according to a more artificial principle. Geoffrey of Vinsauf outlines these two in his *Poetria Nova*. This early thirteenth-century textbook on composing verse which was widely read, taught in schools, and influenced writers such as Chaucer, as well as medieval preaching.³ In his treatise, of Vinsauf writes:

> Let a definite order chart in advance at what point the pen will take up its course, or where it will fix its Cadiz [...]. The material’s order may follow two possible courses: at one time it advances along the pathways of art, at another it travels the smooth road of nature. Nature’s smooth road points the way when ‘things’ and ‘words’ follow the same sequence, and the order of discourse does not depart from the order of occurrence. The poem travels the pathway of art if a more effective order presents first what was later in time, and defers the appearance of what was actually earlier.⁴

The work and the ordering of the material have a point at which their *ductus* begins; both work and ordering travel towards a Cadiz, a place that forms the end point of the journey. Geoffrey distinguishes two pathways or two shapes

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¹ Carruthers, ‘The Concept of Ductus, or Journeying through a Work of Art’, 190.
² Beth Williamson, ‘Material Culture and Medieval Christianity’, 69.
³ Chaucer refers to Geoffrey of Vinsauf in the ‘Nun’s Priest’s Tale’ (l. 3347) and the *Poetria Nova* in *Troilus and Criseyde*, I, ll. 1165-71. Carruthers, ‘The Concept of Ductus, or Journeying through a Work of Art’, 206.
ofductus, that of nature and that of art. Both paths, however, involve ordering and arranging. Only by having been arranged in a particular order, does the sequence of the ‘words’ resemble the sequence of the ‘things’. Therefore, a work that travels ‘the smooth road of nature’ is as constructed as one that ‘travels the pathway of art’, even although the former strives to be mimetic and therefore chronological.

It is possible to object that Geoffrey’s description does not refer to events and only describes ordering of sections at text level, instead of ordering of events in both story and text. Several Middle English writings, however, do show that Poetria Nova also shaped thinking about narrative and plot. These texts also demonstrate that events can serve as the different sites along which theductus leads. In his prologue to his Legendys of Hooly Wummen, a mid-fifteenth-century collection of female saints’ lifes, Osbern Bokenham refers to Geoffrey of Vinsauf when writing about narrative:

The forme of procedyng artificyal
is in no wyse, ner poetical,
after the scole of the crafty clerk
Galfryd of Ynglond, in hys newe work,
Entytyld thus, as I can aspye,
Galfridus Anglicus, in hys Newe Poetrye […]
But for-as-meche I nevere dede muse
In thylk crafty werk, I it now refuse,
and wil declaryn evene by and by
Of Seynt Margrete, after the story,
The byrthe, the fostryng, and how she cam,
Fyrst to the feyth and sythe to the martyrdam,
As ny my wyt it can devyse
Aftyr the legend; and sythe in what wyse,
Be whom and how oftyn she translated was,
And where now she restyth, and in what plas.

[The manner of proceeding is neither poetical
nor according to art in any sense
in the tradition of the skilled clerk
Geoffrey of England, in his new work,
entitled that way, as I can discover,
Galfridus Anglicus, in his New Poetry […]
but because I never studied
[composing] such complex works, I now refuse to do so,
and will relate evenly one after the other
according to her history, Saint’s Margaret’s
birth and her being fostered, and how she
first came to faith and then to martyrdom,
as closely to the legend as my mind can construct it,
than in what way,
by whom and how often her life was translated/ her relics moved,
and where she now rests, and in which place.]¹

Several things can be seen here. First of all, Bokenham gives a plot summary of the story that will follow. He does not describe his text in itself, a practice often found in medieval prologues, but rather sums up the events. Saint Margaret of Antioch was born and grew up; later she converted to Christianity, which led to her being martyred, which led to her body becoming relics, which can now be seen in a certain place, and so on.

Secondly, by describing his text as ‘procedyng’, progressing or moving forward, Bokenham presents this plot as shaped like a trajectory.² The point of departure of this ‘procedyng’ is Margaret’s birth, the different stops are her education, conversion, martyrdom and her relics being moved around, and its end the final resting place of her relics. The ductus, the narrator promises, will be ‘evene by and by’, that is, not only in succession (‘by and by’) but also in a manner resembling a straight line (‘evene’³). The narrator claims that the order of events in this narrative follows that of a proto-version (‘afyr the story [...] afyr the legend’).

Additionally, the narrator presents himself as using chronology as an ordering principle connecting the different events, (‘fyrst [...] sythe [...] sythe [...] now’) and cause as well. This chronological, causal ‘form of proceding’ he considers a more direct trajectory than the artificial or poetical ‘forme of procedyng’.

Returning to Vision, the ductus in the story follows the path of nature rather than the path of art, and the text, the signifier of the story, therefore does so as well. Like Bokenham affecting to submit his narratorial control to the author of the proto-legend, the narrator thus presents herself as submitting her narratorial agency to that of God. She lets the linear shape of the mater of her narrative reflect the linear entent of the visions: the ductus progresses linearly, first reflecting the accomplished situation of one half of the entent, ‘herewith is the fende overcomen’, and then reflecting the command in the second half, ‘thowe shall noughte be overcomen’. By matching mater and entent in this manner, the narrator suggests that the entent of the visions has been reliably translated into the entent of the text.

² ‘procedinge (ger.) ‘proceden (v.)’ MED.
³ ‘even (adv.)’ MED.
Linear Plot at Story and Text Level
On story level, the chronological arranging creates a structural opposition between the visions and the demonic assaults, which makes the story formally mirror the *entent*. A useful narratological concept here is Tzvetan Todorov’s model of a return to equilibrium, in which the end of the narrative is similar but not identical to the beginning. Todorov describes this return to equilibrium as follows:

> [A]n ‘ideal’ narrative begins with a stable situation, which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical.\(^1\)

According to this model, then, a plot circles upwards. It returns nearly full-circle to where it began, but the end point is not the same as the beginning.

On story level, the chronological order allows the narrator to set the demonic assaults structurally apart from the rest of the visionary experience. In Judith Dale’s words, she is ‘anxious to locate this episode as separate from the initiating miracle of the bleeding crucifix and the vision that follows.’\(^2\)

I suggest that the chronological order underscores this separation. For instance, whereas the visions feature only brief returns to the non-visionary world, a long return to the non-visionary world precedes the demonic assaults. In addition, before the demonic episodes start character Julian believes the visions are over. This is implied by her dismissal of the visions as ‘raving’, and the narrator’s claim that ‘And here was ane ende of alle that oure lorde shewed me that daye’ (Vis. 20. 50). ['And this was the end of all that our Lord revealed to me that day.']\(^3\) To use Todorov’s terms, this apparent end to the visionary marks the return to the earlier equilibrium. The narrative starts with character Julian in a state of illness, without visions. The visionary state, with the illness suspended or absent, is a state of disequilibrium. Character Julian’s return to a state of non-visionary illness thus forms a return to equilibrium. This second equilibrium differs from the first one in that character Julian realizes that she will live, which she does not know in the beginning.

The narrator emphasizes this return to a point that is similar, yet different from the beginning by letting character Julian almost feel as if she never had experienced the visions ‘as I had never had conforte before bot

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1 Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, 111.
2 Judith Dale, ‘“Sin Is Behovely’: Art and Theodicy in the Julian Text”, 131. Dale’s claim is a reading of a chapter rubric in *Revelation*.
litille’ (Vis. 21. 4). Ending with a return to an earlier situation or place is a convention in several medieval narrative genres, such as romances.¹ The narrator thus lets the even cristen, familiar with these conventions, think the visions over, just as character Julian does. In Revelation the chronology is disrupted at this point, with the story and text promising reassuringly that — after Julian’s lapse in faith—there will be another vision. Vision, in contrast, features no such break in chronology and no such reassurance. Neither the even cristen nor character Julian knows if there will be more visions, which gives the demonic assault an even more threatening quality than it already is by itself.

Similarly, the third and final demonic episode takes place after the visionary experience as a whole is over. It is only after ‘alle was close, and [Julian] saw no mare’ that ‘the fende com again with his heete and his stinke’ (Vis. 22. 36, 37; 23. 1). ‘[And soon afterwards everything was at a close and [Julian] saw no more [...] the devil came back with his heat and his stench’.)²

That the devil’s actions are not shown in a vision from God may seem logical, but this feature of Julian’s visions differs from her contemporaries. In the Liber the devil actively tries to bring about harm within God-sent visions. In a vision ‘in bodi likenes,’ for instance, the devil acts as an accuser to Birgitta’s deceased son:

> Þe modir shewed eftir to þe spouse in bodi likenes what was done with þe saule of hir son. Scho sawe in her sprete one faire feld, and þerin sho sawe Iesu sitting in one trone, als it were one kinge crowned [...]And þere stode bifor the domesman one saule, tremellinge for drede [...]an criede þe feende and saide to þe domesman [...] ‘I will reherse his sinnes [...] Ȝıt haue I mani thinges that he sulde be mine for.’

>[The mother showed to the spouse in bodily likeness what was done with the soul of her son. She saw in her spirit a fair plain, and thereon she saw Christ sit on a throne, like a king crowned [...] And there stood before the judge one soul, trembling with dread[...][Then the fiend cried out, saying to the judge [...] ‘I will list his sins [...] Yet there are many things for which his soul should be mine.’]³

¹ Davenport, Medieval Narrative : An Introduction, 141.
² Revelations of Divine Love, 32.
In these scenes, the actions of the devil form part of the visionary experience. Unlike in *Vision*, the narrative does not create different episodes out of the devil’s actions and those of God.

In its chronological order of events in the story, *Vision* resembles saints’ lives. Like in saints’ lives, in *Vision* the problematic sequence of events and its violent ending becomes ‘behovely’. Both McAvoy and Hagen have recognized that in *Vision* the narrator feels the need to support the coerciveness of her own narrative with that of the hagiographic tale of Saint Cecilia. The matching order of events in the story as that in the fabula forms a similar tactical but problematic use of hagiographic conventions. For instance, *The Golden Legend* recounts nearly all female saints’ lives chronologically. The legend begins with the saint’s birth, for instance with ‘Cecilia, that illustrious virgin, was born into a noble Roman family and raised in the faith of Christ from infancy.’ The story then moves chronologically through the events of the saints’ life, subjects the saint to increasingly gruesome torments, which miraculously do the saint’s body no harm. The story usually ends with the saint’s death as a martyr, often followed by the transformation of her body into relics and dedication of a church to her. The legend of fourth-century Saint Lucy, for instance, concludes with the tormentors finally succeeding in killing the saint, who even then does not die immediately: ‘At this point the consul’s friends, seeing how distressed he was, plunged a dagger into the martyr’s throat [...] she did not [...] breathe her last before priests had brought her the Body of the Lord and all those present had responded “Amen” to the Lord.’ Bokenham’s summary also suggests that this chronological order often occurs in Middle English saints’ lives as well.

This chronological order of events in saints’ legends, I suggest, is necessitated by how the plot focuses upon violence that increases in intensity, and upon ‘the miraculous integrity of the female body,’ as Catherine Sarok writes. The narrative needs to present the body as displaying continuous integrity, unharmed by the violent torments and humiliations. Asynchrony would destabilize this convention of continued

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2 In fact, narrator Julian’s depiction of character Julian as very devout in her youth and having offered ‘service, namely in thy youth’ could be read as evoking hagiographic conventions as well.
3 The only exception to this in *The Golden Legend* is the legend of Mary of Egypt, whose life is told in retrospect by the saint herself to a priest accidentally meeting her. De Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, 227–29.
4 Ibid., 704.
5 Ibid., 29.
wholeness and increasing violence: if a saint’s life were to start *in media res*, the reader would be unable to tell from the description of the saint’s body whether any torments had taken place and how much violence is still required before the saint achieves martyrdom. The hagiographical convention of martyrdom also necessitates a chronological telling. Were the text and story of the *vita* to start with its *telos*, the saint’s death, the rest of the narrative would no longer need to be told.

In *Vision*, as in saints’ lives, the chronological telling makes a violent conclusion narratively fitting. The last vision and the last demonic episode, which mark the end of the story, demonstrate this ‘behovely’ violence. In the last vision, Christ gravely tells character Julian that she did not hallucinate, and what is expected of her after the visionary experience:

> Witte it welle, it was no ravinge that thowe sawe today. Botte take it, and leve it, and kepe the thereto, and thowe shalle nought be overcomen. (Vis. 22. 23, 34)

[Be well aware that what you saw today was no delirium, but accept it and believe it, and hold to it, and you shall not be overcome.]

The use of ‘shalle’ in this passage and in the *entent* in general is significant. Unlike the modern English ‘shall’, ‘shalle’ not only denotes futurity but also necessity and obligation. Christ not only assures Julian that she will not be overcome, but also exhorts her that she must not be overcome. In the third and longest demonic episode, when the fiends try ‘sirre [Julian] to dispaire’ once more, the narrator lets character Julian put Christ’s warning into practice. This is effective; whereas the previous assaults appear to end by themselves, character Julian is now able to terminate the fiends’ attack by remembering and re-performing the sight of Christ’s suffering body:

> My bodelye eye I sette on the same crosse I had sen e comforth in before [...] and thus thay occupied me alle the night and on the morn till it was aboute prime dayes [...] And thus was I delivered of tham be the vertu of Cristes passion. For ‘tharewith is the fende overcome’, as Criste saide before to me. (Vis. 23. 11, 12, 18-22)

[I fixed my bodily eyes on the same cross, in which I had seen comfort before [...] And so they preoccupied me all that night and in the morning until it was just after sunrise [...] And so I was delivered

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1 *Revelations of Divine Love*, 32.
from them by virtue of Christ’s Passion, for through that the devil is overcome, as Christ said to me before.]¹

Character Julian has heard these words before, and she has been assaulted twice before. Yet only during the third assault does the sight of Christ’s suffering body achieve its promised apotropaic ‘vertu’, making her able to fight back, that is, to not be overcome.

The third demonic episode, and Julian’s fall, are thus necessary for the narrative fully to reflect the entent of ‘herewith is the fende overcomen […] thowe shall noughte be overcomen’: they are narratively fitting, ‘beovely’. To present herself as a true visionary narrator Julian must end her story with a violent event. In brief, she must illustrate the entent of ‘thowe shall noughte be overcomen’ with the devil trying to achieve the opposite. Instead of the ‘fulle trewe sikernesse’ [‘greatest certainty’] with which Christ expresses the entent of the visions, the narrator cannot avoid giving the entent of her text unsettling psychomachia overtones.

The linearity of the text emphasizes the chronological ordering of the story. The ductus is fluid and linear. The events are strung together by markers of sequentiality such as ‘and after this […] and after this […] and after this,’ which resemble Bokenham’s ‘sithe […] sithe […] sithe’. For instance, after character Julian has spoken to those around her sickbed, the reader is led quickly from one visionary moment to the next:

And after this, I saw with bodely sight the face of the crucifix that hange before me [...] And after this, I saw God in a point [...] And after this I sawe, behaldande, the bodye plenteously bledande (Vis. 8. 1, 2, 9, 20).

[And after this I saw with my bodily sight in the face on the crucifix which hung before me [...] And after this I saw God in a point [...] And after this I saw, as I watched, the body bleeding profusely.]²

As a result, the ductus flows almost unobstructedly towards the end, like the visions are said to do. Only the two brief meditations in sections 19 and 20 form a pause. This break for meditation forms a textual parallel to the pause in the visions, making the evencristen’s reading process resemble character Julian’s experience in the fabula.

It is likely that medieval readers and hearers of Julian’s writings were aware of her pausing the telling of the events in order to meditate upon their content, or taking up the telling of the events again, since other texts also pay

¹ Revelations of Divine Love, 33.
² Ibid., 11.
attention to such processes. In *The Canterbury Tales*, for instance, the characters frequently state they will now stop delaying the progression of the tale, or that they will now turn away from a certain event or character and instead move on to another.¹ The noticeable pulling the *euencresten* quickly to the *entent* therefore assures the *euencresten* that his or her reading experience resembles the visionary experience. On the other hand, it implies anxiety about the *euencresten*’s narrative desire. Narrator Julian does not wish to stray from the ‘path of nature’, formed by the vision. Not only is that path already sufficiently beset by demons, she also does not want to risk leading the *euencresten* astray, away from the *entent*.

Another parallel on text level created by the linearity is between narrator Julian’s warning the *euencresten* against ‘wikked spiritte[s]’ and Christ warning character Julian. The former occurs at the end of the visionary experience, the latter a few lines before the end of the text (Vis. 25. 20-31). The latter is a passage on discernment of spirits, or *discretio spirituum*, in which narrator Julian warns the *euencresten* against evil spirits disguised as good angels. These evil spirits cause turmoil and unrest when they speak to a believer, the narrator claims. As Watson and Jenkins point out, she thus implicitly contrasts her text with the turmoil-causing words produced by evil spirits, who are said to ‘speke’ (Vis. 25. 29)² What is more, she provides the *euencresten* with a set of criteria for recognizing the divine origins of *Vision*, since her text offers comfort and rest. Just as Christ impresses upon character Julian’s mind the importance of believing the visions in order not to be overcome, the narrator likewise desires that the *euencresten* ‘take [...] and leve’ [accept and believe] the text for his or her own spiritual security.

These parallels transfer the *psychomachia* to the *euencresten*’s life, while also suggesting a similar narratorial anxiety about the desires aroused by the text. Like many religious texts, *Vision* was expected to have a spiritually beneficial effect on readers’ desires.³ The scrivial voice in the opening rubric states that the vision is ‘gretly stirrande to alle thaye that desires to be Cristes love’ (Rubric’.3.4) [‘greatly moving to all who desire to be lovers of Christ’].⁴ The finiteness of the text contributes to the anxiety also suggested by the parallels. *Vision* fears that once the *euencresten* has finished reading, he or she might experience a similarly ambiguous wish for

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¹ For instance, The Clerk states in his tale that, instead of dwelling on Griselda’s emotional state and expression, it is important ‘to shortly forth this matere for to chace’, ‘to keep my story up to pace’. The narrator then lets the *ductus* move briskly to a crucial event, namely, the Marquis’ equally brisk pursuing of Griselda. Chaucer, ‘The Clerk’s Tale’, l. 341. Trans. Coghill, *The Canterbury Tales*, 330.
² Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 118.
visions with equally spiritually threatening results. The text may have a ‘gretly stirrande’ effect which the narrator cannot control.

In sum, narrator Julian has the linear, time-bound plot reflect the linear, time-bound entent, and thereby portrays herself as a reliable scribe of the divine. Yet because of this plot, she also cannot help but show anxiety about character Julian’s and the evencristen’s desire, as well as about her own desire and ability to narrate tell ‘as I sawe […] als trewely as I can’ (Vis. 23. 51, 22). Several critics, such as Watson, Staley and Windeatt, have observed that Vision has a darker, more pessimistic emphasis than Revelation; the plot features I have discussed partially account for this different emphasis.

**Effect**

This linear, time-bound plot at story and fabula level, emphasized by the linearity of the text, facilitates the reader’s remembering of both mater and mening: two series of supernatural experiences are juxtaposed, each reflecting one half of the entent. Whereas Revelation starts with an overview of all the visions, Vision begins with Christ’s head bleeding, followed by different scenes of the Passion. This series reflects ‘herewith is the feende overcomen,’ as the narrator has Christ himself expound: ‘And than was formede in my saule this worde: “Herewith is the feende overcomen.” This saide oure lorde menande his passion, as he shewed me before’ (Vis. 8. 30-34). ‘And then […] these words were formed in my soul: “In this way the devil is overcomen.’ Our Lord said these words referring to his Passion, as he had shown me before.’ The demonic assaults after Julian’s return to the non-visionary world, and her lapse in faith reflect ‘Thow shal nought be overcomen’. This grouping of part of the mater under a half of the entent facilitates the imprint of both on the evencristen’s mind. By connecting the information that makes up the mater to a particular locution of Christ, that locution stands in for and cues that information. Thus, ‘Herewith is the feende overcomen’ stands in for and cues the visions up to Julian’s lapse in faith, ‘Thow shalte nought be overcomen’ Julian’s lapse and the events that follow it. Modern cognitive psychology calls such grouping or segmentation of informational items ‘chunking’, but it was a common technique in the Middle Ages as well. An anchorite would for instance have encountered the Ancrene Wisse using the first line of a psalm or prayer to cue the whole.

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2 Revelations of Divine Love, 12.
3 Gilbert, Boucher, and Jemel, ‘The Perceptual Chunking of Speech: A Demonstration Using ERPs’; Miller, ‘The Magical Number Seven, plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our
Likewise, in both *Vision* and *Revelation* Julian describes Christ’s promises, each one locution, as compressible into five words.¹ By thus making mater and entent evoke one another, the narrator facilitates the evencristen’s memory of both. Moreover, she reminds the evencristen of the need for this continuous remembering and believing as strongly as Christ reminds character Julian of this. Narrator Julian, then, shows the same ‘full sharp’ [very firm] care towards the evencristen as Christ does towards character Julian. This care suggests that she fears similar demonic assaults in the evencristen’s life. When the text is over or has been heard, the evencristen must and can visualize the text from memory, in order to be able daily to ‘refuse […] a wikked spirite’ (Vis. 25. 24, 25) [‘reject […] an evil spirit.’].² Thus, *Vision* is a weapon in the psychomachia it both describes and fears.

A more positive effect of the linearity and finiteness of the mater is that it creates closure to a satisfying degree. By the end of *Vision*, the narrator and God have fulfilled character Julian’s initial wishes, and the evencristen’s narrative desire: character Julian has achieved co- Passion, survived a mortal sickness, and has undergone ‘alle the dredes and tempestes of feyndes’. Moreover, in the final vision Julian’s heavenly Bridegroom surprises her expectations by sitting in her soul rather than being nailed to the cross. Additionally, in this last vision, as Watson and Jenkins note, Christ’s locution sums up the vision and brings the revelation full circle.³ The text thus reaches its knotte and the plot its telos at that point, satisfying narrative expectations. Yet the undercurrent of evil, sin and psychomachia pervading *Vision* makes this closure unsettling and paradoxically unsatisfying: the narrator wishes to recount more, but does not dare to do so yet.

**Garland upon Garland: *Revelation*’s Circular Plot**

In *Revelation*, *Vision*’s linear plot on fabula and story level is incorporated in a greater, circular plot, which the circularity of the text mirrors. A number of critics, for example Maud McInerney, see the narrative of *Revelation* as circular.⁴ I suggest that this circularity is also found in the events, that is, the plot on fabula level and the plot on story level. On the level of fabula, *Revelation* accomplishes this circularity by letting the wish to see Christ bodily still drive about one third of the plot, but then making it part of a

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¹ Vis. 15. 11, Rev. 32.16.
² Revelations of Divine Love, 36.
³ Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 110.
⁴ McInerney, ‘In the Meydens Womb: Julian of Norwich and the Poetics of Enclosure’, 172. See also Park, ‘Reflecting Christ: The Role of the Flesh in Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich’, 37.
circular search for God’s embodied perspective. That is to say, the narrator still structures the visions, up until the change in Christ’s expression, around revealing more of Christ’s body. In fact, the narrator lets character Julian see more of Christ’s body in these visions, and connects these more explicitly.

However, after the moment of Christ’s change in ‘chere’, this wish is subsumed into a wish for and active searching for God’s perspective. Unlike the desire for seeing Christ’s body, this desire and search for God’s perspective is never completely fulfilled. With this more active ‘seeking’, character Julian’s narrative agency increases: the narrator confidently makes her desires are as central to the plot as God’s, and sometimes even these dominate the plot.

**Seeing Into Christ to See Like Christ: Circular Plot at Fabula Level**

At fabula level, *Revelation* incorporates the plot of *Vision* into its own in three overlapping ways: the earlier wish for a bodily sight of Christ’s suffering leads to the new narrative desire; the brief moment in *Vision* of seeking for God’s perspective is expanded, and the earlier events are made to contribute to the different cumulative effect of the visions.

*Revelation* makes Julian’s earlier desire for a bodily sight of Christ lead to an active seeking for God’s embodied perspective. The physical effects of his suffering, seen as a result of the earlier desire, allow Him to look into the wound in his side, and consequently to offer character Julian the first glimpse of God’s perspective.¹ This scene is found in the Tenth Revelation, and like Glasscoe, I consider the Eighth Revelation, of Christ’s change in expression, the ‘pivotal point in the visionary experience’.² From the Eighth Revelation onwards, Julian’s search for God’s perspective truly begins, although this search is mentioned briefly earlier.

However, the Tenth Revelation, changed significantly in *Revelation*, is more central to this new desire than its starting point. In this vision, the narrator allows character Julian to see salvation history and humanity from God’s point of view for the first time, leaving Julian wanting more of this perspective. A comparison of *Vision* and *Revelation* shows how the narrator in *Revelation* allows Julian briefly to see from Christ’s mental yet embodied perspective. In *Vision*, character Julian simply sees Christ look at the wound in his side: ‘Full merelye and gladlye oure lorde loked into his side and beheld, and saide this worde – “lo, how I loved the”’ (*Vision* 13:1, 2). [‘Very happily and gladly the Lord looked into his side, and gazed, and said these

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¹ The narrator emphasizes that in the hazelnut vision she sees creation in comparison to God: in other words, she still sees from a human perceiving body rather than from a divine one.

words, “Look how much I loved you’’.) In Revelation, this moment has become a separate Revelation and has been changed extensively. The narrator now allows character Julian to look into the wound from the position of Christ’s body:

With a glad chere oure good lorde loked into his side and beheld, enjoyenge. And with his swete loking he led forth the understanding of his creature by the same wound into his side, within. And ther he shewed a fair, delectable place, and large inow for alle mankind that shalle be saved to rest in pees and love [...] and with this, oure good lorde saide full blissefully, ‘Lo, how I loved the.’ (Rev. 24. 1-4, 11)

[Then with a glad expression our Lord looked into his side and gazed, rejoicing; and with his dear gaze he led his creature’s understanding through the same wound into his side within. And then he revealed a beautiful and delightful place, large enough for all mankind that will be saved to rest there in peace and in love [...] And with this our good Lord said most blessedly, ‘Look how I loved you’.]

The joyful expression with which Christ looks at his gaping side wound, a bodily signifier of his suffering, allows Julian literally to see from Christ’s point of view. Narrator Julian then has Christ bring to her alter-ego’s mind a future event. This event consists of all the saved, perhaps all of humanity, being brought into Christ at the end of time. From God’s perspective, in which each moment is eternally present, this deed is already taking place. Accordingly, when God makes character Julian think of how all of humanity will rest inside of Christ’s side wound, he fulfills her desire for his perspective to a certain extent.

This first hint of God’s perspective and the ‘longing’ and seeking for this perspective logically come out of Revelation’s transformed version of the earlier desire. The side wound’s openness results from Christ’s more intense, longer suffering in Revelation. In comparison to Vision, the narrator makes his body bleed longer and more copiously, losing all its blood and moisture, implying greater wounds. As a result, the wound in Christ’s side has increased as well, as suggested by how Christ beholds it long enough for Julian to see his expression of enjoyment and to join her seeing with his. Revelation thus incorporates the plot from Vision into its own, with the earlier desire making the new desire possible. It is because character Julian

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first wished to have ‘sene bodily the passion of oure lorde’ (Vis. 1. 7; Rev. 2. 8, 9) that she can now see from that body.

The fabula plot of Revelation also incorporates that of Vision by expanding the brief moment in Vision of seeking for God’s perspective. In Revelation, after the first partial fulfilling of character Julian’s wish, Revelation adds several events driven by character Julian’s seeing into God’s mind. An early version of this desire and search for God’s perspective already appears in Vision: character Julian first wonders why sin was not prevented, worries how everything can ever be well, and ‘desire[s] […] to have some more open declaring’ (Vis. 15. 5), ‘wishes[.] […] to receive some clearer explanation’.

Revelation includes these scenes, and builds upon them by adding new events driven by the same desire and creating new causal relations between all these events. For instance, in Revelation, when character Julian wishes to know why the beginning of evil was not prevented, Christ tells her, as in Vision, that ‘sin is behovely but alle shalle be wele’ and reminds her of the Passion and all human suffering (Rev. 27. 7-17). Yet this answer to Julian’s ‘stering’ now also leads to a sight not found in Vision:

And in these same words, I saw a high, marvelous previte hid in God, which private he shalle openly make known to us in heven. In which knowing we shalle verely se the cause why he sufferde sinne to come (Rev. 27. 33-35).

[And in these same words I saw a marvellous and exalted mystery hidden in God, a mystery which he will make openly known to us in heaven, in which knowledge we shall truly see the reason why he allowed sin to come about; and in the sight of this we shall rejoice in our Lord God forever.]

Although the full answer to character Julian’s questioning is deferred, the narrator not only adds a new event but also suggests that the heavenly answer encompasses more than ‘sin is behovely’. Thus, in contrast to Vision, the narrator encourages character Julian’s seeking for understanding instead of routing it back to the earlier wishes.

Another new causal connection between the visions lies behind the added vision of the great divine action at the end of time. In an added passage, narrator Julian first lets her character alter-ego juxtapose Christ’s earlier locutions:

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 21.
2 Ibid., 75.
One time oure good lorde saide, ‘alle manner of thinge shalle be wele’ and another time he said ‘thou shalt se thyselfe that alle manner of thinge shalle be wele.’ And in theyse two the soule toke sundry maner of understanding. (Rev. 32. 1-3)

[At one time our good Lord said, ‘All things shall be well’; and another time he said, ‘You will see for yourself that all manner of things shall be well’; and from these two the soul derived different understandings.]

With the use of the past tense (‘toke’) the narrator situates the understanding in the visionary sequence; it is a new event. This new event generates a new sight, God’s unknown action at the end of time, which character Julian sees in her understanding:

And thus in the same five wordes before saide [...] I understonde a mighty comfort of alle the works of oure lorde God that are for to come...There is a deed which the blisseful trinite shall do in the last day, as to my sight [...] by which deed he shalle make all thinge wele [...] And in this sight I marveyled gretly (Rev. 32. 16-18, 28, 29, 31).

[And so in these last five sayings mentioned previously [...] I understand there to be great comfort concerning all the words of our Lord God which are to come [...] There is a deed which the blessed Trinity will do on the last day, as it seems to me [...] through this deed he will make all things well [...] And I wondered a great deal about this revelation].

This new sight results from the desire for insight, and partly fulfills it. That is, the sight is ‘understonde’ as an answer to Julian’s anxious questioning about how ‘might all be wele’. This questioning also appears in Vision: the Revelation narrator lets God give character Julian a different, more complete answer than her Vision equivalent, and makes Him fulfill her alter-ego’s wishes more.

However, this vision also frustrates character Julian’s wish for seeing God’s perspective. Thinking of the many creatures which orthodox thought considered damned, she marvels and doubts what she has just heard: ‘And stonding all this, methought it was unpossible that alle maner of thing shuld be wele, as oure lorde shewed in this time’ (Rev. 32. 39, 40). ['Considering all this, it seemed impossible to me that all manner of things should be well, as

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1 Ibid., 79.
2 Ibid., 80.
our Lord revealed at that time."

Unlike in Vision, even repeated reassurances do not entirely fulfill character Julian's wishes for more answers. In other words, whereas the Passion visions make character Julian 'well apaide', 'well pleased' or 'fully satisfied' with Christ's suffering and with having seen the Passion, the later visions no longer leave her 'apaide'.

Furthermore, the new desire gives the post-Passion visions and the visions in general a different overall effect. In Vision, the answers character Julian receives in response to her cautious wish for God’s perspective sometimes trouble her individually, causing 'a softe drede' (Vis. 17. 2) ['a quiet fear'] or 'mourning' (Vis. 14. 1). Still, their overall effect, and that of the text, is one of comfort: 'Alle that I haf e now saide, and shalle saye efter is comforthinge against sinne' (Vis. 16. 8, 9). ['All this that I have now said, and more of that I shall say after, gives comfort against sin.']

In the terms used earlier, the visions after the pivot lead to a change to wele.

In Revelation, in contrast, these visions, intended to fulfill Julian's wish for understanding, lead to a change to wo. Character Julian is shown glimpses into God's secret plans concerning sin, a great future deed making all things well and perhaps saving all creatures, and a second deed involving how God works through human sin. As a result, she reads all her visions differently: 'God shewed in alle the revelations of tetimes that man werketh evermore his wille and wurshipe' (Rev. 44. 1, 2). ['God shewed frequently in all the visions that man always works [God's] will and to [God's] worship.]

The narrator has character Julian read all her visions through the lens of those given in answer to her search.

This new reading, however, makes character Julian see a tension between the perspective in the visions and that of the Church and character Julian's own experience. According to the visions, God does not consider humanity sinful, a perception the opposite of what the church and her own experience teach her. This conflict strongly distresses character Julian, not only emotionally, but cognitively and spiritually as well. Thus, these visions frustrate the desire for understanding and God's perspective which they are supposed to fulfill, and cause a change to wo.

This wo is the opposite of the changes to wele which God, according to the narrator, wishes to accomplish with the visions: 'And the cause why he shewede [this deed] is to make us enjoy in him and in alle his werkes' (Rev. 36. 13). ['The reason why he revealed [this deed] is to make us enjoy in him
and all his works.’] The narrator, then, has God fail to give the reassurance and understanding he wishes to give. God wishes to bring character Julian comfort and joy, but character Julian wishes for seeing God’s perspective, which results in *wo*. The narrator thus makes character Julian’s wishes more central to the plot than God’s. She allows her character alter-ego to be more stubborn and demanding, implying an increasing trust in her narrative agency.

**Julian’s Intellectual, Emotional ‘Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachtani’**

This seeking for God’s perspective from the Eighth Revelation to the parable displays a dramatic arc. After noticing the conflict described above, character Julian seeks God’s perspective more intensely, focusing on God’s perspective on these two ‘beholdinges’ or ‘domes’. This crisis causes character Julian such suffering that it equals that of Christ in the earlier visions: the narrator supplements the lacking events of her narrative of Christ’s Passion with those of Julian’s passion for further understanding.

Lynn Staley calls this protracted search an ‘extended dialogue between [character Julian’s] spiritual understanding and her belief in the teachings of the church’, which she considers ‘a move of pure genius’; she points out that overhearing this dialogue turns the potentially critical reader into an advocate of it. These interactions between character Julian and God cause character Julian emotional, spiritual, and intellectual suffering. My reading, then, challenges the popular perception of character Julian as serene.

*Revelation* creates several parallels between Christ’s physical suffering in the First Revelation up until the Eighth and character Julian’s emotional and intellectual suffering from the Ninth up until the Fourteenth. To begin with, both sequences of suffering begin with the other person’s death being interrupted. Before the visionary experience, Julian expects to die but does not; in the pivotal Eighth Revelation, Christ appears about to die but does not. Secondly, both Christ’s and character Julian’s *wo* increase over the course of the visions. Julian experiences grief and sorrow when wondering why the beginning of sin was not prevented; Christ experiences sorrow in the Second Revelation. Character Julian also experiences a lack of ‘ese’ (*Rev. 45. 14*) and finally ‘traveyl’ (*Rev. 50. 14*), evoking Christ who receives ‘no manner of comfort’ on the cross (*Rev. 17. 34*). Third, Julian’s anxious attempting to understand leads to her suffering becoming equally ineffable to that of Christ:

> And by the same domes I understode that sinners be sometime worthy blame and wrath, and theyse two I culde not see in God. And

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1 Ibid., 85.

2 Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich’, 141.
therefore my advice and my desyer was more than I can or may telle. (Rev. 45. 17-20)

[And on account of the same judgement I understood that sinners at some time deserve blame and anger; and therefore I could not see these two things in God, and therefore [my deliberation and] my longing was greater than I can or may tell.]

The ineffability of character Julian’s longing echoes the narrator’s earlier description of Christ’s unspeakable suffering: ‘For which paines I saw that alle is to littile that I can say, for it may not be told’ (Rev. 17. 39, 40). ['But I saw that all I can say of them is inadequate, for those pains cannot be described.']. Like Christ obtaining salvation for humanity with his suffering body, Julian obtains understanding for her evenchristen with her emotional and intellectual suffering.

In the end, however, narrator Julian has her alter-ego’s suffering and that of Christ differ tellingly. After character Julian repeatedly has tried to unite the two ‘beholdinges,’ finding only partial answers, she fears the visions and God’s presence will vanish and her distressing questions never answered. Her emotional, cognitive and spiritual suffering then reaches a breaking point:

I cryde inwardly with all my might, seking into God  for helpe, mening thus, ‘A, lorde Jhesu, king of blisse, how s hall I be esede? Who shall tell me and tech me that me nedeth to wit, if I may not at this time se it in the?’ (Rev. 50. 31-33)

[I cried inwardly with all my might, seeking into God for help, thinking in this way, ‘Ah, Lord Jesus, king of bliss, how am I to be comforted? Who shall teach me and tell me what I need to know, if I may not see it in you at this time?’]

With its biblical syntax, and desperate cry to God not to leave, and point in time before the ninth hour, this passage strongly evokes two of Christ’s cries to God on Calvary. The Gospel of Matthew recounts one of these: ‘And aboute the nynpe hour: ihc criede wiþ a greet voice & seide, heli, heli,
lamazabatany, that is, my god, my god, whi hast þou forsake me?¹ The second cry, found in Luke, is retold by the Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: 'And so atte þe laste he putte the seuenþe worde, with a stronlye cry & wepyngte teres seying þus, Fadere I commende my spirite in to þi handes.' ['And so in the end he uttered the seventh phrase, with a strong cry and weeping tears, saying thus 'Father, I commend my spirit into thy hands.']² Unlike other vernacular retellings of the Passion narrative, Julian’s account of the Passion does not include these significant events. In the Eighth Revelation, when Christ seems on the verge of dying, that is, about to cry out ‘in to þi handes’, Christ does not die. Instead, he continues to live, showing a joyful expression. Thus, the Revelation narrator lets character Julian cry out instead of Christ. As a result, her suffering both mirrors and completes the Passion narrative. God responds to this desperate cry by revealing more understanding, which implies that character Julian’s completing of the Passion narrative is essential to the plot. Whereas Vision narrator still seems distrustful of character Julian’s desires, the Revelation narrator makes them central to the plot and narratively fitting, or ‘behovely’.

Additionally, this loud cry evokes Julian’s surprised, loud ‘Benedicite dominus!’ (Rev. 4. 13) at the beginning of the visions.³ It also has resonances of Mary’s astonishment during the Annunciation.⁴ Like Christ in the motherhood meditation giving birth to humanity on the cross, character Julian’s suffering allows her to conceive and give birth to the understanding which she seeks, as well as to a new, paradigm-shifting vision.

The narrator presents this emotional, spiritual, intellectual crisis as a longing for visual participation in the divine, a seeing into Christ similar to that in the Tenth Revelation:

For either me behoveth to se in God that sinne were alle done awaye, or else me behoved to se in God how he seeth it [...] My longing endured, him continuantly beholding.’ (Rev. 50. 16, 17, 19, 20, emphasis added)

[For either I needed to see in God that sin was completely done away with, or else I needed to see in God how he sees it [...] My longing endured—contemplating him continually.]⁵

¹ ed. Lindberg, King Henry’s Bible :Matthew 27.46, 47, p. 72.
³ Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 272.Ibid.
⁴ Miles, ‘Christine de Pizan and Julian of Norwich in Conversation.’
Like in the Tenth Revelation, narrator Julian has her character alter-ego need to look into God’s body, in order to be able to see humanity from that body, with the same emotional attitude and knowledge as God does.

Circling Back from the Exemplum to ‘All the Hole Revelation’. 
An emotional and intellectual crisis of a similar force, likewise caused by the main character’s wishes, occurs in Pearl, but both crises have different effects on the fulfillment of these desires. In Pearl, this narrative apex leads to God abruptly ending the supernatural experience. Nearly insane with longing the Dreamer desperately wishes to join the Pearl-maiden. He therefore attempts to cross the stream, but this does not please Christ, who immediately brings the dream to a sudden conclusion:

Hit payed hym not þat I so flonc
Ouer meruelous mere3, so mad arayde.
Of raas þa3 I were rasch and ronk,
3et rapely þerinne I wat3 restrayed.
For, ry3t as I sparred vnto þe bonc,
þat brathþe out of my drem me brayde.

[It did not please Him that I rushed over the miraculous waters like that, in such a state of frenzy. Though I was rash and impetuous to rush headlong, I was quickly restrained in that course, for just as I sprang to the bank, that impetuosity jerked me out of my dream.]1

With perfect fairytale circularity, his longing to be closer to the Pearl-maiden separates the Dreamer from her. This longing, which allowed for the dream to begin, also causes the dream to end. Consequently, both Christ and the narrator seem rather distrustful of the character’s wishes.

In Revelation, character Julian similarly fears that her supernatural experience will end suddenly:

My reson […] culde have no rest, for drede that his blesse presens shulde passe fro my sight, and I to be left in unknowing how he beholde us in oure sinne.’ (Rev. 50. 14-17)

[My reason [...] could have no rest for fear that his blessed presence should pass from my sight and I would be left not knowing how he regards us in our sin.]2

2 Revelations of Divine Love, 105.
Only the visions can lessen the crisis which they themselves have created. Therefore, like in the Dreamer in *Pearl*, character Julian tries to achieve more understanding by moving deeper into the otherworldly experience, ‘seeking into God for helpe’. In *Pearl*, this move deeper into the otherworldly landscape results in the end of the supernatural experience. In *Revelation*, in contrast, it leads to another vision, which surpasses the preceding visions in depth. God responds immediately to character Julian’s anguished exclamation

And then our courteous Lord answered by showing in a mysterious, veiled way a wonderful parable of a lord who has a servant, and gave me insights towards my understanding of both. (Rev. 51.1-2)

The *Revelation* narrator, then, allows the desiring character more visionary agency than the *Pearl* narrator and portrays the seeking of a glimpse of the beatific vision more positively. Yet already from the outset, character Julian’s new vision puzzles more (‘full mistily’) than it illuminates. *Revelation* suggests that character Julian wishes so strongly for such a complete sight of God’s perspective, that even an elaborate, highly intricate vision does not suffice. Once more the narrator makes character Julian’s wishes more central to the plot than God’s.

In addition to leading character Julian deeper into the visionary experience, narrator Julian also depicts her character alter-ego’s search for God’s perspective as allowing character Julian to experience the visions over and over again. The narrator first describes how the parable does not diminish character Julian’s spiritual and intellectual anguish but rather increases her lack of ‘ese’:

Notwithstanding all this forthleding, the marveyling of this example went never fro me, for methoght it was geven me for anwere to my desyer. And yet culde I not take therein full understanding to my ees in that time.’ (Rev. 51.54-56)

[But despite all this guidance, my feeling of puzzlement at the parable never left me; for it seemed to me that it had been given me

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1 Ibid.
as an answer to what I yearned to know, and yet at that time I could not understand it fully to my satisfaction.)

God intends the parable to answer Julian’s ‘desyer,’ but it fails to do so. The narrator then has God attempt to comfort her by frequently showing a ‘director’s cut’ of the visions:

[M]e behoveth now to telle thre propertes in which I am somdele esed [...] the third is all the hole revelation, fro the beginning to the ende, which oure lorde God of his goodness bringeth oftimes frely to the sight of my understanding. (Rev.51. 62-67)

[I]t is for me now to describe three aspects through which I have been somewhat consoled [...] the third is the whole revelation from the beginning to the end [...] which our Lord God in his goodness often brings freely to my mind’s eye.)

Julian’s wishes are slightly fulfilled, as ‘somdele esed’ suggests. More importantly, the narrator makes a large part of the plot almost entirely circular. That is, an event near the end of the visionary experience leads to the sequence of visions beginning again, the only difference being that this seeing happens at another moment. In comparison to Vision, then, the narrator has Julian’s desyer and seking shape the sequence of events more, displaying an increased trust in character Julian’s narrative agency. Whereas in Vision character Julian’s wishes only leads to her seeing a single visionary sequence, character Julian’s desire for seeing from God’s perspective leads to a loop of visions in Revelation.

It is possible to compare this plot feature with Pearl once more. The plot of Pearl, like that of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, is circular only in the sense that the final event resembles the first. This aspect of Pearl and Gawain resembles Todorov’s model of a return to an earlier equilibrium. The dreamer wakes up to find his ‘hede vpon þat hyll e watz layde/þeras my perle to grounde strayd’ [[h]ead was laid upon that hill where my pearl slipped away into the earth.]. The Dreamer’s position upon waking is identical to when he begins to dream, when he ‘felle upon þat floury fla3t’ fell upon that flowery turf]. The dreamer then recognizes to his sorrow that

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1 Ibid., 108.
2 Ibid.
4 ed. Andrew, Pearl, l. 57 p. 57; Andrew and Waldron, The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript : A Prose Translation, 2.
his dream is over. To his grief, the plot is not circular in the sense that the last event leads to the first event. A large segment of Revelation’s plot, in contrast, displays near-complete circularity, for instance, when the parable of the lord and servant leads to character Julian’s re-seeing of it, or when the last vision likewise leads to Julian’s seeing the visions again.

**A Circular Fabula of Years of Wondering**

The narrator foregrounds character Julian’s wishes most, however, by letting the partially satisfying answer appear only twenty years later. In mental anguish until 1393, character Julian’s wo lasts longer than that of Christ. The narrator lets character Julian receive divine instructions for solving the puzzle of the parable:

> For twenty yere after the time of the shewign, save thre monethes, I had teching inwardly, as I shall sey: ‘It longeth the to take hede to alle te propertes and conditions that were shewed in the example, though the thinke that it be misty and indifferent to thy sight.’ *(Rev. 51. 73-76).*

> [For three months short of twenty years after the time of the revelation, I received teaching inwardly as I shall tell: ‘You need to pay attention to all the particular properties and attributes that were shown in the parable, though they may seem to you mysterious and indeterminate in your eyes.’]¹

The parable has been excruciatingly ‘misty’ for twenty years; only now does it become slightly less puzzling. These instructions inspire character Julian to study the parable repeatedly. After doing so, Julian’s wish has been fulfilled to an acceptable not fully satisfying extent:

> And it this I have now saide was my desyer in perty answered, and my gret fere somedele esed, by the lovely, gracious shewing of oure lorde God. In which shewing I saw and understode full sekerly that in eche a soule that shall be safe is a godly wille that never assented to sinne, ne never shall. *(Rev. 53.7-10)*

> [And in what I have just said my wish was partly answered, and my great anxiety was somewhat eased by the loving gracious revelation of our good Lord; in which revelation I saw and understood most

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¹ *Revelations of Divine Love*, 108.
certainly that in every soul that will be saved is a godly will which never assented to sin, nor ever shall.]  

The narrator lets character Julian receive an answer which takes the edge off her emotional and intellectual anguish. Yet ‘somdele’ and ‘in perty’ suggests that the wish and the great fear continues in 1393 and afterwards, even after the narrative is finished. Like Christ’s blood which appears capable of overflowing Julian’s bed, character Julian’s desire and her fear overflow Revelation with the agency they are given by the narrator. Yet at the same time they prompt the visions to begin once more. 

This depiction of the visionary as baffled for twenty years is unique to Revelation, and to Julian. In the Liber for instance, as Rosalynn Voaden has observed, the celestial characters immediately provide Birgitta with an interpretation or explanation when necessary. This narrative strategy allows the Liber to present Birgitta as directly and unambiguously channeling God’s word. For example, Birgitta is described as feeling one Christmas ‘as it had bene a whike childe sterrieng in her hert’ [‘as if there were a live child stirring in her heart’]. The Virgin Mary appears on the same day, providing an exegesis of Birgitta’s bodily sensation: it alludes to Mary’s experience during the Annunciation and indicates the arrival of Christ in Birgitta’s heart. In Voaden’s words, Birgitta’s ‘autonomous intelligence is made to seem non-existent.’  

Kempe also lets the celestial characters lavish knowledge on Margery. When Margery during mass sees the sacrament shake like a dove and marvels about this, Kempe has Christ, without asking reveal the significance of the vision, and he expounds in great detail the natural disaster it foreshadows. Whereas Vision, the Liber and the Book foreground divine assistance in order to authorize their readings of their visions, Revelation emphasizes the mnemonic indwelling of Christ, making character Julian, like Mary, authoritatively ‘ponder these things in her heart’.

**Beginning, Middle, Beginning? Circular Plot at Fabula Level**

Contextualizing this circularity of a large part of Revelation’s plot with contemporary literary theory and practice reveals Julian’s narrative radicalism.

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1 Ibid., 118.
2 ed. Ellis, *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden*, bk. VI ch. 63 l. 2,3 p. 460. (My translation)
3 Ibid., bk. VI. 86 l. 18-26, 460.
4 Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries*, 98.
Medieval thought on writing agreed that the beginning, middle and end of a text and narrative should be shaped differently, and that each of these parts served a different function in the whole. Geoffrey of Vinsauf discusses beginning, middle and end and their different forms and function in the *Poetria Nova*. The beginning of the poem should ‘like a courteous attendant, introduce the subject with grace,’ and the conclusion ‘dismiss the poem honourably’. This description suggests that each of the different parts serves a different function. He then recommends ‘in all of its parts let the whole method of presentation bring credit upon the poem’.¹ ‘Presentation’ seems to imply form or order.

Middle English prologues to narrative texts also reflect on how to shape the beginning, middle and end of a narrative. An example is the prologue to the northern English narrative poem *Cursor Mundi*, written by an anonymous author around 1300. At the end of this prologue the narrator explicitly states he will choose a particular point in time and make that the first event in his narrative:

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Now of this proloug wel I blyn,
In Cristes name my boke begynne.
Cursor of the Werlde I wil hit cal.
For almast hit overrynys al.
Take we oure begynnyng than
Of him that al this werlde began.

[Now this prologue I will end
and in Christ’s name begin my book.
The Runner of the World I will call it
because it runs around almost everything.
Let us take it from the beginning then
with Him who this whole world began.]
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By means of the title, and his use of the verb ‘overrinnen’ (‘to run across’), the narrator describes his work as moving through certain events.³ He also announces that he has decided on an event that will form the starting point (‘oure begynning’) of the events he will tell. This point, he suggests, matches exactly the beginning of the whole world. ‘Oure begynning’ therefore refers both to the beginning of the story and to the beginning of humanity. Thus,

³ ‘overrinnen (v.)’ def. 1, MED.
the narrator explicitly matches the order of events in his tale to another order, that of world history according to the Bible, thereby showing a strong awareness of the need for shaping the beginning of a sequence of events.

Returning to Revelation, and keeping in mind Spearing’s remark about diptych-like plot structures, a tripartite structure can be seen, not found in Vision. This tripartite structure is similar to the triptych discerned by Dale, with each part having a beginning, middle and end. The first part consists of the events up until Christ’s change in expression. These events centre round Christ’s suffering and are fuelled by character Julian’s desire for a sight of Christ’s body. The second part is formed by the events up until the parable of the Lord and Servant. These events are driven by character Julian’s search for God’s embodied perspective. The third part consists of the parable of the Lord and Servant and the events that follow it.

Revelation makes the conclusion of each part lead to the beginning of the next part. Christ’s ‘chere’ turns joyful, which becomes the expression with which he looks into his side; Julian’s anxious search into God’s mind becomes her seeing into the Lord and Servant, and the parable ultimately leads to the visions being shown again. Instead of leading her from the beginning, through the middle to the end, the narrator lets her character alter-ego’s desire create an endless perichoresis, moving into one another, of events. As a result, the fabula plot becomes as endless as the visions. Character Julian’s desires, Revelation suggests, drive the visions as much as God’s do.

A Preview of the Beginning: Circular Plot at Story Level
At story level, the narrator of Revelation emphasizes this circular plot by a number of changes. Before describing character Julian’s returning illness and lapse of faith, for instance, the narrator reassures the reader that the visionary experience is not over; she adds a ‘flash-forward’—which Genette calls a prolepsis—not found in Vision:

Ande after this the goode lorde shewde the sixteenth revelation on the night following, as I shalle sey after; which sixteenth was conclusion and confirmation to alle fifteen. But furst me behoveth to telle you anenst my febilnes, wretchednes, and blindness. (Rev. 66:1-4).

[And after this the good Lord showed the sixteenth revelation on the following night, as I shall describe later; and this sixteenth revelation

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2 Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, 42.
was the conclusion and confirmation to all fifteen. But first I must tell you about my weakness, wretchedness, and blindness.]¹

On text-level, this passage draws more attention to the storytelling process itself. On the level of story, it creates a sense of suspense absent in Vision. Unlike in Vision, the evencresten now knows more about the future events than character Julian does. The evencresten has just heard this prolepsis, and remembers from the parable that character Julian will continue to see the visions even after the Sixteenth Revelation. Naturally, character Julian does not know this. This inequality in knowledge about the plot draws attention to its circularity. Additionally, with this flash-forward, narrator Julian shows more compassion for the evencresten than God has for character Julian, implying that the Revelation narrator trusts the evencresten’s narrative desire more than her Vision equivalent does.

**Trusting the Fall**

Another change at story level also stresses the circularity and endlessness of a large segment of the chain of events. This change consists of character Julian being shown an improved version of the visions as an unexpected yet ‘behovely’ reward for her ‘gret sinne’ of rejecting the visions as hallucinations.

Several changes at story level in the Sixteenth Revelation suggest this connection between Julian’s fall and the re-seeing of the visions. First, in both Vision and Revelation Christ warns and assures character Julian that she neither will nor must be overcome, and should believe the visions. In Vision, Christ speaks ‘full soberly’ (Vis. 22. 22) [‘very seriously’]². In Revelation, his tone has become more affective; Christ speaks ‘fulle swetely’ (Rev. 68. 15) [‘very lovingly’]³. In addition, Christ’s exhortations have been changed: ‘comfort thee therwith and trust thee therto’ (Rev. 68. 46, 47) [‘comfort yourself with it and trust in it’]⁴ has been added. Both the content and tone of Christ’s locution have become fonder and kinder. The narrator thus lets Christ help Julian recover from the shock of the assault by comfortingly reminding her of the visions.

Secondly, the ‘keep thee therin’ returns after the vision, when the narrator has Christ help character Julian to follow his advice. In a passage only found in Revelation, she lets Christ respond to character Julian’s doubts by creating the visionary loop already described. Confidently stating that she

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¹Revelations of Divine Love, 139.
²Ibid., 143.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
now is certain that it is ‘oure savioure’ that showed her the visions, the narrator links this firm belief to Christ’s words:

And therto I am bounde by his owne mening, with the next wordes that folowen: ‘Keep thee therein, and comfort thee therwith, and truste therof.’ And thus I am bounde to kepe it in my faith. For on the same day that it was shewde, what time the sight was passed, as a wretch I forsoke it, and openly I saide that I had raved. Than oure lorde Jhesu of his mercy wolde not let it perish, but he shewde it all agene within my soule, with more fullhed, with the blessed light of his precious love, seyeng theyse wordes fulle mightily and fulle mekely: ‘Wit it now welle, it was no raving that thou saw this day’ — as if he had saide: ‘For the sight was passed fro the, thou lost it and couth or might not kepe it. But wit it now: that is to seye, now thou seest it.’ (Rev. 70:7-17)

[I am bound to do so by everything he meant by the words that follow next: ‘Hold to it, and comfort yourself with it, and trust in it.’ So I am bound to maintain it faithfully. For on the same day that it was revealed, when the vision had passed, like a wretch I denied it, and I said openly that I had been delirious. Then our Lord Jesus in his mercy would not let the vision be lost, but he revealed it all again inwardly in my soul, with more completeness, with the blessed light of his precious love, saying these words most powerfully and most gently, ‘Know it well now, what you saw today was no delirium’, as if he had said, ‘Because the vision had passed away you lost it and could not keep it; but know it now, that is to say, now that you see it.’

Julian’s characteristically open language makes the ‘it’ which she now ‘wit[s]’ refer to both the entire revelation and the fact of her seeing. Narrator Julian, then, has Christ show her alter-ego a more complete version of the visions. This ‘director’s cut’ presumably excludes the frightening assaults from the fiend, since both Vision and Revelation depict these as not belonging to the visions.

The change in Christ’s tone (a story change) makes the new event of Julian seeing the visions again (a fabula change), an unexpected reward, like that received by the servant. Christ’s changed tone is identical to the Lord’s expression: he looks ‘upon his servant full […] swety’ (Rev. 51. 10). Moreover, in Revelation narrator Julian describes her alter-ego’s denial of

\[\text{\footnotesize 1} \text{ Ibid., 144, 145.}\]
the visions in terms that evoke the Servant’s fall: it is characterized by ‘blindness’ and ‘futility’ (Rev. 66. 4). In the parable, instead of punishing the Servant or ascribing any guilt to him, the Lord rewards the Servant more than if he had not fallen. The narrator claims that this action is what ‘behoveth need be’ (Rev. 51. 45, 46) [‘must needs be’]. ‘Behoveth’ suggests that this reward is narratively fitting. These parallels therefore imply that character Julian is rewarded as well. The vision of Christ’s dwelling in her soul and the visionary loop thus become this unexpected but ‘behovely’ reward. Character Julian’s denial of the visions’ existence thus paradoxically leads to her seeing them more completely.

God rewarding Julian for her lapse in faith makes this part of this plot differ significantly from its Vision equivalent. Most noticeably, it dismantles the psychomachia-elements pervading these scenes in Vision, and therefore its implied distrust of character Julian’s desires as well. Instead, both the fall and the reward become ‘behovely’, that is, plot elements needed for God’s narrative to be complete.

In Vision, the narrator lets God allow the devil to frighten character Julian into believing the visions again, making these events a threatening punishment from an angry Father. In Revelation, in contrast, God allows character Julian to fall so that he can reward beyond her expectations later on.

God, according to the understanding character Julian’s achieves earlier in Revelation, sees all human beings as sinless; the episodes with the fiend therefore no longer form a penalty. Instead, the narrator makes Julian’s fall and suffering form part of God’s plot. That is to say, they become ‘behovely’, narratively fitting and part of a narrative leading towards love. Whereas in Vision Julian’s desire is spiritually ambiguous and has frightening side-effects, in Revelation narrator Julian makes character Julian’s desires an integral part of Mother Christ’s desire to comfort and gladden her.

In addition, by changing the last supernatural event in the visionary sequence, Revelation changes the entire sequence. Instead of ending with demons frightening her, in Revelation character Julian’s experience in 1373 ‘ends’ with her seeing the visions again. Narrator Julian thus overwrites the old visionary experience, with its side-effects of fiends assaulting character Julian, with a more complete version, which lacks this frightening experience. Consequently, in Chaucer’s terms, Christ’s locution about not

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1 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 330.
3 Admittedly, this still is a rather problematic theodicy; Grace Jantzen offers a helpful solution, suggesting that according to Julian, the reward is ‘intrinsic to the suffering, and impossible without it’. Jantzen, Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian, 186. Ibid.
being overcome no longer forms the gist and knotte. In other words, instead of letting the story reach a definite telos, the narrator lets character Julian return full-circle to the beginning of the visions. During the last demonic assault, character Julian is looking straight ahead at the cross, like she did the day before, once more 'seeking' for Christ's suffering body: the end has become the beginning.

In this continuous focusing and circling back to the events of a single experience, the plot differs from the similarly cyclical plot of the B-text Piers Plowman. As Barbara Newman observes, the events of Piers form a cyclical scheme built around the liturgical year. That is, the plot moves from an Epiphany (passus 1) through Carnival, Lent, Holy week and Pentecost (2-19) to Advent (passus 20). The plot of Piers, then, draws a common structure into its own structure, including the evencristen that follow the liturgical year into the events of the story. The plot of Revelation does the reverse: its own structure becomes the template for the experience of the evencristen.

**Knitting in the Round: Circularity at Text Level**

By means of strongly increased cross-referencing, the text of Revelation invites a reading process equally cyclical as the plot at story and fabula level, and therefore emphasizes this circular plot. In medieval literary terms, the ductus through the mater follows a circular 'path of art' rather than a linear 'path of nature.

Denys Turner and Caroline Walker Bynum have discerned a generally spiral quality in Julian’s thought. More specifically, Elisabeth Dutton, in her study of the influence of compilations on Julian’s works, has recognized Revelation’s circularity on text-level in its voices and images. Dutton notes that the table of contents encourages the reader to select a Revelation rather than a chapter. I suggest that the text encourages a similarly circular movement between the Revelations by means of the cross-references. The cross-references have received relatively little critical attention, with the exception of brief discussions by Riddy and Dutton. Riddy draws attention to the ‘elaborate recursive structure of the long version’, created by these, pointing out that ‘cross-referring enables Julian to look both forwards and back.’ I would like to add that the cross-referencing encourages the reader likewise to looking forwards and looking back, and that this circular ductus echoes and emphasizes the circular plot, making the mater, the text, formally mirror the entent of God’s encircling love.

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3 Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 50, 157.
4 Riddy, “Publication” before Print: The Case of Julian of Norwich’, 116.
In its intricate cross-referencing, *Revelation* differs both from *Vision* and from other visionary texts. The *Vision* narrator gives only a small number of cross-references, which simply refer forwards or backwards in the text. For instance, the narrator promises the reader that she will relate an important element later ‘And for the gastely thirste was shewed to me as I shalle sey afterwarde’ (*Vis*. 10. 15). ['And I shall say later what was revealed to me concerning the spiritual thirst.]

In *Revelation* far more of these cross-references are found. These refer frequently to the Revelations by their numbers. As a result, each Revelation contains several references to the others; these cross-references often connect new meditations to earlier locutions. Narrator Julian therefore not only provides many metaphors of knitting or tying together, as Donohue-White and Sprung have observed; she also creates such knitting together on text level.

What is more, these cross-references often point forward to visions the narrator has not yet described. For instance, in the Fifteenth Revelation, the narrator looks both forward and backward, as described by Riddy, imaging the mutual indwelling of God and humanity by linking of the two sections of the text:

> And [Crist] is with us in erth, us leding; and that was shewde in the third, wher I saw God in a point; and he is with us in oure soule, endlessly wonning, rewling and yeming us, and that was shewde in the sixteenth, as I shalle sey. (*Rev*. 51. 30-32)

[And he is with us on earth, guiding us; and that was shown the third revelation, where I saw God in a point. And he is with us endlessly dwelling in our soul, ruling and caring for us, and that was shown in the sixteenth revelation, as I shall recount.]

By referring to the First and the Sixteenth Revelation, narrator Julian makes the *evencristen* dwell in the text, just as according to her theology God dwells in the *evencristen* and vice versa. Moreover, with the different tenses ‘was shewde’ and ‘as I shalle sey’, narrator Julian ties together past and future in her text knot.

In comparison to other visionary texts and religious narratives, Such extensive self-referential cross-referencing does not occur in other visionary texts or other religious narratives. In Birgitta’s *Liber*, for example, the

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2 Donohue-White, ‘Reading Divine Maternity in Julian of Norwich’, 45; Sprung, “We Nevyr Shall Come out of Hym’: Enclosure and Immanence in Julian of Norwich’s *Book of Showings*, 47, 48.
characters only every now and then refer to earlier visions, and do so by referring to their content and the location in which Birgitta received these visions rather than by their number. In Book VII, for instance, Mary recapitulates a number of previous visions for Birgitta:

\[\text{Þe modir aperid in þe same place to þe spouse and said: ‘Doughtir, it is lange sithen þat I hight þe in Rome þat I suld shewe to þe in Bedleeme þe maner of mi beringe of mi son, all if I shewed þe somewhat in Napils. Þus I did as I haue now shewed unto þe[.]}\]

[The Mother appeared in the same place to the spouse and said: ‘Daughter, it is long ago that I told you in Rome that I should show you in Bethlehem how I bore my son, though I showed you it partly in Napels. I have now showed you the manner in which I did so.]\(^1\)

The cross references belong to the story rather than to the text: the reader is told all he or she needs to know, and the text does not lead the reader back to a particular earlier vision.

The added cross-references in *Revelation*, I suggest, make the mater of the text resemble a piece of circular knitting. That is, the narrator gives the text anchoritic overtones by letting its form evoke handicrafts and the making of clothing, crafts which the Ancrene Wisse recommends to anchorites as daily activities.\(^2\) Though ‘to knit’ probably was not used in the modern sense,\(^3\) several late-fourteenth-century fragments of knitting clothing, knit in the round, have been found in London.\(^4\) Moreover, Norwich—and East Anglia as a whole —was an important centre for the English wool-trade and wool production.\(^5\) It is therefore possible that knitted clothing was made in historical Julian’s day, and in Norwich. As Chaucer’s use of the term *knotte* suggests, the material of a text could be thought of as resembling a thread.

*Revelation* contains many instances of such textual knitting in the round, or circular *ductus*. For instance, the narrator repeatedly refers

\[\text{1 Ed. Ellis, VII ch. 22 ll. 5-8, page 487. (My translation)}\]

\[\text{2 Ancrene Wisse, ed. Millett, ch. 8:22 p. 160.}\]

\[\text{3 The MED is rather unclear on this. On the one hand it does not give describe ‘knitted’ as being used in the modern sense of ‘to knit, on the other hand it mentions ‘knitter’ being used as an occupational term in 1305, but that could refer to weaving as well.}\]


\[\text{5 Gibson, 155.}\]
backward to the First Revelation, or forward to the Sixteenth; she creates as it were a mental space or stitch to which the Revelation can be connected later. For example, in a passage in the Fifteenth Revelation that anticipates the meditation on Christ's motherhood, the narrator both describes and creates circular structures:

And oure savioure is oure very moder, in whome we be endlesly borne and never shall come out of him. Plenteously, fully and swetely was this shewe; and it is spoken of in the furst, wher it saide: 'We be all in him beclosed.' And he is beclosed in us; and that is spoken of in the sixteenth shewing, where he seyth: ‘He sitteth in oure soule.’ For it is his liking to reigne in oure understanding blisselfully. (Rev. 57. 42 -46)

[Abundantly, and fully, and sweetly was this shown; and it is spoken of in the first revelation, where he says 'we are all enclosed in him and.' And he is enclosed in us; and it is spoken of in the sixteenth revelation, where it says 'he sits in our soul'; for it is his pleasure to reign blissfully in our understanding, and to sit restfully in our soul.]

The *ductus* in this passage first encourages the reader first to go backward—mentally, or by turning the page—from the Fifteenth Revelation to the ‘furst [...] shewing’. The reader is then invited to move forward to the last and Sixteenth Revelation, and then necessarily needs to return to the Fifteenth Revelation. *Revelation* features many of such moments of circular *ductus*; by means of these, the narrator knits the text around the *evencresten*, creating the enclosing movement as the text describes. The *evencresten* becomes as textually enclosed in *Revelation* as he or she is spiritually enclosed in God.

The narrator's knitting in the round gives the text anchoritic overtones, but also evokes her own motifs (found mainly in *Revelation*) and several motifs from late medieval devotional culture, particularly popular in East Anglia. In late medieval religious art and literature, the Incarnation is frequently figured in terms of Mary clothing Christ in the garment of human flesh and blood. Gibson has shown that this analogy is frequently found in East-Anglian devotion. In the N-Town plays, for instance, Mary tells Joseph that Jesus ‘wylle be clad in flesch and blood/and of youre wyff be born’. Religious art expressed this analogy by showing Mary spinning, or circularly

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2 Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, 155.
3 Sugano, ‘Play 12, Joseph’s Doubt’, ll. 65, 66.
knitting Christ's seamless tunic, to which Mary's body also was compared.¹ Since mothers were thought to provide the matter of a foetus, Mary provides both Christ's mater, his garment of flesh, and the matter of his everyday garment, as Mary Dzon has noted.²

Narrator Julian reconfigures this web of associations. Instead of Mary, she lets Christ himself 'knit him to oure body in the maidens wombe' (Rev. 57. 36) ['joined himself to our body in the Virgin's womb'].³ She also describes Christ as clothing Himself in human flesh and blood: 'in this lowe place he arrayed him and dight him all redy inoure poure flesh, himself to do the service and moderhode in alle thing' (Rev. 60. 10,11). ['[He] made himself ready in this humble place and dressed himself in our poor flesh, himself to perform the service and the office of motherhood in everything.']⁴ Christ becomes the ultimate mother, who shapes his own mater.

This garment-like mater, the narrator claims, Christ lovingly wraps around humanity: 'He isoure clothing, that for love wrapp eth us and windeth us' (Rev. 5. 3, 4). ['He is our clothing that out of love enwraps us and enfolds us'.] Revelation, in fact, lets both the denotation 'physical matter,' shared by all created things, and that of 'text matter' or 'subject matter' resonate together:

Whan God shulde make mannes body, he toke the slime of the erth, which is a mater medeled and gadered of all bodely thinges, and thereof he made mannes body [...] In this endlesse love, mannis soule is kept hole, as all the mater of the revelation meneth and sheweth (Rev. 53. 35-38, 40-42).

[ [W]hen God was to make man’s body he took the slime of the earth, which is matter mixed and gathered from all bodily things, and from that he made man’s body [...] And in this endless love man’s soul is kept whole, as the subject matter of the revelations means and shows].⁶

The matter of mud, the human body and the text can all be shaped and gathered into a signifying whole.

¹ Dzon, ‘Birgitta of Sweden and Christ’s Clothing’, 138; Gibson, The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages, 156–66.
³ Revelations of Divine Love, 125.
⁴ Ibid., 130.
⁵ Ibid., 45.
⁶ Ibid., 119.
The *Revelation* narrator thus parallels three acts of knitting in the round: Christ’s clothing himself in and knitting himself to humanity, Christ’s wrapping himself around humanity, and her own cross-referencing and her stringing together Middle English words. Since these parallels do not occur in *Vision*, they imply a change in narratorial self-fashioning. In *Vision* the narrator still depicts herself as a visionary rather than a writer, as Staley also observes;¹ in *Revelation* the narrator deifies her own writing process. Yet this forming of a *textus* retains its material overtones; her wrapping the reader in the tissue and vellum of the work allows Christ to wrap humanity maternally and eternally in his divine, skin-like matter.

This leading the reader cyclically through the Revelations forms a striking contrast with similar textual processes in *The Canterbury Tales*. The *Canterbury Tales* narrator, as Dutton observes, affects to be a passive scribe of the tales and shifts the responsibility to choose a tale to the reader: ²

> And therefore, whoso list it nat yheere,  
> Turne over the leef and chese another tale;  
> For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,  
> Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,  
> And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.  
> Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys.  

[So if this tale had better not be heard  
Just turn the page and choose another sort  
You’ll find them here in plenty, long and short  
Many historical, that will profess  
Morality, good breeding, saintliness.  
Do not blame me if you should choose amiss.]³

If the reader does not wish to hear the Miller’s tale of ‘harlotrie’, it is his or her individual responsibility to turn away from that tale this very moment; the narrator refuses to be held accountable. The narrator of *Revelation*, in contrast, sees no such conflict between the responsibility of the narrator and that of the reader. In *Vision* the narrator still seems anxious about the evencristen’s narrative desire and about whether he or she will follow the *ductus* or not. In *Revelation*, in contrast, the narrator simply assumes the reader will do so. She trusts the evencristen’s desire to be as endless as that

² Dutton, *Devotional Compilations*, 164.
of character Julian, leading them wrapped themselves more closely in the body of the text just as Julian’s infinite seking leads her deeper into God’s body.

To conclude, Revelation creates on story and fabula level a plot that is as circular as the narrator claims the visions have been since 1373 up until the moment of writing. The narrator, then, presents herself as not only a reliable scribe of the divine, but as also an author capable of re-creating years of re-seeing the visions in a text that demands years of re-reading.

**Effect**

As a result of this circularity of the fabula, story and text, the effect of Revelation’s plot on the narrative as a whole strongly differs from that of Vision’s linear plot.

An immediately noticeable difference is the increased lack of closure. In Vision the narrator considers it possible to sum up the whole work in ten words (‘Herewith is the fende overcomen – Thow shall nought be overcomen’). She also has her character alter-ego experience ‘a singulere joy and a blis’ (Vis. 22. 16, 17) [‘a special joy and a bliss’] when seeing Christ in the final vision: the plot has reached its goal.

In Revelation, in contrast, neither the telos of the plot nor the end of Julian’s seking are ever fully reached. For example, unlike in Vision, the narrator does not let the entent form the conclusion of Julian’s wishing. The answer in character Julian’s ‘gostly understonding’ (Rev. 86. 12, 13) about love being God’s entent takes place in 1388, earlier in the fabula than the instructions about the parable. Even after hearing these apparently conclusive words about love being God’s, the visions’ and the text’s entent, character Julian’s ‘gret fere’ is still not ‘esed’ and her desyer still unfulfilled.

In Revelation, then, character Julian, the narrator, and the reader, keep circling back to the first visions, and circling upwards while they do so, but never fully reaching full sight of God’s perspective. The narrator explicitly admits that her wish to unite her human perspective with God’s will not be granted in either this narrative or this life:

> And to alle this I had ne had no nother answere but a marvelous example of a lorde and a servant, as I shall sey after. And yet I stond in desyer, and will into my lives ende, that I migh t by grace know theyse two domes as it longeth to me’ (Rev. 45. 28–29).

> [And I had no other answer to all this than a wonderful parable of a lord and a servant, as I shall report later—and that was revealed very ambiguously. And I am still longing—and will until the end of my

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life—to understand by grace these two judgements as they apply to me].

With this lack of closure, the narrator creates a similar unfulfilled longing in the evencresten, blurring the linear distinction between the period of the evencresten’s reading and the period afterwards. Unlike in Vision, the narrator no longer fears the effect of her text.

This lack of closure can be compared to that in The Book of Margery Kempe, as outlined by Staley. Staley points out that Kempe does not conclude the fabula with Margery returning to a normative existence of domestic and communal harmony. This underlines Kempe’s depiction of Margery as a singular figure: ‘Like Chaucer or Langland, who were willing to end their poems with incidents that defy our conventional notions of closure, Kempe denies us the comfort inherent in the circular form.’ Whereas in the Book a lack of closure sets Margery as apart from the other characters as her beloved saints are from their tormentors, Revelation expects the evencresten to wish to join character Julian in the search that simultaneously drives the plot and prevents it from reaching a conclusion.

Thematically, the circular plot structure also makes the mater mirror a part of the entent or mening: ‘Wherfore shewed he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thou shalt wit more in the same’ (Rev. 86. 14, 15). [‘Why did he show it? For love. Hold fast to this, and you will know and understand more of the same.’] The deixis of ‘therin’ is ambiguous: it refers to love, the locution, and to the visions as a whole. By means of the circular plot and text, then, the narrator has Revelation hold the evencresten like character Julian is expected to hold herself in the visions. She thereby enables both character Julian and the evencresten to uncover more in the same visions and the same text, by re-reading and re-seeing these. Doing so creates a spiralling movement upward and inward, deeper into the visions and the text. The narrator thus collapses the distinction between text and visions, character Julian and evencresten.

Finally, by subsuming Julian’s finite longing for a bodily sight into an endless longing for God, Revelation problematizes the distinction between narrative and non-narrative, between ‘ensamples’ and serious doctrine. Revelation thereby challenges the often-expressed claim that the laity were spiritually and intellectually incapable of contemplating abstract dogmatic matters. I already pointed out that these assumptions can be found in Chaucer’s Pardoner’s words. Nicholas Love expresses a similar sentiment in his fifteenth-century The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, writing

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1 Ibid., 98, 99.
2 Staley, Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions, 4.
3 Revelations of Divine Love, 164.
that ‘symple soules, who can only think of ‘bodily þinges’ need to be fed with
‘mylke of lyȝte doctrine’ [‘milk of doctrinally light matters’] and not with
‘sadde mete of grete clargye & of hye contemplacion’ [‘serious food of great
learning and high contemplation of the Divinity’].

Vision seems to make a similar distinction between its narrative and abstract sections. After having recounted the last vision and having scorned sin, the narrator shifts to the present tense of a homily and announces that she will now start expounding abstract matters: ‘And what wretchedness is I
wille saye, as I am lernede be the shewinge of God’ (Vis. 23. 33). [‘And I want
to say what baseness is, as I have been taught by the revelation of God.’] The
‘lerning’ is argumentative, abstracted from the narrative ‘shewing’ of Christ’s
body. It is kept to a minimum in order not to tax the minds of
evencristen
who are ‘lewid’ [uneducated or lay] like the Vision
narrator claims to be (Vis. 6. 37).

Although such markers of a shift in register still occur in Revelation, it is
more often the case that narrative sections morph unnoticeably into
meditation and back. Furthermore, the text displays the same seeking for
God’s view as the story does. For instance, the narrator will sometimes pause
her spiritual exploration and warn the evencristen not to pry into ‘oure
lordes prevy concelle,’ (Rev. 30. 11) [‘our Lord’s private counsels’]. She then
nevertheless continues to wonder and seek, a tension that Diane Watt also
has observed. In brief, narrator Julian ignores her own advice. Moreover,
she makes character Julian unable any longer to distinguish between the
narrative ‘shewing’ and seemingly more abstract “inward lerning” received
afterwards. According to the narrator, these are so ‘oned [...] that I can not
nor may not deperte them’ (Rev. 51. 67, 68). [‘so united [...] that I neither
can nor may separate them.’].

Accordingly, character Julian’s seeing and re-seeing of the visions, and
narrator Julian’s writing, are all driven by the same desire for God’s
perspective. Moreover, all of these processes partly fulfill and partly frustrate
this desire. Revelation is sometimes described as having broken the
narrative framework of Vision, or the thread of the narrative being lost. Yet
when seeing both the narrative and meditative or argumentative sections as
acts, and as attempts by character Julian and her narrator alter-ego to circle
upwards towards God’s understanding, the distinction between narrative

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2 Revelations of Divine Love, 164.
3 ‘lewed, adj.’ def.1, MED.
5 Watt, ‘Saint Julian of the Apocalypse’, 70.
and non-narrative, ‘bodily þinges’ and ‘contemplation’ is blurred and no longer useful. Narrator Julian thus implies that, whether lay or religious, the evencristen is capable of grasping Julian’s ‘high contemplation’.

‘Ordained to Fro Withoute Beginning’: Revelation’s Omnitemporal, Non-sequential Plot

Within Revelation’s circular plot, glimpses of an omnitemporal or timeless, non-sequential plot can be found, in which all events simultaneously present. To use the terms with which the narrator describes God’s omnitemporal actions, she creates a plot formed of ‘dedes [...] withoute beginning’ (Rev. 11. 30, 35). This plot hints at God’s eternal perspective; it also recreates character Julian’s memory inventory—her mental ‘storehouse of material in the form of both “words” and “things”’—in that of the evencristen.2

Robertson has noted how the style of Revelation creates such an eternally present moment, writing that ‘Julian aims to integrate the past, present and future into a single, immanent moment ever present before her and her audience’.3 Similarly, McAvoy has shown that by using ‘phrases of contemporaneity’ in the descriptions of the visions, which make the visions take place in and simultaneously with other visions, Revelation transports character Julian to a dimension outside of linear, sequential time.4 Furthermore, several critics, for instance Christina Maria Cervone, have drawn attention to the timeless and non-sequential order of events in the parable of the Lord and Servant.5 Such hints of timelessness and non-sequentiality, I argue, can not only be found in the style of Revelation and in the parable, but also in the rest of the plot of Revelation.

Whereas the circular plot of Revelation emphasizes character Julian’s agency and that of the narrator, this omnitemporal plot evokes the influence of ‘transcendent subject’ God. This plot invites the evencristen to see divine action in the ambiguous causal relations between the visions. ‘Transcendent subject’ is a narratological term coined by Vitz, who draws upon Greimas’

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2 Medieval faculty psychology distinguished between one’s memory inventory or vis memorativa, and cogitatio, thought and understanding, as Mary Carruthers describes. Julian’s memory inventory is therefore distinct from the ‘sight of [Julian’s] understanding’ (Rev. 51. 67), with which she frequently re-sees the visions. The memories are preserved in her memory inventory in a non-sequential, atemporal format; with the eye of her understanding she frequently re-sees the visions sequentially, at different moments in time. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 67,68.
3 Robertson, ‘Julian of Norwich's Modernist Style and the Creation of Audience’, 146.
4 McAvoy, ‘Gendered Strategies of Time and Memory in the Writing of Julian of Norwich and the Recluse of Winchester’, 104.
5 Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love*, 140, 141.
scheme of actantial roles. ‘Subject’ is one of Greimas’ several actants or actantial roles, that is, the role that a character has in a plot; the subject is the character or characters desiring or aiming for the object. Vitz has demonstrated the need for expanding the Greimasian actant category of ‘subject’ when studying medieval religious narratives. According to Vitz ‘with respect to medieval narrative […] we often have to be willing to consider as Subject various figures that are not characters, or even “in” the story, in the obvious traditional sense.’¹ By letting the atemporal, non-sequential plot suggest God’s acting as a transcendent subject, narrator Julian depicts God as participating in her telling, thus endowing her text with divine authority.

**Fragmenting Time and Order: Omnimtemporality at Fabula Level**

On fabula level, *Revelation* opens up the circular yet time-bound, sequential plot by adding visions that are ambiguously located in time and in the visionary sequence, that is, in the fabula, but nonetheless affect the next vision and the whole. An example of such an addition is found in the mysterious Second Revelation. Like in *Vision*, character Julian first sees Christ’s face undergo changes resulting from the torments after his trial, and sees his face being covered in dry blood. The vision that *Revelation* then inserts into the visionary sequence is equally bewildering:

One time my understanding was led downe into the se a grounde, and there saw I hilles and dales grene, seming as it were mosse begrowen, with wrake and gravel. (*Rev.* 10. 14, 15)

[One time my understanding was guided down to the bottom of the sea, and there I saw green hills and valleys, seeming as if overgrown with moss, with seaweed and gravel.]²

Though the story places this vision after that of blood covering Christ’s face, ‘one time’ suggests neither contemporaneity nor linearity, unlike the ‘and after this’ which has been connecting the visions earlier. The sequence is fragmented, creating an apprehensiveness in the evenercristen similar to that experienced by character Julian, who is ‘sometime in a feer whether it was a shewing or none’ (Rev. 10:28) [‘doubtful for a while whether it was a revelation.’].³

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³ *Revelations of Divine Love*, 53.
Narrator Julian then increases the fragmentation of Revelation’s sequence and time by letting this vision occurring ‘one time’ lead to a vision repeatedly seen, equally ambiguously placed in time:

And then diverse times our lord gave me more sight, wherby that I understode truly that it was a shewing: It was a figure and a likenes of oure foule, black, dede hame, which oure faire, brighte, blessed lord bare for oure sinne. (Rev. 10. 28-31).

[And then at various times our good Lord gave me more insight, so that I truly understood that it was a revelation. It was an emblem and likeness of our foul, black, mortal covering, which our fair, bright, blessed Lord bore for our sins.]\(^1\)

The use of ‘more’ and ‘then’ and the past tense suggest linear time; yet the ‘diverse times’ fragments this, while the motionless quality of the ‘figure and likeness’ with its chain of signifiers emphasizes this atemporality, as does the ambiguous deixis.\(^2\) Nevertheless, the vision of this ‘figure’ still has an effect in time: it convinces character Julian of the authenticity of the vision of the ‘sea grounde’.

Moreover, in spite of the ambiguous temporality, the narrator stresses that this image of Christ’s face provides a foundation for a subsequent vision, and that it refers back the earlier bodily sight with its ‘changing of colour’:

Of this it speketh in the eighth revelation in the sixteenth chapter, where it speketh more of the same liknesse. And there it seyeth ‘of the vernacle of Rome, it meneth by diverse changing of colour and chere’. (Rev. 10. 51-55).

[This is spoken of in the eighth revelation, where more is said about the same likeness. And as concerns the Vernicle in Rome, it moves through various changes in colour and expression.]\(^3\)

Thus, in spite of being ambiguously situated in time and in the sequence, these two visions have a particular effect on the other visions. As a result, a timeline becomes impossible to reconstruct. In Julian’s own terms, it is unclear in which order the ‘dedes’ have been ordained.

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2 ‘Liknes’ also denotes ‘guise, appearance, shape’; Julian’s *discretio spirituum* passage in *Vision* uses it in this sense, ‘liknes(se), n’ def.1a. It therefore is an appearance of Christ’s human disguise. For a discussion of the unusual term ‘hame’, see Cervone, ‘Julian of Norwich and John Capgrave’.

3 *Revelations of Divine Love*, 54.
Yet this vision of an image of Christ’s human skin results from the same desire for more (in)sight that drives the circular, sequential order of events in *Revelation*. Narrator Julian lets her character alter-ego long to know whether the sight of the ‘sea grounde’ is genuine (*Rev. 10. 25 - 27*); God responds to make her understand. Thus, the search for (in)sight not only creates a quest with a sequential character, but also fragments that sequential character.

**God’s Omnitemporal Plotting**

*Revelation* also opens up the causal relations in its plot. These ambiguous causal relations between the added visions show hints of a timeless, non-sequential plot, and interpellate God as the transcendent subject. The visions of the two deeds are instances of the causal chain of events being fragmented; these two visions, like the other visions after the pivot, partly fulfill and partly frustrate Julian’s wishes for seeing God’s perspective.

Often when describing the visions, the narrator will indicate how an event leads to the next. For instance, a vision is given in response to character Julian’s wondering, or seeing deeper into a vision will reveal the next. However, such clear causality is lacking from the descriptions of the two deeds. The sight of the ‘deed which the blissful trinite shall do in the last day’, is generated by a specific moment in the visionary sequence, the juxtaposing of the five locutions. Unlike in other visions, the narrator does not describe how this act of juxtaposing leads to the act of understanding leads or becomes the sight. Moreover, the present tense in ‘understonde’ makes the act of understanding take place in an atemporal present detached from the past of the visionary experience. In spite of these ambiguous causal and temporal relations, this sight contributes to several other events in the fabula. Thinking about this great deed makes character Julian wish to see purgatory and hell; the goodness it suggests motivates character Julian to ask about her friend’s destiny, and with its possible suggestion of creatures being saved it contributes to the different overall effect already described.

The vision of the second deed seems even more tenuously related to the other events in terms of causality. Without any contextual remarks, the narrator opens the chapter by boldly stating:

> Oure lorde God shewde that a deed shalle be done, and himselfe shalle do it [...] and by me it shall be done [...] and I shalle do right nought but sinne. (*Rev. 36. 1-4*)
[Our Lord God revealed that a deed will be done, and he himself will do it [...] and it will be done with regard to myself [...] and I shall do nothing but sin.]

Shewde’ situates the vision in the past of the visionary experience, yet the narrator does not reveal how this event relates causally or temporally to the others. The narrator then places the hitherto detached vision in the visionary sequence:

When I saw the shewing continued, I understode it was shewed for a great thing which was to com [...] which dede hath the properte before saide. (Rev. 36. 14-17)

[When I saw that his revelation continued, I understood that it was on account of a great deed which was to come [...] this deed has the properties already described.]

Although the place of this vision in the temporal and causal chain of events is ambiguous, the narrator stresses that it forms an essential part of the visionary experience. With its focus on God working through human sinning, it can be said to contribute strongly to character Julian’s seeing a discrepancy between God’s beholding and human beholding.

Consequently, a paradox can be seen: these two events lack clear causal, temporal beginnings, but they nevertheless continue within the visionary experience and have a particular effect on it. As a result, the events formally evoke the earlier discussion of how God arranges historical events, in which the narrator stresses that all events from God’s perspective seem without beginning:

[F]or tho thinges that be in the foreseing wisdom of Gode bene fro withoute beginning, which rightfully and worshipfully he ledeth to the best ende, falling to us sodeynly, ourselfe unweting. (Rev. 11. 7-9)

[Those things that are in the foreseeing wisdom of God from without beginning—which he justly and gloriously and continually guides to the best conclusion as they happen—come upon us suddenly and unwares.]

1 Ibid., 85.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 55.
In *Revelation*, then, the arranging of events in the story mirrors God’s arranging of events in history. That is, the beginninglessness of these two visions narratively depicts God’s perception of all events, and the visions ‘come upon’ the *evencresten* as suddenly as God’s actions are said to do. Furthermore, the ambiguous plot connections of the first prophecy dramatize human lack of knowledge about when this apocalyptic *eucatastrophe* will take place and what it will entail. Consequently, with their fragmenting of the sequence, these visions recreate in the *evencresten* the ‘marveyl’ and uncertainty character Julian experiences during these visions.

Yet, by letting her ordering of events evoke God’s, the narrator also invites the *evencresten* to read this ambiguous causal linkage light of her other statements about divine providence (*Rev.* 11). According to her, from God’s omnitemporal perspective, there is no ‘aventure’ since God guides all events to the pre-ordained end: ‘there no doer but he’ (*Rev.* 11. 35). ‘Aventure’ refers to accident or chance, but also to an episodic, unpredictable narrative without causal linkage. The narrator asserts that human spiritual blindness and lack of foresight makes us think that events suggest ‘aventure’, that is, lack of narrative coherence. By giving a few events in her story such apparent lack of narrative coherence, the narrator suggests that in fact character God’s continuously acts as a transcendent subject in the plot and the reading process. God is made the ‘doer’ who leads all events in the narrative, participating in and authorizing the narrator’s storytelling. According to *Revelation*, God will reveal to the *evencresten* previously unseen causal linkage and narrative coherence during the reading process. *Revelation*, the narrator implies, is divinely plotted.

**Many Exempla, One Lord and Servant: Omnitemporality on Story and Text Level**

In its story and text, *Revelation* also makes certain events omnitemporal and non-sequential. That is, the added *exempla* make the central change to *wele* in the Lord and Servant parable present in the *evencresten*’s memory inventory before the parable occurs in the story and text. As noted earlier, the omnitemporal or atemporal elements in the parable, particularly those in its fabula, are well documented. The relation between the parable and the shorter *exempla* has received less attention. Elisabeth Dutton, however, argues that the smaller textual circles of the *exempla* prepare for the parable, providing its image of the Lord and Servant with layers of meanings before

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1 For a comparison between Julian’s prophecies and Tolkien’s concept of the eucatastrophe, see K.R. West, ‘Julian of Norwich’s “Great Deed” and Tolkien’s Eucatastrophe.’

2 Vitz, 124.
the parable itself is narrated.¹ I concur with Dutton’s argument, but would like to add that when comparing the parable and the shorter exempla in terms of events rather than imagery, an even more subtle interplay between all these short narratives is revealed.

The Revelation narrator turns God into a storyteller like herself. He tells character Julian nine short narratives,² including the parable of the Lord and Servant. These are often meant to support character Julian’s understanding of the visions. Narrator Julian often calls these short narratives an ‘exs ample’, an exemplum. Though often defined as ‘a short narrative used to illustrate or confirm a general statement,’³ Larry Scanlon underscores that exempla should not be reduced to an exchange between a narrative and an external general principle, with the narrative only illustrating that principle. Instead, Scanlon argues, the narrative embodies and prescribes a communal value: ‘In its narrative, the exemplum reenacts the actual, historical embodiment of communal value in a protagonist or an event, and then, in its moral, effects the value’s re-emergence with the obligatory force of moral law.’⁴ This conceptualization of exempla as involving mutual enactment is particularly appropriate to Revelation, which also challenges the distinction between narrative and argumentative.

As collections of exempla show, exempla could resemble folk tales, saints’ legends and romances, but by the thirteenth-century most exempla were anecdotal tales depicting everyday situations. The Ancrene Wisse, rich in vivid exempla, provides an instance of such an exemplum, and what Scanlon calls its ‘narrative enactment of cultural authority’.⁵ Admonishing the reader to inflict suffering on him- or herself for God’s love, the Ancrene Wisse author creates a gendered embodiment of a devotional value, which he expects the reader to share:

Dear man and woman, our virtue seems good to God [...] pay attention to this example [enssample]. If a man had travelled a long way away, and someone came and told him that his much-loved wife missed him so much that she took no pleasure in anything without him, but was thin and pale from thinking about his love, surely he would be better pleased than if he was told she was enjoying herself

¹ Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 148,148.
² As with many formal features in Julian, it is actually often ambiguous whether or not an event is an exemplum: Watson and Jenkins discern some very brief allegories, and it is possible to read the defecation passage as an exemplum as well.
⁴ Scanlon, Narrative, Authority and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition, 34.
⁵ Ibid.
and having fun and running wild with other men, and was having a wonderful time? In the same way our Lord, who is the soul’s husband, who sees everything that she does although he sits on high, is very pleased that she misses him, and will hurry towards her much faster with the gift of his grace.\footnote{Millett, Ancrene Wisse/Guide for Anchoresses: A Translation, pt. 6, 138, 139.}

Though this \textit{ensample} also partly relies on the allegorical mode, it nonetheless shows how the \textit{exemplum} draws upon particular values.\footnote{For a discussion of the allegorical mode in the Wisse \textit{exempla}, see Gunn, Ancrene Wisse: From Pastoral Literature to Vernacular Spirituality, 152.} In this case it draws upon ‘moral laws’ concerning heterosexual marriage, such the moral obligation to miss one’s absent partner, the partner’s moral obligation to care whether he or she is missed. The \textit{exemplum} has both characters enact this, and finally creates a moral in which this moral law enforces how the believer and Christ should interact. The contemporary reader encountering \textit{exempla} in \textit{Revelation}, therefore, is likely to have expected these short narratives to embody a shared spiritual value, and their moral to bring out this value in such an authoritative manner that it seems a moral law.

Moreover, \textit{exempla} in sermons and other didactic religious discourses were thought to imprint the doctrine expounded better on the listener’s memory. In Scanlon’s terms, they were thought to allow the communal dogmatic value to imprint itself authoritatively as a moral law on the listener’s mind. Many sermons and religious works often illustrated the various points of their argument with various \textit{exempla}, thereby allowing the lay audience to follow the argument. As Mary Carruthers has shown, when hearing or reading such a series of \textit{exempla}, many listeners or readers would have displayed the ‘characteristic medieval habit’ of mentally gathering up these different \textit{exempla}, stringing them together to form a mnemonic chain of stories and pictures.\footnote{Carruthers, The Craft of Thought, 147.} Doctrinal material could be attached to this chain. With its many \textit{exempla}, \textit{Revelation} can be said to expect a similar chain-making from the evenchristen.

The \textit{exempla} in \textit{Revelation} are quite brief and consist often of only a few lines and a few events. As the introduction of to this chapter shows, this is even the case in the parable of the Lord and Servant, until character Julian begins to study it more closely. \textit{Revelation} excises the preacher’s \textit{exemplum} of Saint Cecilia; almost all \textit{exempla} are now told by character God.

When the \textit{exempla} are summarized, it becomes clear how they echo one another. That is, they often consist of an interaction between a character higher in rank according to the late-medieval social hierarchy, and a character lower in rank. The First Revelation features Christ showing an
open example of a king or lord treating a servant in a familiar manner, to the servant’s ecstatic delight.¹ In the Sixth Revelation God lifts Julian’s understanding to heaven to see an exemplum of God as a lord calling his friends and servants to a feast, and one a king thanking his subject and making it known in the entire realm, and thereby increasing that subject’s honour.² In the Eighth Revelation narrator Julian tells the tale of Dionysius the Aeropagite, who, noticing creation responding to Christ’s death, writes on an altar ‘for the unknown God.’³ In the Ninth Revelation, illustrating how ‘apaide,’ well pleased he is with suffering for Julian, Christ brings to her mind a similitude of a glad giver, who only wants to please the recipient, and thinks nothing of the labour and costs.⁴ In the Tenth, for more understanding of Christ’s delight in Mary, Christ shows an example of a man loving another human being and wishing all others to do the same.⁵ In the Thirteenth, to show that sin will be turned into honour in heaven, God brings Saint John of Beverley to character Julian’s mind, as well as his fall into sin and the paradoxical reward in heaven.⁶ The parable of the Lord and Servant needs no further introduction. In the last exemplum, in the Sixteenth Revelation, Julian is given understanding of God’s lordship of the soul by means of an exemplum of a creature who is shown great kingdoms and nobility belonging to a lord but looks up at the lord’s dwelling place, knowing that is the worthiest place.⁷

It is not known whether these exempla are unique. Dutton suggests that the first one may be a preacher’s exemplum or derived from a vita.⁸ Martin Chase finds two possible analogues to the parable of the Lord and Servant in two theological works written in the last decade of the eleventh century, Cur Deus Homo by Anselm of Canterbury, and and the Elucidarius, but notes that the soteriology in the parable differs markedly.⁹ Since most of the other exempla are quite abstract, similarities to other known exempla may be simply coincidental.

Using the earlier concepts of ‘changes to wele’ and ‘changes to wo’, these summaries already show that that almost all of these exempla center round a change to wele. This change to wele often consists of the character lower in rank being shown unexpected or undeserved honour by the person

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1 Rev. 7. 27-35.
2 Rev. 14. 3-9, 7-21.
3 Rev. 18. 22-15.
4 Rev. 23. 29-34.
5 Rev. 25:26, 28
6 Rev. 38. 18-30
7 Rev. 68. 19-22
8 Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 146.
9 Chase, ‘The Elucidarius and Julian of Norwich’s Parable of the Lord and the Servant.’
higher in rank. For instance, in the exemplum generated by Christ’s thanking character Julian for her youthful devotion, the lord brings his friends and servants to greater emotional and socioeconomic wele:

And in this, my understanding was lifted up into heaven, where I saw our lord God as a lord in his own house, which lord hath called alle his derewurthy friends [S: servants and friends] to a solempe fest. Than I saw the lorde taking no place in his awne house, but I saw him royally reigne in his house, and all fulfilleth it with joy and mirth, himselfe endlesly to glad and solace his derewurthe frendes, fulle homely and curtesly. (Rev.14. 2-6)

[And with this my understanding was lifted up into heaven, where I saw our Lord as a lord in his own house, who has called all his beloved servants and friends to a splendid feast. Then I saw the lord take no seat in his own house, but I saw him reign royally in his house, and he filled it full of joy and delight, himself eternally gladdening and comforting his beloved friends most friendlily and courteously.]

Instead of sitting down and demanding to be waited upon by his servants, as character Julian expects him to do, the lord honours his servants by comforting and gladdening them, giving them more emotional wele, and treating them 'homely,' as social equals. They experience a change to greater socio-economic wele.

Comparable changes to wele caused by the character higher in rank also characterize the other exempla. The king lets his appreciation for his subject be known in the entire realm; God turns John of Beverley's sin into honour, and so on. Furthermore, just as the changes to wele are similar in these exempla, they also share the same accessible hermeneutic principle. That is to say, the person higher in rank or status, who causes the change to wele, signifies God; the character lower in rank or status signifies humanity.

Though encouraging in content, in terms of fabula plot the exempla display an imbalance in narrative agency between the character signifying God and the character signifying humanity. The character showing honour and effecting the change to wele is the only desiring subject. This character's wishes fuel the short plots of the exempla. The characters lower in rank, undergoing the change to wele, lack agency: they do little more than receive what the other character gives them.

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 59.
2 Watson and Jenkins, 'Sidenotes', 68.
Two terms from Bal’s adaptation of Greimas’ actantial scheme, ‘receiver’ and ‘power’ are useful to study this imbalance in agency, and to show how the parable of the lord and servant subverts this. The ‘power’ is the character or characters that supply the object (the entity which the subject wants) and allow the object to be given; the ‘receiver’ is the character or characters to whom the object is given.¹ In the first exemplum, for instance, the ‘king’ or ‘lord’ is both power and desiring subject, while the character lower in rank is mostly a receiver, lacking agency:

‘It is most worshyp that a solempe kinge or gret lorde may do to a pore servant if he wille be homely with him, and namely if he shew it himselfe of fulle true mening and with glad chere, both in previte and openly. Than thinketh this pore creature thus: ‘Lo, what might this noble lorde do more worshippe and joy to me than to shew to me, that am so littille, this marvellous homelyhede? Sothly it is more joy and liking to me than if he gafe me gret geftes and wer himself strange in manner.’ This bodely exsample was shewde so high that his mannes hart might be ravished and almost forget himself for joy of this grete homelyhede.’ (Rev. 7. 27-35).

[It is the highest honour that a majestic king or a great lord can show a poor servant if he is friendly with him, and especially if he makes it known himself, with true sincerity and a cheerful expression, both in private and in public. Then this poor creature thinks in this way, ‘Ah! What greater honour and joy could this noble lord give me than to treat me, who am so humble, with this marvellous friendliness? This truly gives me more joy and pleasure than if he gave me great gifts and were himself distant in manner.’ This human example was shown so elevately that a man’s heart could be ravished and almost forget itself for joy at this great friendliness.]²

The king or lord wishes to show the poor servant the great honour of treating him as a friend and equal (‘homely’); as a desiring subject, his wish (to treat the servant as a friend and equal and honour him) drives the events. That is, he treats the servant homely on different occasions, and succeeds in making the servant experience this friendship and honour, which marks the end of the exemplum. In terms of changes to wo and wele, he wishes to bring about a change to wele for the servant, and succeeds in this.

The lord is also the only power, the character who can give ‘homelyhede’ and honour to another character. Narrator Julian has narrator Christ, who

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¹ Bal, Narratology, 202–4.
² Revelations of Divine Love, 49.
tells the exemplum, not allow the servant give anything in return. Nor is the servant a desiring subject, and, having no desires, he cannot affect the plot. The narrator leaves the servant unable to do anything except for emotionally responding to his change to emotional and socio-economic wele. Even when responding with joy, the servant is given little narrative agency: his intense gladness almost deprives him from the integrity of his self, as his heart is snatched away (it undergoes raptus) and his very awareness of his existence forgotten.¹

In sum, in medieval literary terms, the exempla show a repeated pattern of a character higher in rank bringing about a change to wele for a character lower in rank. The former signifies God, and the latter humanity. In narratological terms, the character higher in rank, being the desiring subject and power, has more narrative agency than the character lower in rank, who is merely the receiver. Consequently, the changes to wele which the narrator encourages the evencristen to remember, and which the narrator lets exempla-narrator Christ attempt to imprint on character Julian’s memory, emphasize God’s wishes more than that of the human characters.

The narrator continuously presents the evencristen with a single change to wele, consisting of an act of unexpected honouring, performed by a king-like or lord-like God and for the benefit of a servant-like human being. These exempla imprint on the evencristen’s memory their strongly overlapping and parallel events, leaving the evencristen’s mnemonic powers unable to gather them up into a chain.² Instead, a single plot consisting of a few images and events is created in the evencristen’s memory inventory, which is a-temporal and detached from the visionary sequence. Like character God instructing character Julian to re-see the parable, narrator Julian thus allows the evencristen to see and re-see the parable before it occurs in the visionary sequence. This composite exemplum, carrying within it all its earlier morals and communal values, is inextricably intertwined with an implied, but not yet fully expressed argument. In Scanlon’s terms, the exempla have together re-enacted a communal spiritual value, but the moral has not yet been formed, nor has the value re-emerged authoritatively yet.

A brief comparison demonstrates Julian’s narrative radicalism in her use of exempla. Christ being depicted as an avid storyteller in the Gospels, Revelation is in no way unique among visionary and devotional texts in

¹ As Watson and Jenkins point out, this is the only occurrence of ‘ravish’ in Revelation and Vision: its appearance is rather uncharacteristic, since neither Revelation nor Vision display interest in mystical raptures. On the basis of this, Dutton suggests that this exemplum may have been drawn from a vita, or refers to Saint Paul. Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 146; Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 148.

² Carruthers points out that mnemonic images and stories needed to be distinct in order to be able to be remembered. The Craft of Thought, 57.
letting Christ tell exempla. Its accumulation of exempla whose plots evoke one another and that jointly create a mnemonic palimpsest exemplum, however, is unusual. In the Liber for instance, different prophetic statements are illustrated by different exempla. Unlike in Revelation, the plots and other narrative features of these differ markedly from one another. The second book of the Liber, offers a rich variety of exempla, which sometimes turn into extensive allegories. Mary gives Birgitta an ‘ensampill’ of ‘one desiringe to lere wisdom’; John the Baptist tells her a parable in which God is compared to a magpie. Christ tells her an exemplum about a judge who needs to sentence his brother but takes that sentence upon himself; he also illustrates his preference for humble Birgitta over better visionaries with an exemplum about ‘a lorde that hase mani wines planted’ and, in spite of possessing excellent wines, sometimes prefers the mediocre wine.

Within Birgitta’s individual visions, these exempla will help the visionary argument move forward. Within the Liber, however, the exempla do not respond to each other greatly. More importantly, the variety of the exempla mirrors the variety of celestial figures that tell these exempla, speak through Birgitta, and interpret these exempla for her. Any interaction between the exempla would suggest that the visionary interfered with these heavenly ‘ensampills’. The Liber’s exempla thus underscore Birgitta’s status as a passive divine channel. Revelation’s exempla, then, underline narrator Julian’s self-portrayal as an author.

To return to Revelation’s exempla, as soon as the foreshadowed parable appears, narrator Julian opens up the mnemonic exemplum created by the earlier equivalents, thereby deepening its timelessness. That is, the parable revises and transforms the earlier exempla, making the resulting whole such a multi-layered palimpsest of different text-sections that the reader can no longer associate with a single moment in the reading process.

Most noticeably, the narrator renders character Julian’s earlier hermeneutical model defunct, and thereby destabilizes her own and the reader’s mnemonic exemplum. At first, character Julian reads the exemplum as relying upon the same analogies and demanding the same exegesis. The character lower in rank, she thinks, must signify humanity, receiving wele from a character higher in rank, who signifies God. Yet character Julian recognizes to her distress that the mnemonic exemplum created earlier does not match the parable. The servant signifies more than Adam and humanity alone:

2 Ibid., bk. II. 29. p. 191.
3 Ibid., bk. II. 12, ll. 10-17, p. 44.
In the servant that was shewed for Adam, as I shall sey, I sawe many
diverse properteys that might by no manner be derec te to singel
Adam. (Rev. 51. 56, 57)

[In the servant who represented Adam, I saw, as I shall explain,
many different characteristics which in no way could be attributed to
Adam alone.]

The simple analogy of ‘servant,’ standing to ‘lord’, ‘subject’ standing to ‘king’
and ‘male lover’ standing to ‘beloved’ as ‘humanity’ stands to ‘God’ is
rendered defunct. Character Julian’s interpretative tools do no longer allow
her explore the exemplum like she wishes to. After many years of wondering,
the narrator has her expand her mnemonic exemplum, and by extension that
of the reader as well. Having close-read the exemplum many times, helped
by divine hermeneutic instructions, character Julian grasps that the servant
signifies doubly:

In the servant is comprehended the seconde person of the trinite;
and in the the servant is comprehended Adam; that is to sey, all men. (Rev. 51. 179, 180)

[In the servant is comprehended the Second Person of the Trinity;
and in the servant is comprehended Adam, that is to say, all men.]

The parable thus collapses the two different characters into one, overturning
the hierarchy of the earlier exempla. Christ is no longer only the courteous
Lord and King, the person higher in status, but also the person lower in
status, a blind, weak servant, dressed in ragged clothing, who falls into a
ditch only a few minutes after running off on his errand.

Staley has noted that the parable ‘blur[s] the line of distinction
between lordship and servantship’ at a time when there was a strong desire
to preserve an ideal of an hierarchically ordered and a clear distinction
between lords and servants. Just as the parable blurs the distinction
between lordship and servantship as found in late fourteenth-century
England, it also blurs that same distinction as found in the earlier exempla,
overturning its hierarchy, thereby transforming the reader’s mnemonic
exemplum: the earlier servant-figures now signify Christ as well.

1 Revelations of Divine Love, 108.
3 Revelations of Divine Love, 112.
4 Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich’, 164.
Moreover, the narrator also destabilizes the earlier exempla by unravelling the imbalance in the characters’ narrative agency as well. In the earlier exempla, the recipients are given honour and undergo a change to wele, but do not have any narrative agency, that is, desire. In the parable, the person lower in status, the servant, is made both a recipient and a subject. He is given a desire, to do the lord’s will and to dig up the treasure, consisting of food that the lord wants, and bring it before the lord. The servant’s action of offering food turns the lord into a recipient as well, similar to the friends, servants and sinful saints in the previous exempla. Additionally, the servants’ narrative desire drives the later part of the exemplum plot, just like the lord’s desire to send out the servant moves the exemplum forward in the beginning. Unlike in the earlier example, the two characters now possess an equal amount of narrative agency.

This granting the exemplum characters more narrative agency suggests that the narrator portrays herself as an author. Nearly all earlier exempla have been narrated by Christ. The exempla which Christ tells suggest that Christ focuses on honouring passive humanity; this relation between God and humanity only depicts Chris’s divine, omnitemporal perspective. In the case of the parable, in contrast, the narrator lets herself, narrate a large part of this exemplum instead of character Christ: she recounts how character Julian’s studies the exemplum and how they both thereby endlessly transform and expands it. The parable as told by narrator Julian, then, transfigures and fulfills the exempla told by Christ. Consequently, Revelation implies that character Julian’s storytelling makes a significant contribution to God’s storytelling and God’s acting. The narrator makes her own narrating ‘behovely’, narratively necessary for God’s storytelling. She creates a new whole more beautiful than the sum of the parts, just as in the parable Christ’s clothing is of a ‘faire semely medolur’ (Rev. 51. 263), signifying both his humanity and his divinity, and is therefore lovelier than that of God the Father, who lacks this humanity.

To turn back to the atemporality which the parable creates on story and text level, Robertson suggests that by offering different viewpoints on the Lord and Servant, the narrator creates ‘what Auerbach calls the ‘symbolic omnitemporality of an event fixed in a remembering consciousness’. Yet the narrator can also be said to offer a new viewpoint on the earlier exempla with this parable, and on the resulting mnemonic exemplum in the reader’s memory inventory as well.

Whereas in the Liber and the Ancrene Wisse the exempla help the argument progress, that is, move sequentially, the exempla in Revelation reflect on one another and resist sequentiality. They therefore defer the expounding of the moral, or, in Scanlon’s terms, the re-emergence of the

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1 Robertson, ‘Julian’s Modernist Style’, 145.
value as a moral law. Instead, the mnemonic exemplum, intensely multilayered yet still whole, becomes the communal value or moral. With this mnemonic exemplum, the narrator shows the evencristen a brief glimpse of God’s omnitemporal perspective, just as God shows his view on human sinning with the parable. The narrator’s trust in her own desire for storytelling and in the evencristen’s narrative desire has strongly increased: she tells stories endlessly, confident that the evencristen will listen, thereby recreating God’s timeless perspective in the evencristen’s memory inventory.

**Effect**
With its plot that offers glimpses of omnitemporality and non-sequentiality, Revelation narrativizes the divine perspective which it seeks and overcomes the linearity and timeboundness of language. That is, it allows the narrator to translate the paradoxical visionary time—in which Christ can seem to have been dying for all eternity—into the linear time of the telling and story.

Moreover, both the circular and the non-sequential elements allow Revelation to challenge the apparently self-evident tenet that texts and stories must necessarily be sequential and finite. Julian’s Revelation thus offers an alternative to the ending of the biblical Book of Revelation, which threatens any person altering the text or adding to it: ‘herynge the wordes of prophecie of this book, if any man schalle putte to þese þinges, God schal putte on hym the veniauncis writun in this book’ (Revelation 22. 18). ¹ Narrator Julian, in contrast, explicitly includes her evencristen in the finishing of her work, stating in the last chapter:

> This boke is begonne by Goddes gifte and with his grace, but it is not yet performed, as to my sight. For charite we pray together, with Goddes werking. (Rev. 86. 1-3)

> [This book was begun by God’s gift and his grace, but is not yet completed, as I see it. With God working within us, let us all pray to God for charity.]²

¹ Perform’ denotes many forms of finishing and perfecting, but also to making and constructing, as well as finishing a garment.³ Revelation, then, does not as much invite all the evencristen to ‘putte to’ the text, as to allow themselves and their re-readings to be enveloped by the text, and participate in its spiralling upward and inward.

¹ Ed. Lindberg, p. 350.
² Revelations of Divine Love, 164.
³ ‘performen’, v., MED.
Conclusion
The linear plot of *Vision*, with its *entent* ‘Herewith is the fende overcomen [...] Thow shalle nought be overcomen,’ animates *Vision*’s theology. Likewise, *Revelation* with its circular plot, its glimpses of a timeless plot, and its *entent* of God’s beginningless love vividly dramatizes its own theology.

*Vision*’s theology of *psychomachia* on the one hand allows character Julian to see increasingly more of the body that saves and protects her. On the other hand, the precariousness of the visions requires her to be wary of her desires and the narrative desire of the reader and text.

*Revelation*’s complex, exuberant theology, which emphasizes God’s sustaining care and lack of wrath, both reflects and is reflected by its plot and *entent*. With its circularity and *entent* emphasizing holding oneself in the visions and text, *Revelation* formally mirrors God’s eternal enclosing of humanity and drawing humanity into him. What is more, the text becomes the means by which God does so. Simultaneously, its moments of timelessness, and its *entent* of love without beginning provide its exploration of providence and its prophecies of God’s two future acts with vivacity and an experiential character.

*Vision* and *Revelation* destabilize some of the theoretical models with which I have brought them into dialogue. This dialogue therefore shows how a medieval text can unravel, confront and transform modern literary thought. To begin, I have already mentioned how Bremond’s model of dividing events into processes of amelioration and deterioration demands great cultural sensitivity of the critic. I would like to add that perhaps the historicist terms of *wele* and *wo* require such sensitivity too, since medieval religious texts do not see *wo* or misfortune as negatively as romances do. For Troilus, the end of his relationship, and the suffering caused by this, might be called a change to *wo* and the end of a process of deterioration. According to narrator Julian in *Revelation*, however, suffering will finally lead to a heavenly change to *wele*. That is, *Revelation* claims that God will ultimately turn all suffering into greater glory and will turn sin into honour. Genre expectations regarding wellbeing and the benefit or harm of pain should therefore be kept in mind when studying such plot elements in medieval texts.

Secondly, *Revelation* posits God’s close engagement as the ‘transcendent subject’ with the text and the reading process. Such a pervasive presence of the transcendent subject God in devotional texts may suggest that when discussing medieval religious texts, the diagram of fabula, story and plot found in the introduction may need to be changed. For example, a triangular shape could represent God and the narrator addressing the reader simultaneously. Moreover, I suggest that in such texts God needs to be seen not only as a character, but also as a co-narrator. It is in fact possible to see *Revelation*, and several other medieval religious texts as a dialogue between
the narrator, co-narrator God and the addressee or implied reader, sometimes one character speaks to the other two, and sometimes one overhears the other two speak. The relation between these three textual agents contributes to the characterization, for instance how much is explicitly told by each character to the other two, or how much narrative agency each displays.

This reading model implied by Revelation blurs the distinction between text and evencristen. According to narrator Julian, God acts upon both, guiding the evencristen through the text and emending the text at the same time. At the same time God also leads the events in the evencristen’s memory to its telos, co-Passion and an assuring sight of Christ in Vision, and nothing less than the beatific vision in Revelation.

This search for a sight of Christ’s body and God’s embodied perspective are both a search for (in)sight: this emphasis on visuality can also be seen from many references to sight in the quoted passages. This chapter has addressed what character Julian has seen, such as Christ’s suffering, her own suffering, several puzzling but ultimately hopeful visions, and finally the visionary loop. However, what is seen is always shaped by how one sees, for instance, from which distance and which emotional attitude. Moreover, as the citations in this chapter have shown, how the narrator makes character Julian see the visions forms part of the forms part of what Staley calls her ‘fictional self-fashioning.’ In order to explore how the narrative of Vision is incorporated in and transformed by that of Revelation, the next chapter examines this particular narrative feature, perspective or focalization, arguing perspective or focalization, arguing that Julian not only looks at Christ in order to see into God’s body, but also to see from that body.

2. Focalization: ‘Now Thou Seest It’

When seeing the parable of the Lord and the Servant for the first time, character Julian is fascinated by how the characters look at one another.

She notices how ‘The lorde loketh upon his servant full lovely and sweetly’ (Rev. 51. 9,10). ['The lord looks at his servant very lovingly and kindly']. She also observes how the servant’s greatest suffering consists of how he is unable to ‘turne his face to lokke upon his loving lord’ (Rev. 51. 16, 17) ['turn his face to look at his loving lord']. At the end of the parable she is surprised that the lord does not apportion him any blame, but rather ‘continuantly […] full tenderly beholdeth him’ (Rev. 51. 33, 34) ['continually regards him most tenderly']. Both the direction and the emotional attitude of character’s gazes, then, are of significance to the narrative.

However, narrator Julian is not satisfied with simply letting the characters in the parables gaze at one another. She also has character Julian re-see the parable twenty years later. In these later scenes, narrator Julian directs all characters’ gazes more than in the first seeing. She lets character Julian move her focus slowly from each detail to the other, makes character Julian’s gaze interact with that of the lord, and has the lord’s look move down into hell up into heaven. The reader can easily picture character Julian carefully turning her regard first to the lord, then to the servant, to their clothes, and so on; moreover, he or she can also perform a similar imaginative gaze themselves.

When comparing Vision and Revelation, similar changes in seeing can be noticed. Just as narrator Julian turns character Julian’s gaze towards the parable again, in Revelation narrator Julian, like a filmmaker, directs all characters’ gazes more than in Vision, especially character Julian’s. The previous chapter has shown how the desire for a sight of Christ’s body drives the plot of Vision, and, for God’s perspective that of Revelation; both forms of seeing can be called (in)sight. This chapter addresses how these (in)sights are seen, that is, from which physical position and with which emotional attitude.

Using the narratological concept of focalization for this relation between who sees and what is seen, I suggest the following. When comparing acts of seeing in Revelation to their Vision equivalents, character Julian’s gaze is closer to Christ’s body, is more dynamic and displays a clearer sense of direction. A fourth change is that Julian’s focalizing and those of others interact more. The first three changes are all characterized by greater ocular

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 106.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 107.
grasping and greater *avisement* —attention or close examination— which leads to Christ’s wounds opening more.

By means of all four of these changes, moreover, *Revelation* revises and challenges the focalization recommended in affective meditation texts. Instead of Mary’s unique perspective from beside the cross—a look which increases Christ’s suffering—*Revelation* offers a far closer, communal gaze which gives Christ joy and which he invites, although it causes his body to bleed and dry out.

Furthermore, as a result of these changes, in *Revelation* character Julian’s focalizing has become more demonstrative. That is, the changes facilitate the *evencristen’s* imaginative imitation of Julian’s looking. By means of this demonstrativeness, I suggest, *Revelation* challenges affective meditation texts as well, and their assumptions about gender and the agency of the audience. Instead of a male narrator telling a female reader how to see, *Revelation* lets a female character *show* the genderless reader how to see, offering a focalization he or she can easily imitate.

This transformed focalization in *Revelation* contains a greater focalization, consisting of a continuous looking deeper into Christ’s body. As a result of Julian’s greater ocular grasping and *avisement* Christ’s body opens itself up more, which obscures that body and makes it more difficult to distinguish. Narrator Julian, then, directs both character Julian’s and the *evencristen’s* eyes towards a body that is continuously being hidden. As a result, *Revelation* lets the focalization demand the same mental labour of the reader that affective meditation works require by means of the plot. Moreover, this continuous hiding requires the reader to gaze beyond the blood that obscures Christ, thereby drawing the reader’s imaginative focalization deeper into Christ’s body.

**Focalization**

A comparison between a scene early in *Vision* and its *Revelation* equivalent shows how narrator Julian directs characters’ seeing more. These passages also provide a useful case study for introducing the concept of focalization and relevant aspects of the medieval understanding of sight. The moment depicted is poignant; Julian and those around her are convinced she will die that day, and a priest is sent for. In the following collated passage, phrases removed in *Revelation* are indicated with square brackets, additions in italics.

> [My curette ... come, and a childe with him, and brought a crosse] and be thane *he can* I had sette mine eyen and might nought speke. [The persone] *he* sette the crosse before my face, and saide: ‘[Doughter], I have brought the image of thy savioure. Loke thereupon, and conforthe the therewith [in reverence of him that]
diede for the and me.]’ Methought than that I was welle, for mine eyen ware sette uprightwarde into hevene, whether I trusted for to come by the mercy of God. Botte nevertheless I assended to sette mine eyen in the face of the crucifixe, if I might, [for to endure the langer into the time of min endinge.] and so I dide, for methought I might langer endure to loke evenforthe than upperight. (Vis. 2. 20-27; Rev. 3. 18-23)

[My curate ...came, and a boy along with him, and brought a cross], and by the time he came my eyes were fixed and I could not speak. The parson set the cross before my face and said, [Daughter.] I have brought you the image of your Saviour. Look at it and take comfort from it, [in reverence of him who died for you and me].’ It seemed to me that I was all right as I was, for my gaze was fixed upwards into heaven where I trusted I was going by Gods mercy. But nevertheless I consented to fix my eyes on the face of the crucifix if I could, [so as to hold out longer until the moment of my death], and so I did for it seemed to me that I could manage to look straight ahead of me for longer than I could look upwards.¹

In both versions narrator Julian pays close attention to the relation between who perceives and what is perceived. The events (the priest’s arrival) and objects (the crucifix, the priest and the little boy) are seen from the physical and emotional point of view of character Julian in 1373. They could also have been seen through the priest’s eyes, or from the perspective of one of character Julian’s friends, with a depiction of Julian on her sickbed and her expression as she looks at the crucifix.

According to Mieke Bal, when elements from the fabula, such as the events, characters and objects, are organized into a story, ‘a choice is made from among the various ‘points of view’ from which the elements can be presented.’² The result of this is, as Bal states, ‘focalization, the relation between “who perceives” and “what is perceived”.’³ Focalization, Bal claims, “‘colours’ the story with subjectivity”.⁴ ‘Who perceives,’ is called the focalizor, what or who is perceived is called the focalized object, and the relation between these two is focalization. In this scene, for instance, character Julian is the focalizor, and the crucifix is one of the focalized objects.

¹ Ibid., 5, 42, 43. (Italics added).
² Bal, Narratology, 8.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
Focalization includes both physical and psychological aspects.¹ That is to say, what and how Julian sees is affected by her physical position (sitting upright in her bed) and the distance between her and the crucifix, but also by her initial reluctance to look at this crucifix, her attitude towards crucifixes and devotional images in general, and so on. This perceiving from the position of Julian’s body and from her mind thus gives the story a particular subjective ‘colouring’.

Bal and Gerard Genette both emphasize that the focalizor differs from the narrator. Genette stresses that most theoretical works on the subject of narrative technique suffer from ‘a confusion between the question who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective? and the very different question who is the narrator? – or more simply, the question who sees? and the question who speaks?’.² This distinction, between focalization and narration, between ‘the vision through which the elements are presented’ and ‘verbalizing that vision’,³ is significant: a narrator can know more than the focalizor, may not share the focalizor’s emotional attitude, and decides whose character’s focalization is presented in the story, thereby giving that perception more prominence. For instance, the Vision narrator briefly allows Julian’s mother to be a focalizor, but the Revelation narrator does not.

Furthermore, the narrator belongs to the text level, while the focalizor belongs to the story level. Narrator Julian, the hypothetical text-based entity uttering the Middle English words, should not be confused with focalizor Julian, the hypothetical story-based entity seeing the visions. Bal furthermore recommends distinguishing two types of focalizor, a character-bound focalizor (CF), when the focalization represented is that of a character, and an external one (EF). ‘The vision through which the elements are presented’ is primarily that of Julian in 1373; she therefore is not only a character but also a character-bound focalizor.

It is possible to claim that CF Julian in Revelation is a composite of all CF ‘Julians’ looking back through the years, with an EF Julian at the moment of telling seeing all these characters see.⁴ For the sake of the clarity of the analysis, however, I discern only one CF Julian in each text. Nevertheless,

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¹ Ibid., 146.
² Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, 186, emphasis in the original.
³ Bal, Narratology, 146.
⁴ Nicholas Watson has noted this palimpsestic quality of CF Julian’s seeing, writing that Julian’s memory of her mind during the visions perhaps has undergone ‘that drift towards greater vividness that occurs when we tell an important dream many times, gradually fusing our sense of what we experienced with our understanding of what it meant and our desire to convey some of the force as well as the bare bones of the experience to our listeners’. Watson, ‘The Trinitarian Hermeneutic in Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love’, 82.
because they see differently, *Vision’s* CF Julian and *Revelation’s* CF Julian differ from one another.

This distinction between narrator Julian, character Julian and character-bound focalizor Julian is especially helpful because of the colouring with subjectivity earlier described.

First of all, with the exception of the brief moment of Julian’s mother looking in *Vision*, Julian’s careful focalization is the only one which *Vision* and *Revelation* represent. This makes the reader likely to accept CF Julian’s perception of the events as well as her interpretations of her visions. According to Bal, being a focalizor gives a character an advantage over the other characters: ‘the reader watches with the character’s eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision represented by that character’.

Secondly, the colouring with subjectivity differs in *Vision* and *Revelation*. That is, the attitudes with which Julian focalizes changes, and so do the physical aspects thereof. As a result, the focalized objects come across differently. For instance, in *Revelation* CF Julian observes Christ more lovingly than her *Vision* equivalent does, often thinking his body ‘sweet’ or ‘tender’. This fond perception gives the visions in *Revelation* a greater sense of emotional intimacy, yet also makes CF Julian’s clinical studying of the slow dehydration of Christ’s body puzzling.

Returning to the scene of Julian on her deathbed, the comparison shows that narrator Julian gives CF Julian’s focalization more independence in *Revelation*. In *Vision* CF Julian lowers her gaze because the process of dying demands it and because a male authority figure instructs her to do so. In *Revelation*, in contrast, she not only assents, but also actively shifts her gaze (‘and so I did’). The reference to the moment of death has been removed; instead the looking itself is foregrounded. In *Revelation*, thus, CF Julian shifts her focalization from God and heaven to the image of the suffering, human Christ because she wishes to.

**Medieval Optics in Devotional Culture**

The model of seeing described above, however, is unidirectional, and like many film theories, it assumes that CF Julian controls the focalization. However, medieval thought on optics, and its expression in devotional culture, did not consider the focalized object passive. Instead, the focalized object was thought to have a certain amount of power over the focalization as well. Carolyn P. Collette, in her study on sight in Chaucer warns against applying modern assumptions about sight to medieval literature. Collette writes that ‘the subject one looked at was thought to be as important as the act of looking itself, and the act of looking always a dynamic interchange

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1 Bal, *Narratology*, 149, 150.
Julian’s focalizing of the crucifix or Christ’s body, then, is a reciprocal exchange; both Julian and the crucifix contribute to the focalization.

The term ‘interchange’ does not, however, fully capture of how physical, intimate and transformative the relation between focalizer and focalized is, according to medieval optics and devotional culture. Seeing was often thought to entail a physical connection between the seer and the seen; focalizer, focalized object or both were thought to extend itself to the other. Sight, then, was thought to resemble touch. Seeing visions, considered very similar to non-visionary seeing in general, was thought to involve these processes as well.

In the context of medieval devotion, thirteenth-century Oxford philosopher Roger Bacon’s synthesis of two optical theories is particularly relevant, as Susannah Biernoff has shown. These two optical models are intromission and extramission. According to intromission theory, all matter replicates either rays, or images of itself, ‘species’, through space, with those images or rays finally striking the human eye and entering or being absorbed by the mind. The extramission tradition claimed that the eye itself emitted species or a ray of light, which would land on the perceived object.

According to Bacon’s synthesis, the eye is both active and passive. The eye receives the ‘species’ emitted by the perceived object, which imprint themselves on the viewer’s mind as if on wax and physically transform him or her. According to Bacon, the viewer has to send out species as well, in order for vision to be complete. That is, the species which the object emits need to be ‘aided and excited by the species of the eye’.

Moreover, sight, as an extension of the embodied soul, actively reaches out and takes hold of what it sees. Bacon claimed that the eye ‘passes over the separate points of a visible object’ and ‘grasp[s] its surface and contain[s] its extremities’. Seeing, thus, transforms both viewer and viewed; it is, as Biernoff argues, a mutual assimilation. This mutual assimilation and transformation was also thought to take place when looking at a devotional

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5 Ibid., 5. My summary is a highly simplified version of what was a lively scientific debate.
6 Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, vol. 2 p. 471.7.4)
7 Ibid., vol. 2 440, 468.
object, seeing visions, or visualizing biblical scenes. These forms of seeing were considered very similar to non-visionary seeing.\(^1\)

What is more, devotional culture not only drew on this conceptualization of sight as mutual assimilation but also amplified it, especially the aspect of physical transformation.\(^2\) For instance, according to fourteenth-century Parisian academic Peter of Limoges, by gazing on an image of Christ’s wounds, the viewer can physically imitate Christ’s suffering body.\(^3\) The focalizor, then, becomes like what is focalized.

Though vision was considered to be a reciprocal process, the viewer’s will was nonetheless thought to play a crucial role in seeing. Augustine for instance claimed that the will applied the sense to the object, and makes the image remain in the memory.\(^4\) Bacon in his *Perspectiva* describes both bodily vision and spiritual vision as requiring the exercise of the will:

> It has been said that not only is intromission [of species] required for vision, but also the extramission and cooperation of its own power and species. Similarly, spiritual vision requires not only that the soul should be the recipient from without of divine grace and powers, but also that it should cooperate by its own power. For consent and the exercise of free will are required, along with the grace of God, if we are to see and gain the state of salvation.\(^5\)

Just as the crucifix is no passive object according to Bacon’s model, Julian is no passive viewer of the visions. Instead, she exercises her will by seeing with *avisement*, and therefore collaborates with God in creating the visions.

The death-bed scene can be read in accordance with this understanding of sight. CF Julian’s gaze grasps the figure, and her eyes send out species. At the same time the figure of suffering Christ begins to sends out species as well, which imprint themselves upon her soul and mind, thereby altering her physically, so that she begins resemble the object. The somatic changes in both *Vision* and *Revelation* following this change in gaze suggest exactly such assimilation with the figure. Just as Christ partly or

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wholly closes his eyes on the cross, Julian’s sight begins to fail, and her head sags down to one side, so that it mirrors that of the figure. When Julian starts to look at the crucifix, then, she engages in an exchange which not merely a dialogue. Rather, it is a visual communion which results in a mutual assimilation, or, in Biernoff’s words ‘a bodily participation in the divine’. The conceptualization of seeing as visual communion is significant for the entire analysis in this chapter. After all, it implies that changes in focalization are not only changes in how and what focalizors see, but also in to what extent these focalizors transform and are transformed by the focalized objects.

By exploring focalization, this chapter connects and more closely examines two traits of Vision and Revelation often pointed out in previous discussions, their ‘intensely visual character’, present particularly in Revelation, and their intertextual relation to affective meditation works. Concerning this visuality, Cate Gunn for instance writes: ‘the visual importance of Julian’s revelation and theology is indisputable; it is as though her whole being is rapt up in her gaze on the vision of God.’ Furthermore, this gaze changes in Revelation, as Barry Windeatt notes: ‘Julian quite literally alters her way of looking at the original shewings.’ This change, Windeatt specifies, consists of a ‘deepening of visuality’; for instance, in the Tenth Revelation, when Christ looks into his side, ‘the audience’s looking now follows and responds to the presented gazes of those on screen.’ The reader being invited to share character Julian’s gaze has also been noted by other critics. Michael Raby, for example, writes ‘Where Julian looks, so do her readers.’ Yet, with the exception of Windeatt’s remark, the studies that pay attention to this demonstrative aspect do not examine how Vision and Revelation differ in this.

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1 This detail can be found in affective meditation texts. Many crucifixes and Man of Sorrows images depict Christ with his eyes either partially open or closed.
2 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 66.
3 Biernoff terms this union by seeing ‘ocular communion’, but I reserve that term for the medieval practice of equating seeing the elevation of the host with receiving the host. Biernoff, Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages, 134.
4 Baker, Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book, 40.
6 Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Her Audience’, 8.
7 Windeatt, ‘Julian’s Showings: Work in Progress’ 11.
8 Ibid.
Other critics, such as Baker and Dale, refer briefly to some of the visions as resembling a photographic or cinematic close-up. These cinematic metaphors are apt and evocative, but obscure to a certain degree the reciprocity and physical transformation that seeing was thought to entail. Vincent Gillespie has also contextualized Revelation with both introversion and extramission theory, discussing the importance of light or lack thereof to the visions; my analysis focuses instead the interactive, assimilative nature of character Julian’s seeing.

Regarding affective meditation, I argue that by means of the changes in focalization Vision both evokes and challenges affective meditation conventions. My argument therefore concurs with that of others, who have also juxtaposed Julian’s works and affective meditation texts. However, I would like to add to these discussions by claiming that Revelation —by offering an alternative meditative focalization— challenges affective meditation discourse more subtly and strategically than previously assumed. Some scholars suggest that Vision and Vision are intended to evoke a similar, co- Passionate response in the reader; others stress that Vision blocks an affective response and subverts affective meditation conventions.

Jennifer Bryan for instance argues that Julian ‘refus[es] to let the pre- scripted “I” of devotional meditation define her own beholding.’ Agreeing with this, I would like to add that this refusal also lies in the formal features of this beholding, that is, the more demonstrative focalization.

Affective meditation was one of the most pervasive and popular devotional traditions of the later Middle Ages. When in the early chapters of both Vision and Revelation character and CF Julian wishes to have seen what Mary Magdalen and the other characters present on Calvary saw, she participates in this tradition.

By meditatively reading certain prose texts or lyrics, the believer vividly imagines him- or herself present at the scenes of Christ’s Passion or other events of his life in order to feel co- Passion, fellow-suffering. Such works were widely read throughout medieval Europe by both laity and

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2 Gillespie, ‘The Colours of Contemplation: Less Light on Julian of Norwich.’
3 Baker, 40–51; Lewis, ‘A Picture of Christendom: The Creation of an Interpretive Community in Julian of Norwich’s A Revelation of Love’, 86; Lochrie, Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh, 86; Baker, Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book, 40–51.
4 Aers, 86.
5 Bryan, Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England, 156, 157.
7 McNamer, Affective Meditation, 12.
clergy; they also formed part of medieval women’s literary culture. Two highly popular works represent affective meditation texts in my discussion: the fourteenth-century *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, written for a Poor Clare and often attributed to the Franciscan John of Caulibus, and its fifteenth-century Middle English adaptation, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, by Nicholas Love.²

Affective meditation and its conventions pervaded late medieval religious culture to a great extent; *The Book of Margery Kempe* strikingly illustrates this.³ Contemporary readers of *Vision* and *Revelation*, then, when encountering Julian’s wish for a sight of Christ’s Passion, likely expected scenes similar to those in the *MVC* or the *Mirror* to follow; they perhaps also expected the texts to evoke a similar co-passionate state.

It is also likely that they thought of the visualizing recommended by the *MVC* or the *Mirror* as comparable to Julian’s looking at the crucifix or her seeing the visions. Moreover, as Barbara Newman has shown, such visualizing was strongly encouraged and cultivated, so that the line between ‘I visualized’ and ‘I saw’ was rather fine.⁴ A similar conflation of visualizing and seeing is found in the *MVC*, according to Michelle Karnes. Karnes points out that the *MVC* makes the believer’s imaginative presence in the gospel events nearly the equivalent of actual presence.⁵ Imaginative focalization thus becomes the equivalent of physical focalization, and likewise makes the focalizer resemble the focalized object.

Three features of affective meditation texts, and of the *MVC* and the *Mirror* in particular, are relevant for the discussion in this chapter. To begin with, affective meditation texts feature script-like instructions on how and what the reader should visualize, and in which direction, and with which mental, emotional and volitional attitude. For instance, the reader of the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is told to imagine herself present at Calvary: ‘Make þe þere present in þi mynde, beholde Alle þat shale be done aȝeynus bi lorde Jesu.’ ['Now make yourself there present in your consciousness, observing all that shall be done by Christ himself'].⁶ The *Mirror* narrator also specifies in what manner the reader should visualize:

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² However, McNamer suggests that the core of the *MVC* may have been written by a Tuscan nun for an audience of fellow nuns. Ibid., 18. Stallings-Taney, *Iohannis de Caulibus: Meditaciones Vitae Christi*. Taney, Miller, and Stallings-Taney, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*.
⁴ Ibid., 16.
⁵ Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages*, 146.
⁶ ed. Sargent, ch. XIII p. 174 ll. 7, 8. (My translation)
‘take hede now diligently with alle thi herte’ [‘play close attention diligently with all thy heart’].

Secondly, as Michelle Karnes has shown, both the MVC and the Mirror train the reader’s imaginative seeing, but to different ends. Karnes argues that in the MVC, imaginative seeing allows the reader to become closer to the scenes and the characters, and finally leads to mystical union with God-the-Trinity. In the Mirror, in contrast, imagination creates distance and can only create an representation of Christ’s humanity. I suggest that Revelation, like the MVC, intends to teach its reader a particular cognitive process, namely seeing with avisement, but does so by making what CF Julian sees more challenging.

Thirdly, their associating co-Passion with women is a ‘robust feature’ of both the MVC and Mirror, and of affective meditation in general. The narrator often tells the addressee to empathize with a female character, and sometimes to share this character’s focalization. This character is often the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalen. The Mirror for instance instructs the reader to share the Virgin contemplating of Christ, just deceased:

Loo now hangeþ oure lorde on the crosse dede [...] his sorouful modere [...] sette hir done by side the crosse & beholdeth piteously hir dere son [...] þou also if þou beholde wele di lorde, þou maiht haue here matire ynough of hye compassion, seynge him so tormentede, þat fro þe sole of þe fote in to þe heist part of þe hede þer was in him none hole place.

[Look, now our Lord hangs dead on the cross [...] His sorrowful mother sits down near the side of the cross, and mournfully beholds her son [...] you, if you will also behold your lord, you may have here sufficient [meditative] material for high compassion, seeing him so tormented, that from the sole of the foot to the highest part of the head there is nothing whole about him.]  

The meditant shares Mary’s sitting position; like Mary he or she looks up, from Christ’s feet to his head. In addition, these works tend to describe the addressee as female, even when the actual audience was mixed or male. Thus, the reader is placed in a female subject position.

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1 ed. Sargent, ch. XLIII, 174.
4 ed. Sargent, ch. XLIII p. 177 ll. 4-7. My translation.
The reader is even encouraged to meditate as if with a female body, for instance that of Saint Cecilia, as McNamer demonstrates. In her thought-provoking words, ‘compassion, as scripted in and through Middle English meditations on the Passion, is largely a function of gender performance: to perform compassion is to feel like a woman.’

The narrators of Vision and Revelation pay lip-service to this convention of a female subject position. In Vision character Julian is cast in the role of a simple woman, and both works invite the evenchristen to take up her focalization, just as affective meditation readers were expected to see from Mary’s perspective:

> And ye that heeres and sees this vision and this techinge [...].it is Goddes wille and my desire that ye take it with as grete joy and liking as Jhesu had shewed it yowe as he did to me. (Vision 6:10).

> [And you who hear and see this vision and this teaching [...] it is God’s will and my desire that you receive it with joy and delight as great as if Jesus had shown it to you, as he did to me.]

With its direct address to the audience (‘yowe’), this passage is reminiscent of affective meditation texts. The reader is invited to visualize (‘sees this vision’) in a manner that matches her focalizing (‘as he did to me’).

Revelation removes ‘as he did to me’ and ‘my desire’. Revelation thus implies that when visualizing the scenes, the reader’s focalization automatically takes up that of CF Julian. CF Julian’s focalization dominates the text so that—instead of inviting the reader actively to take it up—her gaze engulfs the reader.

**Closer to Christ than Mary**

One set of changes in Revelation which make CF Julian’s focalizing more demonstrative is how the narrator places CF Julian and the focalized objects closer to one another. As a result, CF Julian’s closer focalizing of Christ’s body surpasses the co-Passionate focalizing of Mary and subsumes it into her own. As seeing according to medieval thought involved a physical encounter between two bodies, this closer focalization allows CF Julian in Revelation to assimilate Christ’s body more than her Vision equivalent and than Mary, and allows the evenchristen reader to do the same.

The changes in the Tenth Revelation illustrate how in Revelation CF Julian’s focalization becomes so close that her body almost intertwines with

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1 McNamer, Affective Meditation, 131.
2 Ibid., 119.
the focalized object. In *Vision*, the spatial relation between CF Julian and Christ’s body is similar to that between Mary and Christ in the *Mirror* passage cited earlier:

The blissed bodye dried allane lange time, with wringing of the nailes and paysinge of the hede and weight of the body. (Vis. 10. 17-19)

[The blessed body was left drying for a long time— with wrenching by the nails and the drooping of the head, and the weight of the body.]

The narrator positions CF Julian sufficiently close for her to see the wrenching by the nails, yet also sufficiently distant to see the entirety of the body. CF Julian can also see beyond the crucifix, since a few lines later she notices how her mother, standing among the other people at Julian’s bedside, looks at her. This creates multiple perspectives, as Liz Herbert McAvoy points out: the reader can momentarily focalize from another perceiving body than Julian’s. Furthermore, the narrator has the crucifix with Christ’s body occupy the same point in space as during the preceding vision, when it hangs before CF Julian. Thus, the spatial relation between focalizor and focalized object is static, allows for emotional distance and creates the possibility of seeing Julian from another character’s perspective.

In *Revelation*, the closeness of the focalization in this visionary moment of seeing Christ’s head increases, both in comparison to *Vision* and in the scene itself. In the beginning, CF Julian observes the entire body. After a while, however, her look has brought his body so close that their faces almost touch:

And the body satilde for weight by long time hanging, and persing and rasing of the heed, and binding of the crowne, alle baken with drye blode, with the sweet here clinging the drye flesh to the thornes and the thornes to the flesh, drying. And in the beginning, while the flesh was fresh and bleding, the continualle sitting of the thornes made the woundes wide. And furthermore I saw that the swete skinne and the tender flesh, with the here and the blode, was all rased and losede above with the thornes, and broken in many pecis, and were hanging as they wolde hastily have fallen downe (Rev. 17. 9-16)

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1 Ibid., 15.
2 McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms*, 120; McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 76, 78.
The body sagged under its own weight through hanging there for a long time, along with the piercing and twisting of the head and the binding of the crown of thorns, all baked with dry blood, with the dear hair and the dry flesh clinging to the thorns, and the thorns to the dying flesh. And at the beginning, while the flesh was fresh and bleeding, the continual pressure of the thorns made the wounds wide. And furthermore I saw that the dear skin and the tender flesh, with the hair and the blood, was all lifted and loosened away from the bone by the thorns with which it had been slashed in many places, like a sagging cloth, as if it would soon have fallen off because it was so heavy and loose while it retained its natural moisture.

Unlike in Vision, when CF Julian directs her attention to the head, in this scene more than just the face is focalized. The focalization now also includes the wide wounds, the thorns being caked in blood, and the tangle of thorns, hair and flesh. In spite of the tangle, CF Julian can still distinguish the many pieces in which the skin has been broken, and how the thorns have scraped and loosed the skin. By letting CF Julian see Christ’s skin and the thorns in such detail, Revelation depicts Christ’s face as only centimetres away from Julian’s face.

Moreover, in addition to being so close to Christ’s face that she can see the raw flesh, CF Julian is no longer able to look beyond the cross: the reference to her mother and ‘othere’ [others] has been removed. Consequently, the reader cannot shift his or her imaginative gaze and see Julian through another character’s eyes. In Revelation, then, Christ’s body and Julian are in such close proximity that Christ’s body entirely fills CF Julian’s field of vision, leaving her unable to see anything else. The narrator thus binds CF Julian’s focalization to Christ’s head as tightly as the thorns do, and the reader’s focalization equally strongly to CF Julian’s.

In works of affective meditation, including the MCV and the Mirror, Mary alone is allowed such close beholding of Christ. Of all the characters in the crucifixion scenes, Mary —the source of his matter— is positioned nearest to Christ’s suffering body. Both the Mirror and MVC place her between Christ’s cross and that of one of the thieves, closely beside the cross. The Mirror connects this intimate gaze and proximity to co-Passion:

And so stode þe modere byside the crosse of hir sone, bytwix his crosse & the þefes crosse. She turned neuer hir eyene fro him, she was full of anguish as he was also.

[And so stood the mother beside the cross of her son, between his cross and the thief's cross. She never turned her eyes away from him; she was full of anguish, just as he was.]¹

Mary’s unwavering seeing from beside the cross allows her to experience to the same amount of suffering as Christ does. The MVC brings Mary’s gaze closer to the cross than that of the other followers:

‘His mother stood by the cross (Jn 19:25) between his cross and the thief’s cross. She did not take her eyes off her son [...] near the cross (Jn. 19:25), with our Lady, were John and Magdalene, and our Lady’s two sisters [...] they felt deep sorrow for our Lord and Lady.²

Thus, whereas Mary can only look at the cross, the others can still observe her grief.

Similarly, when the MVC and the Mirror tell the meditant to see as if present themselves, the recommended focalization is not as close as Mary’s. This is because all events on and around Calvary need to be observed. The Mirror, for instance, has the reader visualize the conversion of a centurion, and how ‘alle þat grete multitude goþe awey towarde  the cite’ [the great multitudes leaves, going in the direction of the city’].³ Consequently, only by identifying with the Virgin, that is, by taking up her focalization, does the reader of the MVC and the Mirror achieve the greatest proximity to Christ.

However, both the Mirror and MVC recommend only once that the meditant share this focalization, in the scene mentioned earlier. Mary and the others sit down at the foot of the cross after Christ’s death, contemplating him and the reader is told to ‘carefully contemplate your Lord[...] from the sole of his foot up to the crown of his head’ (emphasis in the original).⁴ Mary’s focalization, then, is a highly privileged perspective. Hers is the most intimate gaze in the narrative, yet only occasionally available to the reader. Instead, as Sarah Stanbury has shown, the ‘intersected trajectories of multiple lines of sight’ available in affective meditation narratives turns her act of looking into a spectacle for the meditant.⁵ Thus, the reader more often looks at Mary than with her.

² Taney, Miller, and Stallings-Taney, Meditations on the Life of Christ, 254 ch. 78. Italics in the original.
⁴ trans. Taney, Miller and Stallings-Taney, p. 256 (ed. Stallings-Taney, Iohannis de Caulibus: Meditaciones Vite Christi, ch. LXVIII ll. 149-151.)
⁵ Stanbury, ‘The Virgin’s Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion’, 86.
Returning to *Vision* and *Revelation*, in *Vision* CF Julian’s focalization resembles that of Mary in affective meditation texts, but in *Revelation* it is closer than Mary’s. Mary can only focalize Christ’s body from the foot of the cross, and so does by extension the meditant reading the *MVC* and *Mirror*. *Revelation*, in contrast, puts CF Julian —and the *evencristen*— on eye-level with Christ’s face, only inches away from the raw flesh under the skin, as if trying to envelop CF Julian and the *evencristen* in that skin. Mary never achieves such physical and visual proximity in the *MVC* and the *Mirror*.¹

*Revelation* emphasizes this surpassing of Mary’s focalization by, instead of Mary’s, only offer CF Julian’s focalization to the reader as a model for visualization. In both *Vision* and *Revelation* Christ’s body is seen hanging alone, and neither text refers to Mary beholding her son on the cross. Both works thus resist affective meditation conventions and traditional representations of the Calvary scene in general. In *Vision* and *Revelation*, Julian does see Mary in a co-Passionate state, but ascribes this co-Passion to the ‘kinde love’ ‘natural love’ between the Virgin and her Son, rather than to Mary’s seeing, as affective meditation texts do (*Rev*. 18. 1-10; *Vis*. 10. 38–41). In addition, Mary is described in non-imagistic, abstract terms, making it impossible to visualize her co-Passionate body or looking and to turn her into a spectacle. As a result, Julian’s painfully close yet co-Passionate gaze at Christ alone is the only affective visualization model available to the reader.

By bringing CF Julian’s body in such proximity to Christ that she seems to be hanging on the cross with him, the narrator memorably illustrates her own theological claim that ‘we be now […] in his crosse with him, dying’ (*Rev*. 21. 12) ‘[we are now […] dying on the cross with him.]’.²

Furthermore, she also allows CF Julian and the *evencristen* to achieve a privileged position on the cross which affective meditation texts only grant Mary. Character Julian and the *evencristen* occupy this place physically, while Mary only does so virtually or mentally. In the *MVC* and the *Mirror*, Mary’s co-Passion parallels Christ’s suffering to the extent that she in her soul shares in Christ’s crucified position. In the *Mirror*, Christ from the cross exclaims to his father ‘loo, now she hangeþ on the crosse with me’ ‘Look, she hangs on the cross with me’. The *Mirror* narrator underlines Christ’s words: ‘she hange in soule with hir sone on þe crosse’. ‘[In her soul, she is hanging

¹ Julian’s close focalizing is also unusual in comparison to that of other visionaries and to Mary’s perspective in others’ visions Birgitta appears to be observing from a greater distance when seeing that ‘þai put on the crowne of þo þorne on his heued, and set it so faste þareto þat þe blode of his heued filled his eyn full, and his eris and his berd were all rede of blode. And þan þai þat did him on þe crosse tuke awai t he burdes, and þan hange he vpon the crosse.’ [They put a crown of thorns on his head, fixing it so tightly that the blood from his head filled his eyes, and his ears and his beard were all dyed red of blood. And those that nailed him to the cross, removed the boards, and then he was hanging on the cross.] ed. Ellis, Bk VII:XVI, ll. 14-19.

² *Revelations of Divine Love*, 68.
on the cross with her son.'].¹ Yet this inner sharing in Christ’s crucifixion is not available to the meditant. The narrator of the MVC stresses the ineffability of Christ’s and Mary’s suffering: ‘Virtually she was hanging on the cross with her son […] the terrible stresses are everywhere and his torments can only be imagined. They cannot be recounted.’² The torments being too great to be narrated, the reader cannot share in Mary’s hanging on the cross with Christ. Revelation, in contrast, places CF Julian’s perceiving body on the cross with Christ, and by extension the visualizing evencristen as well.

According to the devotional understanding of sight, being in such proximity to Christ allows CF Julian to assimilate Christ’s body more than in Vision. That is, the ‘species’ of each minute detail and change of Christ’s body are more deeply imprinted on her soul and mind, making her body resemble Christ more and her suffering an exact parallel of that of Christ. CF Julian in Revelation and the visualizing evencristen reader therefore achieve greater consciousness of Christ’s Passion than CF Julian in Vision or Mary from the foot of the cross. At the same time they can experience a level of co-Passion previously only available to Mary. Mary’s unique, privileged Calvary experience is thus surpassed by and included in CF Julian’s focalization, in which all evencristen can share.

**Subsuming Mary’s Unwavering Focalization into Communal Focalization**

In addition to CF Julian’s and Christ’s body being closer to one another, the narrator of Vision also makes CF Julian’s focalizing more demonstrative by giving it a clearer sense of orientation. Such clearer sense of a movement towards a certain point also appears in the first re-seeing of the parable of the Lord and Servant. In that vision, CF Julian first looks at the Lord and Servant in general, and then studies them in an increasingly detailed manner, from their sitting and standing to their clothes, and finally to their inner attitudes. Medieval rhetoric called a sense of direction in a text intention.³ It is therefore possible to speak of a more intention-filled focalization.

In the Passion visions, such an increased intention can be noticed in the vision of the dehydrating of Christ’s body, showing a better oriented move from the parts to the whole. Both Vision and Revelation state that Christ is on the verge of death, creating a parallel between Julian’s observing of

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¹ ed. Sargent, ch. XLI p. 176 l. 28, 29; ibid., ll. 13, 14.
Christ’s final moments and Mary’s. In Vision, the focalization is rather scattered:

After this, Christ shewed me a partie of his passion nere his dyinge. I sawe that swete face as it were drye and bludlyelesse with pale dyinge; sithen mare deade pale, langourande, and than turned more deade to the blewe; and sithene mare blewe, as the fleshe turned mare depee dede. For alle the paines that Criste sufferde in his bodye shewed to me in the blissede face, as farfuthe as I sawe it, and nameleye in the lippes, thare I sawe this foure colourse [...]. This was a hevy change, to see this deepe dyinge. And the nese claungede and dried to my sight. (Vis. 10. 1-8.)

[After this Christ showed me a part of his Passion, close to his death. I saw that dear face as if it were dry and bloodless with the pallor of death; and then more deathly pale in anguish, and then turning blue as death advanced, and afterwards a darker blue as death took more hold on his flesh. For all the pains that Christ suffered in his body were visible to me in the blessed face as far as I could see it, and especially in the lips. There I saw these four colours [...] This was a grievous change, to see this deep dying, and also, as it seemed to me, the nose shrivelled and dried up.]

The focalizor’s gaze rests mainly on the face, dwelling on the lips for a while. Two abrupt changes in focus follow it, created by the reference to Christ’s body as a whole suffering (‘alle the paines that Criste sufferde in his bodye’) and by the mention of the nose. This somewhat chaotic seeing creates the impression of emotional turmoil. Faced with Christ’s impending death, neither the narrator nor CF Julian knows where to look.

In Revelation, in contrast, the focalizor moves her gaze unflinchingly from one detail of Christ’s face to the other, and finally observes the whole body:

After this, Crist shewde a parte of his passion nere his dying. I saw the swete face as it were drye and blodeles with pale dying and sithen more deade pale, languring; and then turned more deade into blew; and sithen more browne blew, as the flesh turned more depe dede. For his passion shewde to me most properly in his blessed face, and namely in his lippes, there I saw these four colours [...] This was a swemfulle change, to se this depe dying. And also the nose clonged togeder and dried, to my sight, and the swete body

1 Revelations of Divine Love, 14.
waxed browne and blacke, alle changed oute of the fair, fresh and lively colour of himself into drye dying. (Rev. 16. 1-9)

[After this Christ showed part of his Passion, close to his death. I saw his dear face as it was dry and bloodless with the pallor of death; and then more deathly pale, in anguish, and then turning blue as death advanced, and afterwards a darker blue as death took more hold on his flesh. For his Passion was revealed to me most distinctly in his blessed face, and especially in his lips. There I saw these four colours [...] This was a grievous change, to see this deep dying, and also, as it seemed to me, the nose shrivelled and dried up, and the dear body was brown and black, completely transformed from his fair living colour as it dried out in death.]¹

Here the focalization first includes the face, then such aspects of the face such as the lips and the nose, and finally ‘pans out’ to look at the entire body. Such a movement suggests a more determined, calmer way of seeing the vision. CF Julian may be bedbound and weak with illness, but she strongly controls the movement of her eyes. In addition, this unwavering focalizing is both easier for the evencristen to imagine CF Julian doing as well as to visualize. The evencristen can easily execute such a movement while gazing at a Man of Sorrows image.

Both the MVC and the Mirror ascribe to Mary a similar unflinching focalizing of Christ. According to the MVC, Mary ‘did not take her eyes off her son’.² The Mirror recounts that she ‘turnede neuer hir eyene fro him’ ['never turned her eyes from him.'].³ Mary, however, cannot sustain this steady looking at her son; the co-Passion brought about by it causes her to collapse in a swoon. Her focalization of Christ’s suffering is thereby interrupted. The MVC explicitly refers to Mary’s losing sensory awareness: ‘[S]o devastaded, she witnessed, him weaken, fail, weep and die [...] because of the many stresses, she became like a person rendered senseless [insensibilis] or half-dead⁴ (emphasis added). Thus, the very body that allows her the closest focalizing of Christ of all the characters in the narrative obstructs that focalizing.

The narrator of Revelation, in contrast, does not allow CF Julian to swoon or to cease focalizing Christ’s suffering body. The replacing of ‘hevye

¹ Ibid., 61, 62.
³ ed. Sargent, ch. XLIII, p. 176, ll. 17, 18.
change’ with ‘swemfulle change’ is telling. ‘Swemfulle’ is derived from the noun ‘swēm’, which denotes not only ‘sorrow’ but also ‘a swoon, faint’. Christ’s suffering, then, is a sight so grievous it almost causes the observer to swoon.

Yet CF Julian does not faint; her body has the advantage over Mary’s of not being the source of Christ’s matter as Mary’s. Therefore, when CF Julian starts seeing, her body does not possess same degree of compassion as Mary’s does at that stage, which allows CF Julian greater control over her perceiving body. Consequently, her focalization of Christ, and the evenchristen’s visualizing, is of a longer duration than Mary’s or the reader of the MVC or Mirror, allowing the Revelation reader greater resemblance to Christ than the reader of the MVC or Mirror.

**Exchanging Looks: More Interactive Focalization**

Although Windeatt suggests that only in Revelation the audience follows and responds to the gazes of the characters, it is possible to notice one instance of interactive focalization in Vision. CF Julian in Vision sees another character see; this results in her seeing from that character’s perspective, that is, merging her focalization with theirs. This moment of ocular interaction takes place after the Passion visions. Christ has just suddenly changed his expression from the anguish of dying to joy and has looked ‘fulle merelye and gladlye’ down into the wound in his side. He now shifts his gaze to look down, to where Mary usually stands in Calvary groups:

[W]ith the same chere and mirthe he loked downe on the right side, and brought to my minde whare our ladye stood in the time of his passion, and saide: ‘Wille thowe see hire?’ And I answered and saide: ‘ya goode lord, gramercy, if it be thy while.’ Ofte times I prayed it, and wened to hafe sene here in bodely likenes. And Jhesu in that worde shewed me a gastelye sight of hire [...] he shewed here than hye and nobille and gloriouse and pleseante to him aboven alle creatures [...] as sho is nowe, in likinge, wirshippe, and joye. (Vis. 13. 7-12)

[And with this same expression and gladness he looked down on his right and brought to my mind where our Lady stood during his Passion, and said, ‘Would you like to see her?’ And I answered and said, ‘Yes, good Lord, thank you, if it be your will.’ I prayed for this often, and I expected to have seen her present bodily, but I did not see her like that. And with those words Jesus showed me a spiritual vision of her [...] he showed her high, and noble, and glorious, and

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1. ‘swēm’ (n) *MED.*
pleasing to him above all other created beings [...] as she is now, in
delight, honour, and joy.]¹

CF Julian, still looking straight ahead as she did in the earlier visions, sees
Christ shift his gaze from his wound to a point lower in the visionary space,
on the viewer's left. Like in the previous visions, when the body hung 'allane'
(Vis. 10. 18), Mary is absent from the visionary space beside the cross. CF
Julian then merges her focalizing with that of Christ in the visions, and sees
from his perspective, as 'downe' and 'on the right side' suggests. (From
Julian's own perspective Mary is on the left). This allows Christ to share a
small part of his 'phantasm', mental image in his memory, of Mary at that
time with CF Julian’s ‘minde’, namely, the place where Mary stood.

CF Julian, however, expects a scene like in a fixture of Passion
meditation and visions. After all, up until now, she has only seen Mary’s co-
Passion ‘in partye’ and rather abstractly (Vis. 10. 38). Moreover, the Passion
scenes, naturally associated with such a bodily sight of Mary, are over.
Mary’s absence in these scenes defies genre conventions and narrative
expectations. It makes the visions as unconventional as a vision of only Mary
looking at an empty cross would be, or an Arthurian romance in which, even
after two-thirds of the story, no knight has appeared. Familiar with affective
meditation conventions, CF Julian both wishes and expects to see fully what
Christ saw. Christ’s question seems to promise this union of focalization and
this wished-for sight of Mary, as several other critics also have pointed out.²
CF Julian’s eager assenting is therefore hardly surprising. Yet the narrator
has Christ deny her this wish, frustrating her attempt to steer her experience
into familiar visionary channels, as Nicholas Watson observes.³ Instead, the
narrator has Christ direct CF Julian’s attention to how God sees Mary now.
Thus, not only Revelation, but this passage also in Vision as well, both evoke
and resist affective meditation focalization, by letting CF Julian’s focalization
interact but then blocking it.

Julian’s focalizing of Christ, and focalizing with Christ evokes Mary’s
and Christ’s anguish exchanging of looks and of pain in affective
meditation texts. The Mirror describes how for both Mother and Son seeing
the other’s pain increases their own:

[A]nd alle þese reproues, blasphemies & despites ben done, seynge
and herynge his most sorrowful modere, whose compassion &
sorowe made him hir sone to haue þe more bitter peyne.

¹Revelations of Divine Love, 19.
³ Watson, ‘Composition’, 649.
[This mocking, blaspheming and scorning were being seen and heard by his most sorrowful mother, whose compassion and sorrow made him her son have even more bitter pain.]¹

An ocular mise-en-abyme of co-Passionate suffering can be noticed here, similar to the ‘complicitous cycle of suffering’ between Christ and Mary which Stanbury discerns in affective meditation lyrics.² Christ sees Mary suffer (‘sorrowful’), which increases his own (‘more bitter peyne’). Seeing that suffering increases Mary’s pain, the seeing of which increases Christ’s in turn, and so on. Her looking at him causes him more pain than he can bear, as suggested by how he attempts to interrupt the cycle by directing his mother’s gaze towards John: ‘woman, loo thi sone’ [‘Woman, look there, thy son.’]³ Christ also tries to avoid his mother’s eyes by replacing his and Mary’s seeing with what McNamer calls ‘the Father’s way of seeing,’ which is dispassionate and abstract.⁴

The MVC describes this wish for divine ocular overruling: ‘Her son prayed silently to the Father for her: ‘My Father, You see how afflicted my mother is […] You see her desolate, afflicted with deep sorrow all the day.’⁵ Yet Christ’s and Mary’s co-Passionate exchange of focalization ceases only when Christ dies, as the ‘she witnessed him die’ cited earlier suggests.

Christ’s other friends and family members are excluded from this exchange of focalization between Christ and Mary. Christ is not described as seeing their suffering or responding to their looking, although they likewise look at Christ. Moreover, although McNamer has shown that the meditant is invited to adopt the Virgin’s ‘specifically maternal’ mode of seeing, neither the MVC nor the Mirror lets Christ during his Passion return the meditant’s gaze like their non-Passion scenes imply, or like Man of Sorrows images do.⁶ Mary’s focalization is therefore not only privileged; by contributing to this visual and vicious cycle of suffering, Mary’s looking also controls Christ’s body to a greater degree than that of the other characters. Only Mary’s ‘act of looking controls the linear drama of Christ’s suffering,’ as Stanbury writes.⁷

² Stanbury, ‘The Virgin’s Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion’, 1088.
³ ed. Sargent, ch. XLIII, p. 177, ll. 12, 13.
⁴ McNamer, Affective Meditation, 137, 138.
⁶ McNamer, Affective Meditation, 138, 134–42; Biernoff, Sight and Embodiment, 146, 147.
⁷ Stanbury, ‘The Virgin’s Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion’, 1088.
Thus, by denying CF Julian’s wish for a bodily sight of Mary, the narrator prevents CF Julian from seeing Christ and Mary engage in this exclusive exchange of gazes. Nor does the narrator allow CF Julian to participate in this exchange from Christ’s perspective. Vision, then, confronts both the unique resemblance to Christ this exchange grants Mary, and her individual ocular control over Christ’s body. Mother Christ, according to Julian, wishes to be looked at in co-Passion by all his children, including his mother. Yet his suffering always is greatest, instead of both his and his mother’s.

Revelation develops this interactive focalization further. It includes the scene above, labels it the Eleventh Revelation, and adds more exegetical commentary. The narrator also adds a similar interaction between focalizors to another Revelation. In this new interaction, unlike in the one just described, Julian is allowed greater control over the visual interaction than Christ.

In both Vision and Revelation, before looking down at Mary, Christ lowers his gaze and looks into the wound in his side, traditionally on the viewer’s left. His body has been immobile during the preceding visions; the unexpected movement of his head therefore foregrounds his focalizing. In Vision, Julian’s focalizing of this moment is entirely static. The vision differs only from conventional Man of Sorrows iconography in Christ’s cheerful expression and in the fact that He moves and speaks:

> Full merelye and gladlye oure lorde loked into his side and beheld, and saide this worde – ‘lo, how I loved the’ – as if he had saide: ‘My childe, if thow kan nought loke in my godhead, see here howe I lette open my side, and my herte be cloven in twa, and lette oute blude and watere alle that was therein.’ (Vision 13, 1-4)

> [Very happily and gladly the Lord looked into his side, and gazed, and said these words, ‘Look how much I loved you’, as if he had said, ‘My child, if you cannot [look on] my Godhead, see here how I let my side be opened and my heart be split in two, and let flow out all the blood and water that was inside.]

1 Many critics, for instance Baker and Windeatt, have noted the similarity between this Revelation and Man of Sorrows iconography, in which Christ is shown after the crucifixion, yet alive or half-alive. In these images—which do not depict a particular episode in the Passion narrative but rather the abstract idea of Christ’s sacrifice—Christ often draws the reader’s attention to his wounds by looking at them, pointing to them, touching them, or simply holding them up for the reader to see. Baker, Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book, 56–60; Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Medieval English Visual Culture’, 196.

2. Revelations of Divine Love, 18, with my addition in square brackets.
CF Julian focalizes Christ looking down and slightly to the left (from Julian’s perspective) in order to look into the wound; she sees Christ and his seeing into the wound; Christ sees the wound, and presumably its insides. However, Christ’s focalization is denied to CF Julian and the reader. The only focalization represented in the text is that of CF Julian, and the narrator does not allow her to see into Christ’s side, or allow her to take up Christ’s perspective like she does in the revelation that follows it. The narrator does provide a paraphrase with similar imagery, but this paraphrase is at text level and therefore addressed to the evencristen rather than character Julian. The addressee is consequently encouraged also to see Christ looking at the wound, but is not allowed to look into the wound either.

This lack of access to the side wound, a conventional image for private devotion, is unusual. Devotional texts and affective meditation texts often recommend the devout reader imagine him- or herself entering the side wound and taking refuge there. The MVC claims that Christ’s wounds are ‘yawning wide for [the meditant’s] entry’ while the Mirror exhorts its reader to be like the martyrs and take shelter in Christ’s body: ‘where trowest is þan his soule & his herte? Sôpely in the wondes of Jesu, 3ee þe wondes not closed, bot opun & wide to entre in.’ [Now where do you think is then his soul and heart? Truly in Christ’s wounds; yea, the wounds are not closed, but open and wide enough to be enter in.] As Sarah Beckwith writes in her study of Christ’s body, affective meditation is ‘a curiously literal embodiment of a drama of exclusion and participation in [Christ’s] body’.

However, it is always a single individual who enters the side wound. The narrator of Vision presents herself as addressing all her evencristen; including such an image for private devotion and by implication positioning her character alter-ego inside, would suggest excluding the evencristen. When comparing this vision to affective meditation texts, Julian’s focalization here is similar to that of Mary, who, from the foot of the cross, can see the wound, but not look into it.

The use of ‘beheld’ makes Julian’s and the evencristen’s exclusion from Christ’s focalization all the more remarkable. This verb suggests both physical proximity and a maternal embrace, as well as a mutual exchange between the believer and God. ‘Beholden’ should not be read as a synonym of ‘seeing’ or ‘gazing’; the Middle English denotations and connotations of ‘beholden’ in medieval religious texts differ subtly but significantly from that of modern ‘to behold’. These subtle differences have a number of implications for the relation between focalizor and focalized object. McNamer defines the late fourteenth-century ‘biholden’ in affective

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3 Beckwith, *Christ’s Body : Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, 40.
meditation as referring to seeing empathetically as a result of holding the focalized object with the eyes.\(^1\) McNamer suggests that it implies a movement outward and involves the wish to hold the focalized body in a maternal, ameliorative embrace.\(^2\) The use of ‘beholden’, thus gives the focalization physical overtones and the focalizor a large amount of agency. It also implies proximity of the focalizor and the focalized object.

Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, in contrast, read Julian’s use of ‘biholden’ as denoting an act of *kenosis*, a meditative emptying of the self similar to Christ’s emptying Himself in the Incarnation. The purpose of this beholding is to create a sense of self-effacing stillness. Instead of an active ocular holding or wishing to embrace one’s suffering child, beholding is, in the words of Gillespie and Ross ‘a still and mutual enjoyment of and exchange of being between God and the soul’.\(^3\) The agency of the focalizor, then, is located in the emptying of the self. The focalizor’s reaching out is thus is directed towards oneself, inward, instead of outward towards the focalized objects.

However, in *Revelation* descriptions of activity of the soul always have physical overtones: Julian is no dualist.\(^4\) It is therefore possible to hear both definitions resonate in the text. ‘Behold’ in *Vision* and *Revelation*, then, implies a focalization that has physical, maternal overtones and involves an active holding with the eyes, while simultaneously involving a conscious stillness. In this passage in *Vision*, however, although ‘behold’ is used, the mutuality that McNamer, Gillespie and Ross ascribe to the term is missing. Christ may be reaching out to his wound and be in a state of self-effacing stillness, but Julian is excluded from both.

*Revelation* adds an interaction in this scene between CF Julian’s gaze and CF Christ’s gaze. This interaction at first appears similar to the one in the Eleventh Revelation, but Julian’s presence in the interaction then increases. Whereas in *Vision* both Christ’s focalization and side wound are closed to CF Julian, in *Revelation* both are open to CF Julian, the *evencristen* and all those who shall be saved:

\(^2\) Ibid., 137.
\(^3\) Gillespie and Ross, ‘The Apophatic Image: The Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich’, 64. Ever since this discussion, *kenosis*, the apophatic, and beholding in Julian’s works have been recurrent motifs in Gillespie’s and Ross’s writings, see also Ross ‘Behold Not The Cloud Of Experience’ and Gillespie’s ‘The Colours of Contemplation’ and ‘Postcards From The Edge’.
\(^4\) I address these physical overtones at length in the chapter on characterization. For Julian’s lack of dualism, see Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 142–49; Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*, 186.
With a glad chere oure good lorde loked into his side and beheld, enjoyenge. And with his swete loking he led forth the understanding of his creature by the same wound into his side, within. And ther he shewed a fair, delectable place, and large inow for alle mankind that shalle be saved to rest in pees and love. And therewith he brought to minde his dereworthy blode and his precious water which he let pour out for love. And with the swete beholding he shewed his blisseful hart even cloven on two. And with this swete enjoying he shewed to my understanding, in part, the blessed godhead[]. (Rev. 24. 1-5)

[Then with a glad expression our Lord looked into his side and gazed, rejoicing; and with his dear gaz[ing] he led his creature's understanding through the same wound into his side within. And there he revealed a beautiful and delightful place, large enough for all mankind that will be saved to rest there in peace and in love. And with that he brought to mind his beloved blood and precious water which he let pour all out for love. And with the precious [gazing] he showed his blessed heart quite riven in two. And with this sweet rejoicing he revealed in part to my understanding the blessed Godhead [].]¹

Christ then tells Julian, as in Vision, ‘Lo, how I loved thee’. This is followed by a greatly extended paraphrase of this statement, including an invitation to behold God.

A number of significant changes make the focalization in this scene more interactive. To begin with, the narrator lets CF Julian see from Christ’s perspective. In narratological terms, her focalization merges with his. Reading Christ’s ‘swet loking’ in terms of Bacon’s synthesis of extramission and intromission, Christ both receives species from his side wound and the space inside of it. At the same time, his gaze moves outward, sending out species through the wound, into the space inside his own body. Julian both receives the species of Christ’s gaze, and grasps his gaze with her own. Doing so allows her to take up the position of Christ’s perceiving body, but also follow Christ’s focalizing with her intellectual sight (‘understanding’) through the wound, into the ‘fair, delectable place’.

¹ Revelations of Divine Love, 71, 72. I have made two changes to Windeatt’s translation of this passage. I have replaced ‘gaze’ by ‘gazing’ because Christ’s looking into his wound being a process is crucial to this passage. Secondly, I have replaced ‘vision’ by ‘gazing’, because the ‘swete beholding’ refers to Christ’s beholding of the wound mentioned in the first line, not to a scene from Julian’s visionary experience.
Secondly, the narrator depicts this collaborative gaze as lingering in the space inside the wound for a while. This lingering suggests the self-effacing stillness that Gillespie and Ross associate with beholding. Thus, it is Christ’s *kenosis*, self-emptying, that allows Julian’s gaze to enter his body. The reference to Christ’s ‘enjoyenge,’ ‘rejoicing’ a more complex, durative emotion than ‘merelye’, when he beholds the wound also points towards such ‘still enjoyment’. Christ, then, beholds the space inside the wound with calm enjoyment and so does CF Julian.

Thirdly, whereas in the Eleventh Revelation the joined focalization is still largely Christ’s, in this interaction Julian is more pervasively present. This is suggested by how the place that is revealed is ‘fair, delectable’. Similarly, the blood brought to character Julian’s mind is ‘dereworthy’ and ‘precious’. These affectionate epithets reflect CF Julian’s attitude rather than Christ’s. Their mutual focalization, then, is dominated by CF Julian. To use one of narrator Julian’s favourite verbs, CF Julian’s focalization has enclosed Christ’s focalization.1 Christ sees as Julian sees. Finally, by using of ‘his creature’, together with the ‘our’ already found in *Vision*, the narrator includes the *evencristen*’s visualizing into CF Julian’s focalization. Christ’s looking into his side wound has been subsumed into a communal focalization, which is ‘led forth’ by Julian.

In the same Revelation, when Julian’s gaze encloses Christ’s, the narrator also makes Christ gladly subject himself to CF Julian’s focalization. He explicitly invites her to both see and behold him. In both *Vision* and *Revelation*, when looking into his side, Christ tells Julian ‘this worde ‘Lo, how I loved thee’ (*Vis.* 13. 2; *Rev.* 24. 11) ['Look how I loved you.'].2 ‘Lo’ does not only denote a simple ‘look!’ but also ‘look here’.3 In a manner reminiscent of Man of Sorrows iconography, Christ explicitly invites CF Julian’s gazing at his own wounded body, prominently displaying it for her to focalize. *Revelation*, moreover, increases the affective tone of Christ’s invitation. His expression is already glad in both *Vision* and *Revelation*, yet *Revelation* doubles this joy by replacing ‘this worde’ with ‘saide full blissfully’ (‘very happily’) (*Vis.* 1. 1; *Rev.* 24. 11). The narrator then gives many paraphrases of these words, all starting with ‘behold’. While Mary’s beholding and seeing increases Christ’s suffering, CF Julian’s and the *evencristen*’s grasping Christ’s body with their eyes give Christ joy unlike any other.

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1 Sarah Beckwith also points out that ‘beclosyd’ is one of narrator Julian’s favourite verbs. Beckwith, ‘Julian of Norwich’, 173.
3 ‘lo’ (interj.), def. 2, *MED*. 

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The Visionary Vanishes

CF Julian’s ocular control over Christ’s body and his focalization becomes even more apparent in the light of another advantage over Mary in affective meditation texts.

Unlike Mary, CF Julian is never seen by Christ in either Vision or Revelation. Julian sees each change in Christ’s face, gaze and expression. In both Vision and Revelation, for instance, she notices how ‘soddenly’ he changed into blissful chere’ (Rev. 21. 8,9; Vis. 15. 17, 18). [‘Soddenly [...] his face transformed into an expression of joy.’] This causes character Julian to experience joy as well, an empathetic response implying she is looking closely at his face: ‘The chaunginge of his chere changed mine’ (Vis. 11. 18; Rev. 21. 9). [‘The change in his expression changed mine’].

Christ, however, is never described as ‘beholding’ or ‘seeing’ her in return. This lack of reciprocity forms a striking contrast with the Lord’s and Servant’s ability to see one another, before the servant’s fall into the ditch, and later, at the end of the parable: ‘The lorde loketh upon his servant full lovely [...] I saw the sonne stonde, seing [...] ’Lo, my dere fader, I stonde before the in Adams kirtle’ (Rev. 51. 9, 10, 211, 212). [‘The lord looks at his servant very lovingly [...] And so I saw the Son standing, expressing [...] “Look, my dear father, I’m standing before you in Adam’s tunic.”’] Yet such mutuality is conspicuously absent between character Julian and her Lord.

Character Julian’s invisibility cannot be read as straightforward imitating of affective meditation visualizing. The MVC, for instance, worries about Christ noticing the meditant and calling him or her over. The recommended physical interaction with the characters, such as holding the Christ child, also implies the meditant being seen. Nor is Julian not being seen by Christ a convention of visionary texts. Margery, seeing Christ for the first time, immediately notices how the attractive Son of Man is ‘lokyng upon hir wyth so blyssyd a chere that sche was strengthy d in alle hir spyritys’ [‘looking upon her with so blessed an expression that she was fortified in all her spirits’].

In addition, other sensory interaction between Christ and Julian does take place. For instance, in both Vision and Revelation Christ and Julian speak to one another. Moreover, even in those visions in which Christ’s sight is not obscured by blood or shreds of hanging flesh, Julian is still invisible to Christ, as illustrated by the scene of the ‘changing of chere’, and when Julian

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1 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 192.
2 Revelations of Divine Love, 17.
3 Ibid., 106, 113.
sees Christ sit in her soul. In medieval optical terms, Christ’s body sends out species to Julian’s eyes, but his eyes cannot receive those of Julian’s body. The narrator creates as it were a one-way screen between CF Julian and Christ. Both *Vision* and *Revelation*, then, objectify Christ, and *Revelation* to a larger extent because of Julian’s closer, more controlled focalizing.

In addition, in *Revelation* no other character is described as seeing Julian either. The moment in *Vision* in which Julian’s mother ‘stode emanges othere and beheld’ her (Vis. 10:2), thus evoking Mary’s exchange of looks with her child about to die, has been removed. Sarah Stanbury has drawn attention to the ‘intersected trajectories of multiple lines of sight’ in affective meditation text, which often turn Mary into a spectacle. Liz Herbert McAvoy discerns these multiple lines of sight in the *Vision* scene with Julian’s mother. Thus, by removing Julian’s mother’s gaze, and by extension its hinting at the exchange of gazes between Christ and Mary, narrator Julian reduces the multiple lines of sight to a single one, that of CF Julian. A similar subsuming of all gazes into CF Julian’s focalization can be seen in the two moments of interaction between Christ and CF Julian. These passages only present Christ’s focalization when it is merged with Julian’s. Christ can only see what and when CF Julian sees.

Since both *Vision* and *Revelation* display a fascination with characters’ seeing of each other, Julian’s seeing while not being seen herself—or in Liz Herbert McAvoy’s words, her being ‘there and not there’—is significant. Thematically, it dramatizes the narrator’s recommendation in *Vision* and *Revelation* that the reader should ‘leve the beholding of a wrech that it was shewde to’ (*Rev*. 8. 34; *Vis*. 6. 4) ['disregard the wretch to whom it was shown'] and in *Revelation* that ‘in the sight of God alle man is one man’ (*Rev*. 51. 89) ['in the sight of God, all men are one man.']. Christ cannot see Julian the individual, because he sees humanity as one being, and so should the reader.

More importantly, however, by making Christ unable to return character Julian’s scrutinizing look, narrator Julian challenges the painful ocular exchange between Mother and Son in affective meditation texts. She replaces it with a focalization in which mother Christ allows the human child to control the seeing. In this focalization, Christ neither can nor wishes to

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1 Both Magill and McAvoy have observed that Julian’s mother’s beholding evokes that of Mary on Calvary. Magill, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic or Visionary?*, 79; McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 77, 78.
2 Stanbury, ‘The Virgin’s Gaze’, 186.
3 McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms*, 120.
4 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 109.
turn the co-Passionate viewer into a spectacle, thereby disrupting the cycle of suffering.

**Grasping with Avisement**

Just as CF Julian’s focalization of Christ affects her, being focalized affects Christ in *Revelation*. That is, in *Revelation* Christ’s body is described as responding to Julian’s looking, even though Christ does not see Julian.

In *Vision*, narrator Julian already makes God adapt the length of a part of a vision to CF Julian: ‘And when I had behalden this with fulle avisement, than shewed oure lorde me wordes fulle mekelye’ (Vis. 22. 20, 21). ['And when I had considered this with much deliberation, then our good Lord revealed words to me very gently']. The polysemy of ‘avisement’ is significant. It not only means ‘the act of looking at something’; it also refers to ‘examination, inspection, observation’ as well as ‘deliberation’ and ‘close attention’. *Avisement* therefore suggests both a visual and a mental focus that takes up some time. Thus, only when CF Julian has achieved a clear view and has observed and understood all there is to see, does God show her words.

In *Revelation* this adapting the visions to Julian’s visual processes is extended to Christ’s body. *Revelation* inserts into several visions a description of Christ’s body continuing to lose blood up until CF Julian has both closely inspected and fully understood these processes. For instance, to the Fourth Revelation, of Christ’s body bleeding copiously, *Revelation* not only adds what Windeatt calls ‘notably well-defined edges’ to the visions but also an interaction between the bleeding and Julian’s visual and intellectual processing:

And after this I saw beholding, the body plenteously bleeding [...]
*And where it cam where it shuld have falle downe, there it vanished. Notwithstanding, the bleding continued a while till it might be seen with avisement.*
(Rev. 12. 1, 5,6; Vis. 8. 20, italics added.)

[And after this I saw, as I watched, the body bleeding profusely [...]
*And when it came to where it should have fallen down, then it vanished; nevertheless, the bleeding continued for a while, so that it could be observed with deliberation.*

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1 Ibid., 32.
2 ‘avisement, n’ MED, Watson and Jenkins ‘Sidenotes’ 111.
4 *Revelations of Divine Love*, 57. (Italics added)
The blood miraculously disappears before reaching Julian’s bed, but the narrator assures the reader that this disappearing does not affect her understanding or how long the showing lasts. Instead, she claims, the bleeding continues until could be seen both clearly and with deliberation. A similar interaction between Christ’s bleeding and Julian’s seeing and understanding has been added to the First Revelation:

I saw the bodilye sight lastande of the plenteouse bleeding of the hede [...] the bleding continued tille many thinges were seen and understonded’ (Vis. 5. 21; Rev. 7. 9, 14, 15 italics added).

[I saw the continuing bodily vision of copious bleeding from Christ’s head [...] the bleeding continued until many things were seen and understood.]

In short, Christ in Revelation bleeds until CF Julian has seen and understood enough. The Revelation narrator thus makes Christ’s suffering conditional on Julian’s inspecting and understanding.

The closer focalization with a clearer sense of direction in Revelation suggests increased avisement as well. Christ’s body, then, responds to Julian’s closer and more intentio-filled focalizing by bleeding more and by drying out more. Such an understanding of Julian’s focalization is strongly in line with the understanding of sight as entailing a meeting of two bodies, which Biernoff calls ‘carnal vision’. In these terms and in Bacon’s terms, Julian’s focalizing in Revelation more strongly grasps the surface of Christ’s body and contains its extremities, aiding the species to such an extent that she draws blood.

Moreover, according to medieval optics, the narrow field of Julian’s focalizing with its sharp edges increases its visual power. Cynthia Hahn notes in her discussion of medieval visuality that a peephole or window, by focusing the visual rays and reducing the visual pyramid was thought to intensify the force of the look. Both Julian’s closer, more-intento filled focalization as well as her tunnel vision therefore allow for more and intensified ocular grasping.

Christ’s body responding to Julian’s avisement by bleeding out and losing more moisture can also form another reading of Julian’s seemingly emotionally detached scrutinizing of Christ’s drying body. Critics have frequently described her fascination with the minute details of the drying of

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1 Ibid., 48, 49. (italics added)
2 Biernoff, Sight and Embodiment in The Middle Ages, 12.
Christ’s flesh as clinical, estranging, self-reflexive and characterized by aesthetic or scientific detachment¹. This focalization, I suggest, can also be read as displaying *avisement*, meant to give character Julian greater knowledge of Christ’s Passion.

An addition in the Eighth Revelation suggests such an interaction between Christ’s body and Julian’s visual examining. CF Julian has been staring at Christ’s forehead, studying how the thorns loosen the skin, but notices a change:

This continued a while, and after it began to change, and I beheld and marvelled. And than I saw it was for it beganne to dry and stint a part of the weight that was round the garland. (Rev. 17. 23-25)

[This continued for a while and soon it began to change, and I watched and marvelled at how it could be. And then I saw that it was because it began to dry and lose part of its weight and congeal around the garland of thorns.]²

CF Julian sees Christ’s body change, but it is a change which she cannot fully see it yet. She therefore studies the change for some time (‘beheld’) and marvels, to which Christ’s body responds by drying more. This response, then, enables her to see and understand Christ’s suffering more. She can thereby assimilate that part of Christ’s suffering into her body and consciousness. This visionary moment is indeed followed by the wished-for co-Passion.

Unlike in Vision, in Revelation this co-Passion is as ineffable as Christ’s; the narrator states that seeing Christ suffer causes her the greatest pain possible. Thus, the more CF Julian sees Christ suffer, the more he responds, and the more co-Passion she achieves, and by extension the visualizing evencristen as well. Julian’s careful studying of Christ’s body may first appear emotionally detached or estranging; its end —co-Passion and greater ‘minde’ of Christ’s Passion— is not. Rather, like Biernoff argues about Mary’s looking at Christ, CF Julian’s focalization ‘collapses the space of detached observation’³, and wraps Julian in the cloth-like skin of mother Christ.

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¹ Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Medieval English Visual Culture’, 187; Barratt, “In the Lowest Part of Our Need’: Julian and Medieval Gynecological Writing’, 239; Aers, ‘The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love’, 89. These are only two of many comments on this detachment.

² Revelations of Divine Love, 63.

An Alternative Meditative Focalization

Having compared CF Julian’s focalization in Vision and Revelation with that in the Mirror and the MVC, it is now possible to outline the alternative meditative focalization which the Revelation narrator lets CF Julian demonstrate with such care. The MVC and the Mirror recommend Mary’s privileged yet interrupted focalizing of Christ, which increases Christ’s suffering and which he attempts to control. What is more, the meditant, who does not possess Mary’s body, can never fully imitate Mary’s focalizing.

As an alternative, Revelation offers a communal, assimilating, sustained gaze of a child, which mother Christ actively, unconditionally seeks and subjects Himself to with joy, and responds to by wilfully and happily suffering more. The focalization which the narrator has CF Julian show rather than instruct, then, does not as much reverse the focalization between Mary and Christ in affective meditation, but rather transfigures it, and the focalization found in Vision, into a form of seeing that prefigures the beatific vision. According to narrator Julian, when visualizing Christ as her focalizer alter-ego sees him, the evencristen already partly sees God as he or she shall do in heaven.

Universalizing and Sanctifying the Female Anchoritic Gaze

This alternative meditative focalization challenges several aspects of affective meditation texts and medieval religious culture.

To begin with, it resists a number of binaries central affective meditation works. These works often posit a binary opposition between on the one hand women and laity, and on the other hand, men and professional religious on the other hand. As McNamer has shown, engaging in affective meditation and co-Passion in general was thought of as womanly. Moreover, as several critics such as Ghosh, Watson and Karnes point out, the Mirror align affective meditation with its concrete scenarios with the laity. The Mirror depicts them as characterized by, in Nicholas Watson’s words ‘ignorance, intellectual simplicity, spiritual childishness, and carnality’. Revelation confronts these associations by making Christ unable to see the individual Julian, who’s a woman but identified by the rubric as a professional religious. In other words, Revelation implies that Christ does not distinguish between lay or clergy, or male or female, but rather that all can look at him as closely as his Mother does, and thereby become like him. Moreover, instead of a focalization recounted authoritatively by a male narrator to a female addressee, in Revelation a female narrator lets a female

1 McNamer, Affective Meditation, 119.
character’s gaze enfold the gaze of an addressee of unknown gender and unknown ‘form of living’.

In addition, by having Christ actively seek CF Julian’s gaze in Vision, the narrator sanctifies the female anchoritic gaze. Instead of a poisonous, sinful gaze that needs to be safely contained in an anchorhold, it is a gaze which Christ desires to be seen by. Some strands of medieval thought on vision described female seeing as potentially harmful and easily turning sinful. For example, the gaze of a menstruating woman was sometimes thought to emit a poisonous vapor. What is more, paradigmatic woman Eve was thought to have caused the Fall with her uncontrolled looking, as the Ancrene Wisse stresses: ‘Your mother, Eve, leapt after [i.e. according to] her eyes, from her eyes to the apple, from the apple in paradise down to the earth, from the earth to hell.’¹ A woman’s looking not only brings about harm, it also is the cause of the existence of sin. As Michelle Sauer has argued, because of this perceived threat of uncontrolled female looking, the female anchorite’s gaze had to be controlled and purified. Church architecture was used to counteract the possible impurity of the anchoresses’ look. For example, the squint, the anchorhold window looking out at the altar, was given the shape of a cross so that the anchorite saw through Christ’s body.²

Narrator Julian, in contrast, does not have Christ ascribe such dangers to character Julian’s gaze, though she is a female anchorite. In Revelation Christ both exhibits his wounds for her to see and explicitly invites her gaze with the words ‘Lo, how I loved thee’, which can be translated as ‘look here, see how I loved you’. He does so ‘full blissfully,’ that is, very happily.³ To Revelation’s Christ, a female anchorite’s gaze is delightful rather than sinful or potentially impure. Nor is character Julian’s anchoritic focalization of controlled as focalization through a squint would have been. Instead, it scans the whole of Christ’s body, seeing more than an anchorite would have seen of Christ’s Eucharistic body from her cell. The narrator thus invites the evenocristen to focalize through and with a female anchoritic body rather than through Christ’s body, with a gaze that, instead of needing purification and male control, directly and joyfully gazes at the divine.

Reshaping Human Focalization to Show a Glimpse of God’s
This transformed focalization in Revelation, which CF Julian performs and which Christ invites, contains hints of a greater focalization. The closer, more

¹ Millett, Ancrene Wisse/Guide for Anchoresses: A Translation, 22 (2.6).
³ For a different reading of Christ’s expressions of joy when gazing into his wound, see McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body, ch. 4.
intentio-filled focalization in Revelation suggests a larger amount of avisement and ocular grasping on CF Julian’s behalf. This greater amount of avisement and ocular grasping leads Christ’s body to respond more by bleeding more and losing more moisture in Revelation as a whole in comparison to Vision, as well as during some of the visions. This greater amount of loss of blood and moisture paradoxically hides the body which CF Julian studies in such great detail. In narrator Julian’s own terms, the greater avisement makes CF Julian focalize more ‘mistily’ instead of ‘more clerly’.

The narrator therefore requires of CF Julian and the evencristen that they use a bifocal focalization, on the one hand looking beyond the focalized objects which obstruct her focalization of Christ, and on the other hand keeping an eye on the obstacle. It is this ‘bifocal’ seeing, or as Julian would say, ‘doubbly’ seeing, of both foreground and background which is the greatest focalization (the outer ring in the diagram in the introduction). The narrator depicts herself as hereby presenting the evencristen with the focalization God wishes them to adopt. Just as Christ can only see humanity through CF Julian’s eyes, the reader should see God only through Julian’s eyes.

Several critics have recognized how the images in Revelation are stranger, more paradoxical, and more noticeably constructed than their Vision equivalents. I suggest that, instead of encouraging ‘imageless and apophatic contemplation,’ the paradoxical and surreal focalization and the need for bifocal seeing, draws the visualizing evencristen deeper into the image and deeper into Christ’s body.

The Fourth Revelation provides an example of how the seeing with avisement creates another focalized object which blocks CF Julian’s view. In Vision, in spite of the blood streaming out from the wounds, CF Julian is still able to discern the wounds and the body:

And after this I sawe, behaldande, the bodye plenteously bledande, hate and freshe and lifelye, right as I sawe before in the hede. And this was shewed me in the semes of scourging. (Vis. 8. 20-23)

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1 My use of the term ‘bifocal’ is inspired by Denys Turner’s use of it to describe Julian’s theology. Julian of Norwich, Theologian, 192.


And after this I saw, as I watched, the body bleeding profusely, hot and freshly and lifelike, just as I saw the head bleeding before. And I was shown this bleeding from the weals of the scourging.\(^1\)

This scene does not require *avisement* to a great extent; in one glance, CF Julian can see the blood and Christ’s body with the many wounds. In *Revelation*, in contrast, the bleeding has increased to such an extent that it engulfs Christ’s body, turning Christ’s skin into a surface fully covered in blood:\(^2\)

> And after this I saw, beholding, the body plenteously bleeding in seeming of scorging, as thus: the faire skinne was broken fulle depe into the tender flesh, with sharpe smitinges all aboute the sweete body. The hote blody ranne out so plenteously that ther was neither seen skinne ne wounde, but as it were all blode. And when it cam where it shuld have fallen downe, ther it vanished. Notwithstanding, the bleding continued a while till it might be seen with avisement. (*Rev. 12. 1-6)*

And after this I saw, as I watched, the body bleeding profusely in weals from the scourging, like this: the fair skin was broken very deeply into the tender flesh through sharp blows all over the precious body; the hot blood ran out so abundantly that neither skin nor wound was to be seen, but it seemed as if it were all blood. And when it came to where it should have fallen down, then it vanished; nevertheless, the bleeding continued for a while, so that it could be observed with deliberation.\(^3\)

At first, CF Julian observes the broken skin and the whole of Christ’s body. The narrator then lets the blood obstruct CF Julian’s focalization of Christ’s body. Unlike in *Vision*, *Revelation* wraps and hides Christ in a covering of blood, making him reminiscent of man in the garments dyed red from Isaiah 63. 1, typologically associated with Christ.\(^4\)

As noted earlier, this passage suggests an interaction between CF Julian’s *avisement* and the bleeding. CF Julian needs to understand and see fully; Christ’s therefore lets his body bleed so copiously and for such a long time that it hides his body. This frustrates the fulfillment of Julian’s wish for

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2. This is reminiscent of fourteenth-century book of devotions BL MS Egerton 1821, which has ten entirely red pages, depicting only blood and wounds.
‘minde’ of Christ’s suffering and co-Passion. That is, the species of his body are unable to reach her eyes and imprint themselves on CF Julian. As a result CF Julian cannot assimilate Christ’s suffering.

However, thinking of the blood as an obstacle makes one easily forget that according to medieval optics seeing is a dialogue between focalizer and focalized object. Accordingly, the blood contributes to the obscured seeing as well: it sends out species which prevent the species of Christ’s body to reach CF Julian’s eyes. The blood, then, actively obscures Christ’s body.

The narrator similarly obstructs the evencristen’s meditative focalization by using the phrases ‘as thus’ and ‘in seming’. Dutton points out that ‘as thus’ and similar phrases are textual markers of compilation or compilation style, in which the author includes segments of works by others into his or her own. The phrase therefore gives the vision a collage-like quality and draws attention to the constructedness of the image, as Aers asserts of other images in Revelation.

Moreover, the phrase ‘in seming’ does not only mean ‘weals’ but also ‘a representation of’, ‘impression’ and ‘appearance’. The phrase’s ‘referentiality gestures elsewhere’, as Gillespie and Ross comment. The citation-like quality of the scene consequently obscures Christ’s body in the evencristen’s meditative focalization just as the blood obstructs CF Julian’s view. In medieval optical terms, all the reader is allowed to assimilate into his or her own body are the species sent out by a representation, not the suffering itself.

The greatly expanded Eighth Revelation offers another instance of CF Julian’s seeing creating obstacles. CF Julian attempts to untangle visually the garland of skin and the garland of thorns (both not found in Vision), but the non-animate focalized objects make it challenging to distinguish which is which:

The garlonde of thornes was deyde with the blode. And that other garland and the hede, all was one coloure, as clotered blode when it was dried. The skinne and the fleshe was small rumpelde, with a tawny coloure, like a drye bord whan it aged, and the face more browne than the body. (Rev. 17. 25-30)

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3 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 166.; ‘seming(e), ger’ (MED).
[The garland of thorns was dyed with the blood, and this other garland and the head were all one colour, like congealed blood when it is dry. Where it showed, the skin of the flesh on his face and body was fine, wrinkled, with a tanned colour like a dry board which has aged; and the face darker than the body.]\(^1\)

The garland of thorns, being dyed with blood, looks more alive than the garland of skin. Also, Christ’s skin first looks like leather, which still suggests a once-living creature, but then begins to resemble the inanimate wood of the crucifix, as Watson and Jenkins also recognize.\(^2\) In medieval optical terms, the species of the crucifix blur those of Christ’s body, making the latter unable to reach Julian’s eyes.

What is more, the part of his body first to animate itself in the visionary experience, his face, becomes the part least distinguishable from the inanimate crucifix matter. Just as it appeared out of the crucifix, Christ’s face disappears back into the crucifix. On text-level, the surreal quality of the image, like that of Christ’s body being obscured by blood, hinders the evencristen’s meditative focalization of Christ’s suffering. Since they receive only non-naturalistic species, they cannot easily be transformed to Christ’s likeness.

Revelation increases this homogeneity between CF Julian’s obscured focalization and the evencristen’s obscured visualizing in two greatly expanded Revelations. In the First Revelation, in which CF Julian sees Christ’s head bleed for the first time, CF Julian overlays her vision of Christ’s bleeding forehead with mental images of domestic objects. The narrator similarly overlays the evencristen’s visualization of Christ’s forehead with these metaphors drawn from everyday life. In Vision, the only focalized object is Christ’s bleeding forehead: ‘I saw the bodiye sight lastande of the plenteouse bleding of the hede’ (Vis. 5. 2). ‘[I saw the continuing bodily vision of copious bleeding from Christ’s head.].’\(^3\) In Revelation, the narrator allows her finest yet unusual images to bring to life and obscure the gruesome sight, adding extensive descriptions after the statement about seeing the bleeding head:

I saw the bodiye sight lasting of the plenteous bleding of the hede. The gret droppes of blode felle dounre fro under the garlonde like pellottes, seming as it had comen oute of the veines. And in the coming oute they were browne rede, for the blode was ful thicke. And in the spreding abrode they were bright rede [...] The

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1 *Revelations of Divine Love*, 63.
2 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 182.
plenteoushede is like to the droppes of water that falle of the evesing of an house after a grete shower of raine, that falle so thicke that no man may number them with no bodely wit. And for the roundhead, they were like to the scale of the herring, for the roundhead in the coming oute of the blode. These thre thinges cam to my minde in the time: pelettes, for the roundhead in the spreding; the droppes of the evesing of a house, for the plenteoushede unnumerable. (Rev. 7. 8-13, 17-27)

[I saw the continuing bodily vision of copious bleeding from Christ’s head. The great drops of blood fell down from under the crown of thorns like beads, looking as if they had come from the veins; and as they came out they were dark red, because the blood was very thick; and as it spread out it was bright red [...] The profusion is like the drops of water which fall from the eaves after a heavy shower of rain and fall so thickly that it is beyond human wit to number them. And as for the roundness of the drops, they were like herring scales as they spread out over the forehead. These three things came to mind at the time: beads, because of the roundness of the drops as the blood came out; herring scales, because of their roundness as they spread over the forehead; rain-drops from the eaves, because of their innumerable profusion.]

Reading this addition with medieval optics and models of cognition shows Revelation creates several parallels between CF Julian’s visionary and mental focalization and the evencristen’s meditative focalization.

To begin with, according to medieval models of cognition, reading about these similes and remembering them is synonymous to Julian’s mental seeing of rain drops, pellets, and herring scales. Written words were thought to enter the mind like visual images, both of its signified and of the text on the page. The written word produces species, which multiply themselves through space and enter the inner senses through the sense of sight, where these inner senses transform the species into a phantasm, a mental image. In the case of words, this phantasm consisted of both the lexical item and the concept. Likewise, remembering or thinking about such a simile meant looking at an image as well. Recalling a memory was thought to consist of moving a ‘phantasm,’ mental image, from one’s memory inventory to the cogitative power. Thus, when the evencristen reads or

1 Ibid., 48–49.
2 Tachau, Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham, 18, 19.
3 Carruthers, The Craft of Thought, 66–68.
remembers the similes, he or she sees the rain drops and the herring in his or her memory and cogitation (both called ‘minde’) just as CF Julian does.¹

Secondly, the mental images with which CF Julian overlays the visionary images draw her attention away from the sight of the bleeding head; the narrator does not refer to Christ’s head for the rest of the chapter. In medieval optical terms, then, the mental images send out species that compete with those of the visionary image and actively hide Christ’s body. Likewise, the narrator refers multiple times to the unusual images, so that these images hide the evencresten’s mental image of Christ’s bleeding forehead. Additionally, their unusual character distracts from visualizing Christ’s bleeding forehead. Christ’s body was far more likely to be compared to fine, sweet wheaten bread², a luxury foodstuff, than to salted herring. Herring was not only a foodstuff associated with the poor, but also as a sea creature humorally entirely different from Christ’s perfect complexion.³ The rain simile also distracts, but rather by its use of the present tense. That is, it firmly situates the image in the moment of reading, making the profusion and the drops of water are made present in the evencresten’s ‘minde’ as they are in CF Julian’s, blocking the image of the bleeding forehead.

These images then, as several other critics have also noted for other reasons, draw attention to themselves and their own artificiality. ⁴ Therefore, within the evencresten’s visualization, that is, within the evencresten’s mental visual field, they obstruct the evencresten’s view of Christ’s bleeding forehead, just as the arresting non-naturalistic visions of the minute changes in the colours of Christ’s dehydrating face and of the two garlands do. In short, in Revelation focalized objects that are easily seen —rain, herring, blood— hide what CF Julian and the evencresten wish to see.

In comparison to affective meditation texts and other visionary works, this impeding of characters’ and the reader’s focalization is remarkable. With affective meditation texts, the easily imaginable imagery is expected to bring the reader closer to Christ and to facilitate the reader’s meditative

¹ This equivalence between the visions on the one hand, and the text and the mental images it produces on the other hand, is also suggested by Julian’s considering the images brought to her ‘minde’, as integral to her visionary experience as each ‘bodely sight’ and ‘gostely sight.’
² Rubin, Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture, 147.
³ Adamson, Food in Medieval Times, 39, 40.
⁴ See for instance Aers, ‘The Humanity of Christ’, 85–87; Finke, Feminist Theory, Women’s Writing, 97; Gillespie and Ross, ‘The Apophatic Image: The Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich’, 65. It should be emphasized, however, that though the focalized objects get in one another’s way, they remain mostly visualizable, as Kevin Magill also argues in Julian of Norwich: Mystic or Visionary, 11. These scenes, though non-naturalistic, do not become imageless, as Gillespie and Ross claim. It may require some mental labour (avisement), but it is possible for instance, to visualize the many changes in Christ’s face in the Eighth Revelation or a small round thing that resembles a hazelnut in size yet is no hazelnut.
engagement rather than hinder it. For instance, as Michelle Karnes has
discusses, the MVC frequently compares elements from the reader’s daily
life, such as the distance between familiar buildings, to that in the story
world. Any paradox in the visualization or amount of non-naturalism, then,
would threaten the meditative process and its spiritual benefits.

Many women’s visionary texts likewise show a preference for easily
understandable imagery and unobscured focalization, summed up by
Nicholas Watson as ‘experiences of a fairly direct kind […] not difficult to
understand or to record’. Birgitta lets Christ compare her to a delicious
cheese, while Margery Kempe brings the great mystery of the Trinity down to
earth by cosily placing them on three cushions in her soul.

Furthermore, the visionary seeing was expected to be clear and
unimpeded. In the Latin version of the Liber, for instance, Birgitta’s gaze is
able to pierce through Mary’s clothes and possibly through her flesh:

> When I was at the manger of the Lord in Bethlehem, I saw a most
> beautiful virgin who was pregnant and clothed in a white mantel and
a light gown through which I could clearly see her virginal body. Her
> womb was very heavy and swollen, for she was now ready to give
> birth.

Birgitta’s focalization here is God-like in its ability to see through everything,
which underlines her visionary passivity. Her vision, in all senses of the
word, is not her own, but God’s. The challenges in CF Julian’s seeing and its
complexities, thus, are likely to have unsettled the contemporary reader, just
as the seeing ‘darkly and swemly’ makes CF Julian doubt whether she is truly
experiencing a vision.

Instead of making CF Julian ignore the obstacle, the narrator has CF
Julian keep all focalized objects before her. Narrator Julian makes her alter-
ego keep her focalization partly on that which obscures her sight, while
simultaneously letting her see beyond it, deeper into Christ’s body. In
medieval optical terms, CF Julian tries to receive species from both the
obscuring focalized object and Christ’s body. As a result, she assimilates both
and is transformed by both, but these obstacles are also taken into Christ’s
body by CF Julian’s gaze.

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1 Watson, ‘The Trinitarian Hermeneutic’, 84.
  Bridget Morris and Denis Searby i. 33, l. 9, p. 109. Windeatt, The Book of Margery
  Kempe: Annotated Edition, bk. 1:86 ll. 7093-7107; Morris,
3 Ed and trans. Searby and Morris, bk. 7:21, l.1,2.
4 This process is similar to that which Dutton discerns with regards to images on text level.
  Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 159.
The Second Revelation offers an example of how CF Julian at the same time keeps the obscuring focalized object before her, while also looking beyond it. In this vision, Julian sees in the crucifix another moment of Christ's Passion, the torments undergone by Christ after his trial, before the crucifixion. In *Vision*, when blood fully hides Christ's face, Julian’s gaze remains static:

> And after this, I sawe with bodely sight the face of the crucifixe that hange before me, in whilke I beheld continuely a party of his passion: dispite, spitting...and alle his blissede face a time closede in dry blode. (Vis. 8. 1-4)

> [And after this I saw with my bodily sight in the face on the crucifix which hung before me—which continuously—a part of his Passion: contempt, spitting... and all his blessed face covered for a time in dried blood.]

The focalization is rather immobile: ‘enclosed in dry blood’ suggests a still image rather than a moving one, and neither CF Julian’s gaze nor the blood seems to move. In *Revelation* CF Julian keeps looking at the blood, while also letting moving her gaze to see beyond it:

> And after this, I saw with bodily sight in the face of the crucifixe that hung before me, in the which I beheld continually a parte of his passion: dispite, spitting... And one time I saw how halfe the face, beginning at the ear, overyede with drye bloud till it beclosed into the mid face. And after that the other halfe beclosed on the same wise, and therewhiles it vanished in this party, even as it cam. This I saw bodely, sweemly and darkly, and I desired more bodely light to have seen more clerly. (Rev. 10. 1-7)

> [And after this I saw with my bodily sight in the face on the crucifix which hung before me—at which I was looking continuously—a part of his Passion: contempt, spitting... And once I saw how half his face, beginning at the ear, was caked with dry blood until it covered to the middle of his face, and after that the other half was covered in the same way, and meanwhile it vanished in the first part just as it...

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had come. I saw this bodily, sorrowfully and dimly, and I wished for
better bodily sight to have seen more clearly.]¹

CF Julian compares the two halves, and is able to see that the manner in
which they are covered in blood are the same. She shifts her gaze from the
one half to the other, noticing how it is dry yet can still cover the face, while
also watching to see (half of) Christ’s face appear again. This greater
movement of her focalization suggests that she trying to see past the blood,
as does her wish to see more clearly. In optical and co-Passion terms, the
species from the blood reach her eyes, transforming her to Christ’s likeness.
Yet she also tries to receive more from the ‘face of the crucifix’ by seeing
deeper into it, as the added ‘in’ in the first line suggests.

_Revelation_ expects the _evenecristen_ to adopt this twofold seeing as well.
The narrator thus imitates the actions she ascribes to God, and has the
different layers of images demand the bifocal seeing which God demands of
CF Julian. A text-level equivalent of CF Julian’s bifocal focalization can be
found in an addition after the vision of Christ’s body bleeding copiously. The
narrator lets character Julian meditate on the plenitude of Christ’s cleansing
blood; this meditation already occurs in _Vision_ but has been expanded and
revised. Suddenly the narrator’s tone shifts in register, instructing the reader
to see:

The dereworthy bloude of oure lorde Jhesu Crist, also as verely as it
is most precious, as verely it is most plenteous. Behold and see the
virtu of this precious plenty of his dereworthy blode! It descended
downe into helle and brak her bondes and deliverd t hem, all that
were there which belong to the courte of heven. The precious plenty
of his dereworthy blode overfloweth all erth, and is rede to wash all
creatures of sinne which be of good will, have ben, and shall be. The
precious plenty of his dereworthy blode ascendeth up into heven in
the blessed body of our lorde Jesu Christ, and ther is in him, bleding,
preyng for us to the father, and is and shal be as long us nedeth.
(_Rev._ 12. 15-23).

[The beloved blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is as truly most precious
as it is truly abundant. Behold and see! The precious plenty of his
beloved blood descended down into hell and broke their bonds and
delivered all those who were there who belonged to the court of
heaven. The precious plenty of his beloved blood overflows the

¹ Ibid., 53. Windeatt also points out that the image in _Revelation_ is more dynamic, but
does not discuss the increased movement of Julian’s gaze. Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich
and Medieval English Visual Culture’, 190.
whole earth and is ready to wash from sin all who are, have been, and shall be of good will. The precious plenty of his beloved blood ascended up into heaven to the blessed body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and is in him there, bleeding and praying for us to the Father—and is and shall be for as long as it is needed.)

With its commanding ‘behold and see!’ this passage calls to mind the script-like instructions in affective meditation texts. The Revelation reader, then, is told to visualize the blood flowing down to hell and back into Christ’s heavenly body in heaven just as readers of the Mirror are told to ‘beholde now [Jesu] praise þ.’

The effect of this instruction, however, differs from that of affective meditation texts. The narrator has the image of the blood and its activities cover Christ’s bleeding body, which the evencristen has visualized earlier. The use of the present tense (‘overfloweth is rede to wash’) suggests that image layer of blood should be kept in front of the reader in his or her mental field of vision.

At the same time, however, the narrator has the reader see beyond this ‘obstacle.’ That is, the use of the ‘oure’, together with the ‘behold and see’ encourages the evencristen to follow with their meditative gaze the movement of the blood, back into Christ’s body. Thus, the image of the blood is not only kept before the reader, but it also is united with the image of Christ’s bleeding body from the earlier vision. Simply put, Christ’s body is seen again. Moreover, Julian’s characteristic ‘syntactical looseness’ displayed in ‘in him, bleding, preying’ both the blood and Christ bleed and pray to the Father. This phrase therefore also invites the evencristen simultaneously to see the covering blood and Christ’s body.

Revelation, thus, teaches the evencristen a bifocal seeing. The evencristen is expected to imitate CF Julian’s bifocal seeing, and apply this to images that draw attention to themselves and that appear to hamper the evencristen’s visualization. Instead of focusing on the rain drops or the herring scales only, Revelation suggests, the evencristen should simultaneously look at them and beyond them, and be transformed by both the obstructing focalized object and Christ’s body.

Training the Evencristen to Grasp With Avisement

CF Julian’s more demonstrative focalization in Revelation facilitates the evencristen’s visualizing. The bifocal focalization, however, requires the

1 Revelations of Divine Love, 57, 58.
reader’s *avisement* in the sense of deliberation. The *evencristen*, like CF Julian, must make a conscious effort not only to look at the closest focalized object but also to look deeper into the image.\(^1\) *Revelation*, thus, didactically creates a parallel between CF Julian’s *avisement* and that of the *evencristen*. In other words, by means of the bifocal focalization, *Revelation* both trains the *evencristen’s avisement* and demands it when *Revelation* is read. Narrator Julian thus implies that the *evencristen’s avisement*, like character Julian’s, contributes to the events of her visionary sequence, and to the intensity of Christ’s suffering. When the *evencristen* reads *Revelation* with deliberation, narrator Julian suggests, Christ’s body will also bleed copiously until the *evencristen* has seen and understood all.

In addition, with this didactic focalization, *Revelation* offers a more embodied, transformative alternative to that found in a number of affective mediation works. The *MVC* in particular, as Karnes has shown, presents itself as requiring the meditant’s deliberate mental labour.\(^2\) It often describes different scenarios for biblical events, —for instance different methods of Christ’s crucifixion — and discusses which is the most reasonable, so that the reader has to think through the scenes carefully. According to Karnes ‘the meditant think[s] through the scenes and inhabits them cognitively in order to inhabit them spiritually’.\(^3\) Such sustained cognitive engagement makes Christ more spiritually present in the reader’s imagination, which in turn makes the believer’s affective meditation more spiritually beneficial.

Instead of multiple scenarios, *Revelation* offers the reader different depths of field. The *evencristen* has to think through and inhabit these, rather than to through different events. By having the complexity of the focalization require *avisement*, *Revelation* grounds such meditative deliberation more in the perceiving body than affective meditation texts do. This greater physicality allows the meditant greater co-Passion. By seeing Christ in the visions, Christ’s imprints his species on the *evencristen*, who thereby physically becomes like Christ. Additionally, by thinking through the seeing in the visions, Christ is made more present spiritually in the *evencristen*’s cognition. *Revelation* thus allows the *evencristen* to kill two birds with one stone: he or she simultaneously receives the spiritual benefits associated with observing Christ’s suffering body closely and those associated with sustained cognitive engagement with Christ’s life.

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1 This process is similar to that done by CF Julian when seeing the parable of the Lord and Servant. This vision is ‘shewed double’ (*Rev*. 51. 4), that is, has two levels. CF Julian’s understanding is first led into the first level of the vision, then into the second one, and then back into the first (51. 33-39). This mental movement requires ‘both kep in mind’ (51. 39), keeping both layers before one’s mental eye.

2 Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages*, 166–78.

3 Ibid, 172.
Thematically, the emphasis on seeing deeper into the image and into Christ’s body similarly challenges affective meditation conventions. Revelation again confronts another binary, essentialist opposition of affective meditation, present in particular in the Mirror.¹ One of its central assumptions is that lay people can only meditate on Christ’s humanity, and cannot contemplate his divinity. Likewise, the symbolic affiliation of women with affective meditation, with its focus on Christ’s human life, creates a similar set of binary oppositions. Aers sums up this ‘key proportion’ in these traditions as: ‘Divinity : Christ’s humanity :: men/masculine/reason : women/feminine/flesh’.²

Unlike Vision, Revelation unravels these binary oppositions. It does so by this emphasis on moving deeper into the image and deeper into Christ’s body. This body traditionally signifies his humanity, but in Revelation also signifies the Trinity. As several critics have noted, Revelation is unique among late medieval devotional texts in how it does not wish to move beyond Christ’s humanity, and in seeing human Christ as signifying and containing the Trinity.³

The extensively changed Tenth Revelation illustrates this aspect of Julian’s theology, by depicting seeing into Christ’s body as a movement into the Trinity. This is suggested by the change in the narrator’s exegetical paraphrase of Christ’s ‘Lo, how I loved thee.’ In Vision the narrator paraphrases these words of love as ‘My childe, if thow can nought loke in my godhead, see here howe I lette open my side’ (Vis.13. 2, 3). [‘My child, if you cannot [look on] my Godhead, see here how I let my side be opened’].⁴ The narrator lets Christ assume that this woman, likely a layperson, and the even cristen cannot look at Christ’s divinity. Christ recommends they therefore look at his body instead. These assumptions about the meditative capacities of the laity and women resemble those of the Mirror.

Revelation, in contrast, changes and expands this exegetical paraphrase: ‘My darling, behold and see thy lorde, thy God, that is thy maker and thy endlesse joy. See thin owne brother, thy savioure’ (Rev. 51. 11,12). [My darling, look and see your Lord, your God, your creator and your endless joy [...] See your brother, your [saviour].]⁵ The narrator lets Christ explicitly state that God can be looked at by CF Julian, and by extension, all

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¹ Several others, such as Aers and Bryan, see Revelation as challenging these binaries as well, but for other reasons.
⁴ Revelations of Divine Love, 19.
⁵ Revelations of Divine Love, 72. Windeatt’s translation, using another manuscript, gives ‘sovereign’ instead of ‘saviour’.

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her *evencresten*. Moreover, the narrator has Christ’s actions match his words. Before the paraphrase, when looking into his wounded side, Christ has shown ‘with the sweet beholding [...] to [Julian’s] understanding, in part, the blessed godhede.’ *(Rev. 24. 7-8)* The narrator now makes Christ fully convinced that the *evencresten* and CF Julian are capable of both seeing and beholding the godhead, and lets them do so.

What is more, with this paraphrase, Christ interprets Julian’s looking into his side wound a few moments earlier as an ocular grasping of God the Maker. Thus, when the *evencresten* meditatively performs CF Julian’s focalization in this scene, he or she sees into God the Creator. Since according to medieval optics sight entails a meeting of two bodies and a physical transformation of the observer,¹ all *evencresten* can thus become physically like the Trinity. Focalization leads to deification.

*Revelation* does not simply replace or set aside such assumptions as those in the *Mirror*, which still influence *Vision* to a certain extent. Instead, *Revelation* wholly reconfigures them, perhaps even transfigures them. The ‘bodily thinges’ are kept: the *evencresten* and Julian keep studying Christ’s body. It is by seeing more deeply into these bodily things that all *evencresten* can see into God, and assimilate God into themselves.

### Conclusion

To conclude, it can be noticed that *Revelation* expands and transforms the focalization already present in *Vision*, while also showing part of a greater focalization, which sees deeper into God. These two forms of focalization in *Revelation* are closely intertwined with its more developed theology.

First of all, by allowing her own visual dialogue with the divine to lead to the divine focalized object being obscured, narrator Julian illustrates several of her claims about the contrast between human perspective and God’s perspective. For instance, *Revelation* thus narrativizes how the human perspective on humanity, sin and world history is harsh and incomplete in comparison to the loving, all-seeing ‘beholding of God,’ in which there is no sin *(Rev. 52).* Denys Turner calls this the ‘bifocal character’ of the theology in *Revelation*, stressing that Julian needs to ‘keep constantly in play two angles of vision.’² CF Julian’s bifocal focalization reflects the narrator’s seeking to find how the two beholdings relate to one another and how to lessen their anxiety-causing discrepancy. This protracted search is central to what Grace Jantzen calls Julian’s ‘theology of integration,’ with its focus on human whole-making.³

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¹ Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, 2.
Secondly, by creating a closer focalization, *Revelation* dramatizes its conviction that in ‘this deadly life’ (*Rev. 10. 47*) each believer is capable of seeing God. With this closer focalization the narrator also illustrates that God continually looks lovingly upon humanity. The narrator has character Julian grasp this continuous visual dialogue when God responds to her wish for more light with a vision in which God leads her understanding down to the bottom of the sea:

> Then I understode thus, that if a man of woman were there, under the brode water, and he might have sight of God —so as God is with a man continually— he shulde be safe in soule and body [...] [God] wille that we believe that we see him continually, thowe that us thinke that it be but little [...] he will be seen, and he will be sought. (*Rev. 10. 16-20, 22-24*)

[Then I understood this: that if a man or woman were under the broad waters, if he could have sight of God (just as God is constantly with us), he would be safe in body and soul [...] God wants us to believe that we see him continually, even though it seems to us that we see only a little [...] for he wants to be seen, and he wants to be sought[.]

The focalization in *Revelation*, in other words, reflects the theological claim that humanity can constantly see God, if they do not focus on their own beholding (‘the brode water’) but rather allow it to be taken up into God’s greater beholding.

The most transformative and characteristic interaction, however, between theology and story-telling is how *Revelation* has its bifocal seeing prefigure the beatific vision. By encouraging the *evencristen* to look more inward into Christ and the Trinity, *Revelation* suggests that the beatific vision differs only in quantity and amount of perfection from the seeing into God already available to the *evencristen* on earth. The *evencristen’s* seeing into God is a gaze which God seeks, and is integral to the dialogue between God’s gaze and humanity’s. This dialectic focalization reappears the narrator meditates in one of the later chapters:

> The highest blesse that is, is to have God in cleer te of enedless light, him verely seying [...] He shall never have his fulle blesse in us till we have oure faire blesse in him, verely seeing his fair blissful chere [...] we may never stente of [...] seking or longing, till we se him clere in

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his blissful chere. For in that sight ther may no wo abide nor wele faile. (Rev. 72. 4, 7,8, 13-15, 22-22)

[The highest bliss there is, is to possess God in the radiance of eternal life\(^1\), seeing him truly [...] but he will never have his full bliss in us until we have our full bliss in him, truly seeing his fair, blessed face [...] we can still never stop [...] seeking or longing, until we see his blessed face clearly; for in that precious, blissful sight no sorrow can remain and no joy can be lacking.]\(^2\)

The narrator posits an uninterrupted seeing lasting from the believer’s earthly existence into the heavenly one. She also makes God’s ‘blesse’ as contingent upon humanity’s seeing of him as humanity’s is on seeing God. CF Julian’s ocular grasping into Christ’s side makes Christ ‘full blissful’; Julian’s seeing with avisement is required to make Christ’s body bleed more. Likewise, according to Revelation Julian, for God’s joy to be complete, all human beings need to see inward into God. Until then, God experiences wo, and his wele is failing. Thus, instead of a beatific vision consisting of a distant, detached looking at God the Father, Revelation offers a communion by means of sight between God and humanity. In this communion, humanity continuously looks further inward into the body of God, who is both ‘true father and moder’ (Rev. 62. 12) ‘true father and mother’\(^3\).

This chapter’s dialogue between Vision and Revelation’s visuality, the narratological concept of focalization, and medieval optics allows for some critical reflexion. Most importantly, focalization and other literary conceptualizations of perception possibly foster a bias towards a unidirectional relation between observer and observed. Many models of visuality seem premised upon the viewer having or trying achieve mastery and control over the viewed, instead of upon both striving for assimilation and communion. The very terms (focalizor-focalized object, viewer-viewed) steer the critic’s conceptualization towards distance and unidirectionality rather than towards reciprocity.

This chapter has tried to avoid this bias by paying attention to acts of assimilation. However, it seems likely that when using twenty-first-century models of visuality, the critic will miss a certain amount of the reciprocity and mutual contributing involved in seeing in medieval texts. A continuous questioning of one’s assumptions about the relation between the different

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\(^1\) The differences between this passage and its translation are due to textual variance in the manuscripts: Paris, which Watson and Jenkins use in this chapter, has ‘light’; Sloane reads ‘life’, which Windeatt prefers.

\(^2\) Revelations of Divine Love, 146, 147.

\(^3\) Revelations of Divine Love, 134.
entities is therefore required when reading medieval texts. Practically, in the context of medieval visionary text, it might be useful to replace ‘focalized object’ by ‘focalized sender’ or ‘focalized shewer’, even when the element perceived is inanimate. ‘Shewer’ or ‘sender’ suggests this entity contributes equally to the seeing as the focalizor does.

More generally, the transformative reciprocity of medieval sight is significant for modern conceptualizations of medieval models of the reading process, as is the understanding of seeing and reading as synonymous. If reading, like seeing, entails an encounter between two bodies, reading is not only consuming of a text but also a dialogue. The text reads the reader as well. Wogan-Browne, Watson, Taylor and Evans have explored the spiritual transformations that both secular and religious vernacular texts expect to bring about in their reader. Yet when reading and seeing are synonymous, reading leads to a physical transformation as well. That is, the text imprints its species on the reader’s interior, and makes the reader resemble what the text depicts. The relation between text and reader thus becomes similar to the mutually assimilative relation between a Man of Sorrows image and a meditant. Such a model of the reading process may strike the twenty-first-century critic as quite alien. However, as Bynum recommends, the alterity of medieval thought should be recognized and inform scholarship. The sense of wonder, thus, evoked by the notion of a reciprocal reading process may indicate that it can helpfully inform medieval literary studies.

Closely related to this, is the meditative engagement and visualizing on the part of the reader that Vision, Revelation and many other medieval religious texts seek and sometimes explicitly demand. Since this feature is absent from a large part of twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature, many modern literary models do not capture it fully. A possibly fruitful transhistorical approach to such texts, however, is a dialogue with fan studies. Several medieval texts resemble fan fiction in their appropriating and transforming of their (sometimes fictional) source material and in their inserting of the reader into the story world. Unlike most works of fan fiction, however, several medieval genres, especially affective meditations make

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1 Comparisons between reading and eating do frequently occur in medieval literary thought, however; the most pervasive one is the concept of *ruminatio*, chewing on a text. The Middle English translation of Catherine of Siena’s *The Orchard of Syon* compares itself to an orchard (hence the title) in which the reader can pick different pieces of fruit.


5 The past thirty years have in fact seen an increase in interest in the points of analogy between medieval literature and fan fiction, with a panel at Kalamazoo on this topic in 2016. Anna Wilson ‘Fanfiction in Medieval Studies’.
explicit the transformations that turn canon into fanon, such as expansions and self-inserts. A dialogue can therefore enrich scholarship on both genres.

In addition, this meditative engagement and visualizing turns the reader into a character. In narratological terms, the reader is not only an entity at text level, but also becomes an element in the story, on a par with the characters, and an aspect in the fabula, on a par with the actors. Julian’s works as well as affective meditations do so with great effectivity.

This feature of many medieval texts challenges the modern claim that works of prose attempting to include the reader in the text as a character distance the reader emotionally from the text rather than engage him or her. Reflecting on second-person narration, H. Porter Abbott, for instance, argues in his introduction to narrative that readers ‘do not take well to being addressed in this way, with someone else telling us what we are thinking and doing.’ Affective meditations, however, show that the strong pull of narrative can diminish possible distrust caused by this direct address. Moreover, Revelation suggests that if this telling what to think and do comes across as a collaborative effort of reader and narrator, it attracts rather than repels the reader.

Returning to Vision and Revelation, it can be noticed that all changes in focalization in Revelation share that they bring CF Julian and the evencristen closer to one another. For example, in Vision it is still possible at one occasion to see the events from another perceiving body than CF Julian’s. In Revelation, in contrast, the reader can see through her eyes only. Likewise, because of their seeing and visualizing being parallels, CF Julian and the evencristen assimilate Christ equally in Revelation. CF Julian and the evencristen, then, not only become both more like Christ, but also more like one another. In brief, the text characterizes them as similar. The next chapter explores this characterization, another narrative feature. Having discussed what is seen, and how the visions are seen, my discussion now turns to who is involved in this seeing. The next chapter therefore examines the major players in this visionary and visual drama about one woman at multiple points in her life, all of humanity, and a remarkably androgynous God.

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1 Jules Evans also very briefly compares affective meditations to fan fiction. Evans, ‘What Can We Recover from Medieval Contemplative Culture.’
2 Abbott, The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative, 64.
3. Characterization: ‘But His Foreseeing Perpos...Wolde That We Were Doubil’

After almost twenty years of grappling with the parable of the Lord and Servant, character Julian finally receives the instructions necessary for acquiring greater understanding of the exemplum. Equipped thus she begins to study the characters with great intensity, including such details as their ‘chere’ [expression] and ‘outward behaving,’ the lord’s ‘nobley and goodnes within’ ['inner nobility and goodness'] and the servant’s ‘inward goodnes and unlothurfully’ ['inner goodness and alacrity'] (Rev. 51. 77-84). By describing these ‘pointes and propertes’ ['properties and attributes'] of the parable characters, the narrator not only lets character Julian discover more about these characters; the narrator also expands their characterization, that is, her construction of humanlike entities who are involved in the action and who have agency.

In the expanded characterization of the parable characters, they accumulate more ‘propertes’ over the course of the different retellings of the parable. For instance, she ascribes black eyes and a loving gaze to the lord. In these re-tellings, I suggest, the servant becomes more double, in the sense of being twofold, just as the parable in the beginning is ‘shewed double’ ‘manifested on two different levels.’

The narrator constructs the servant, first as ‘a servant’, but after the instructions, as both this servant and all of humanity: ‘The servant [...] was shewed for Adam: [...] one man was shewed that time, and his falling, to make thereby understand how God beholdeth alle manne and his falling’ (Rev. 51. 86-88). ['The servant [...] represents Adam [...] one man and his fall was shown at that time to make understood how God regards any man and his fall.'] After even more retellings, the narrator lets character Julian discover that the servant ‘comprehends,’ signifies and encloses both Adam and Christ: ‘In the servant is comprehended the seconde person of the trinite, and in the servant is comprehended Adam: that is to sey, all men’ (Rev. 51. 178, 179). The servant, then, signifies doubly, as Ena Jenkins also suggests.

Yet the narrator’s characterization of the servant does not end there. At the end of the re-seeings of the parable, Christ and Adam become one figure, ‘the sonne’. This character is the transfigured servant, clothed in humanity:

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2 Abbott, The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative, 188.
Our foule deadly flesh, that Goddes son toke upon him —which was Adams olde kirtel, straite, bare and shorte— then by oure savioure was made fair, new, whit and bright [.] (Rev. 51. 259-261)

[Our foul mortal flesh which God’s son took upon himself – which was Adam’s old tunic, tight-fitting, threadbare and short, was then made by our Saviour newly beautiful, white and bright].

The narrator sees that Adam’s ragged kirtle has become the Son’s spotless clothing, yet the uniting of divinity and humanity makes the garment more beautiful than God’s:

[F]air and richer than [...] the clothing which I saw on the fader [...] Cristes clothing is now of fair, semely medelour, which is so mervelous that I can it not discrive. (Rev. 51. 259-263).

[Fairer and richer [...] than the clothing I saw on the father [...] Christ’s clothing is now of a beautiful and befitting mixture, which was so marvellous that I cannot describe it.]

The same properte, ‘the coloure of his clothing, and the manner of shape’ (Rev. 51. 80), is here used to unite Adam and humanity that was earlier used to distinguish the two.

I suggest that when comparing the construction of the human and divine characters in Vision and Revelation, it is possible to see a similar increase in doubleness, in the sense of being twofold and being changeable. Simultaneously, Revelation also hints at the doubleness of these characters ultimately becoming one ‘medelour’ in Christ.

In medieval literature such doubleness was often ascribed to women. Medieval misogynistic texts often characterized women as naturally ‘double’ and as a sign of instability, mutability, faithlessness, and twofoldness, characteristics which ‘doubleness’ also denotes. For instance, in his fifteenth-century epic poem the Troy Book, Lydgate writes in a lengthy misogynistic litany: ‘unto [women] it longeth of nature/ From her birth to hauen alliaunce / With doubilnes and with variaunce’. [‘It is a natural characteristic of women/ from birth onwards to have alliance/ with doubleness and variance.’] The apologia in Vision can be seen as a pre-emptive response to such stereotypes.

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1 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 272.
2 Revelations of Divine Love, 114.
I argue that *Revelation* makes its characters more double, with the exception of the devil, ascribing such female doubleness to the Trinity, Christ, character Julian and the *evencresten*, and thereby transforms such stereotypes from the inside out. This increasing doubleness can be read as the same impulse as the one behind *Revelation*'s excision of the *apologia* and other references to character Julian's gender. That is, the feminine goes underground, as Liz Herbert McAvoy suggests; the narrator thus confronts medieval gender stereotypes from within these stereotypes.

Exploring characterization in *Vision* and *Revelation* thus allows for a closer examination of their narrative strategies concerning gender. Nicholas Watson has argued that *Revelation*, with its motherhood theology and the ontology of the soul as consisting of ‘substance’ (essence) and ‘sensualite’ (‘sensory being’ or ‘being in time and history’) greatly shifts the authorized meanings of these gender stereotypes. Liz Herbert McAvoy has shown that the doubleness of the language in *Revelation*, defined as its ‘endless doublings and multiplicities’, likewise turns these misogynistic stereotypes into an authoritative, bodily hermeneutic.

By means of the construction of the characters, I argue, *Revelation* likewise reconfigures this doubleness from the inside out, by further developing a strand already found in *Vision*. This increasing doubleness allows *Revelation* to engage with two discourses that often mediated and controlled women, and to which the *apologia* in *Vision* responds: those centering around *discretio spirituum*, the discernment of spirits and God-sent visions, and *auctoritas*, the literary and doctrinal authoritativeness of a text.

**From a Single Visionary to a ‘Doubil’ Author**

In *Vision*, I suggest, narrator Julian is still at pains to avoid doubleness in her construction of her character alter-ego. She portrays her as a typical instance of a visionary by making her characteristics fit the visionary vocation. Consequently, the narrator cannot avoid separating character Julian from the *evencresten* whom she claims character Julian represents, creating an unwanted doubleness. In *Revelation*, in contrast, this doubleness

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1 McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 211, 212.
3 McAvoy, “‘For We Be Doubel of God’s Making’: Writing, Gender and the Body in Julian of Norwich.,” 168.
becomes a positive characteristic and is expanded. The characterization dramatizes the ontology of the soul as made up of substance and sensuality, representing character Julian, the evenchristen, and God as double, with both The Trinity and Christ being made mothers in a twofold way. At the end of Revelation, however, some aspects of characterization depict the complete uniting of substance and sensuality, which is only fully available in the afterlife and after Christ’s action at the end of time.

In general, then, when comparing Vision and Revelation, a shift can be seen from anxious unity, to self-assured doubleness, to hints of that doubleness turning into unity in heaven. A number of critics have explored how the portrayals of character Julian and narrator Julian differ in Vision and Revelation.

Several, such as Staley and Dutton, also note a shift from character Julian being portrayed as mostly a visionary to a more multifaceted character resembling an exegete and a compiler. Agreeing with this, I see a similar increase in complexity of and multifacetedness in the construction of God, the evenchristen, and character Julian.

Establishing Auctoritas and Facilitating Discretio Spirituum

Examining characterization sheds further light upon how Vision and Revelation engage with discretio spirituum and auctoritas discourses. Though assumptions regarding women and discretio spirituum and auctoritas mediated and controlled women, female authors and visionaries could also draw upon them to validate their voice, as the apologia shows. In Vision, narrator Julian cautions: ‘Botte God forbade that ye shulde saye or take it so that I am techere [...] for I am a woman, lewed, febille, and freylle’ (Vis. 6. 35-37). ['But God forbid that you should say, or take it, that I am a teacher [...] for I am a woman, ignorant, weak, and frail.'] Yet, as numerous critics note, the narrator then tactically uses that same weakness to turn her character alter-ego into a vehicle for divine auctoritas, narrating authentic visions, in accordance with discretio spirituum discourse: ‘Bot I wate it wele, this that I saye I have it of the shewinge of him that es soverayne techare’ (Vis. 6. 37, 38). ['But I know very well that what I am saying I have

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1 When referring to the increased doubleness in Revelation, I do not wish to imply that its ontology or theology is dualist, and its distinctions binary. In all her characterizations and ontological discussions of humanity and the divine, she will often make a distinction, only to interlink and unite the two concepts in a perichoresis-like fashion. However, for the sake of analysis, a small amount of simplification and therefore a very small amount of apparent dualism cannot be avoided.


3 Revelations of Divine Love, 10.

4 Watson and Jenkins, Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 64; McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body, 67; Barratt, Women’s Writing in Middle English, 9.
received through revelation from him who is the supreme teacher.‘1] This passage shows that discretio spirituum and auctoritas are strongly tied up with how an author or visionary depicts him- or herself.

In this apologia, echoes of discretio spirituum discourse can be heard. According to the many principles associated with discretio spirituum, the visionary’s character traits are inextricably linked with the validity of the visions. As Rosalyn Voaden has illustrated, a visionary needs to present herself as virtuous, powerless, submissive to her confessor, and lacking knowledge in order to come across as a true visionary.2 Moreover, self-fashioning also affected a text’s auctoritas, that is, its doctrinal and literary ‘authoritativeness’ and its authenticity. During the later middle ages, literary discourse saw auctoritas move from the divine realm to the human, and from the past to the present; vernacular writers began to depict themselves as similar to classical, respected authors and ascribe their status to themselves.3 Though auctoritas was often seen as incompatible with femininity, as Alexandra Barrat points out, female writers could nonetheless establish auctoritas in their texts by claiming to be instruments of God’s higher authority, or by appropriating authority as compilers, translators and adaptors.4

Different critics have discerned different strategies in Vision and Revelation for establishing auctoritas and for validating the visions. According to Elisabeth Dutton, the Revelation narrator’s use of compilation conventions, and her representing character Julian’s process of learning to compile, allows her to establish the auctoritas of a compiler, commentator, and auctor.5 Lynn Staley suggests that in Revelation auctoritas is derived from the narrator’s ability to provide her visionary experience with exegetical commentary, in contrast to Vision.6 Liz Herbert McAvoy argues, among other things, that it is the narrator’s increased self-fashioning as a prophetic, sibylline wise woman in Revelation which establishes auctoritas.7 Concurring with these, I would like to suggest another possible strategy as well: by ascribing the doubleness thought to undermine the reliability of women’s visions and their writings to God (the divine Auctor) and all evenchristen, character Julian’s doubleness and that of the text become an indicator of their auctoritas and visionary authenticity.

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 10.
2 Voaden, God’s Words, Women’s Voices, 97, 104.
4 The Idea of the Vernacular, 7.
5 Barratt, 4, 8.
6 Elisabeth Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 161–68.
7 Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich’, 139.
8 McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body, 205–34.
The Penitential Characterization Grid and Revelation’s own Circumstantiae

Turning to the parable once more, the ‘pointes and propertes’ which character Julian studies, evoke a characterization template available in medieval religious culture, the list of topics, or circumstantiae, used by the clergy when hearing confession.

These penitential manuals instruct priests hearing confession to learn who the penitent is, what the sin was, why the sin was committed, where, and so on. Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland point out that this system constructs a narrative: ‘Like the orator with his topics and arguments, the priest must exert a situational mastery over the narrative of confession: we see here how the priest is schooled in the discipline of producing that narrative.’

I would like to add that a portrait of the penitent is created within that narrative. In John Mirk’s early fifteenth-century Instructions to Parish Priests, for instance, the priest is instructed to learn the sinner’s gender (‘heo or he’), age (‘yonge or olde’) social and economic status (‘bonde or fre’ ‘pore or rych’ ‘clerke or lewed or seculer’), marital status (‘sengul, or weddet, or cloystered’) and cognitive capacities (‘and yef he were in hys wyte’ ‘and whether he or she is in their right mind’).

How vivid the narratives and characterization produced by confession could be can be seen from the chapter on confession in the Ancrene Wisse. The structure of confession in this chapter also draws upon circumstantiae:

Abute sunne liggeð six þing þet hit hulieð o Latin ‘circumstances’ (on English ‘totagges’ mahe beon icleopede): persone, stude, time, manere, tale, cause.

[These are six things associated with sin that conceal it, ‘circumstances’ in Latin (in English they can be called ‘accessories’): person, place, time, manner, number, cause.]

The Ancrene Wisse-author provides each circumstance with a brief discussion and examples. The latter create vignettes with striking depictions of the penitents’ behaviour, speech, inner life and personality, for instance when they describe themselves (‘persone’), the place and cause:

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1 Curry Woods and Copeland, ‘Classroom and Confession’, 402.
2 Mirk, Instructions for Parish Priests, 44 ll. 1408-1412, 1417. My translation.
3 Ancrene Wisse, ed. Millett, pt. 5.11 p. 120; trans Millett, Ancrene Wisse/Guide for Anchoresse, 120.
I am [...] an anchoress, a nun, a married woman, an unmarried girl, a woman who has burnt her fingers in the same way before and should have been better prepared against it [...] I joked or talked in this way in church, joined round dances in the churchyard [...] I had these thoughts in church, watched him at the altar as he offered [...] I did it with an evil intention, even if no harm came of it.1

These instructions with their examples invite the anchoress to communicate a self-portrait, a characterization of herself, to the confessor.

Whether Julian knew the *Ancrene Wisse* or not, there can be no doubt about the historical Julian and her devout readers having experienced confession. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 made annual confession to one’s parish priest compulsory.2 Furthermore, according to the *Ancrene Wisse*, anchorites were expected to make confession often.3 Consequently, creating such self-depictions must have been a rather familiar practice. These *circumstantiae* are likely to have influenced depictions of characters in medieval narratives in general, as is suggested by Mary Brasswell’s study of the penitential tradition supporting the creation of self-aware characters in *Gawain* and *Piers* 4 and also in *Vision* and *Revelation*.

The parable *circumstantiae* in *Revelation* overlap somewhat with the penitential *circumstantiae* in the *Ancrene Wisse*, but also differ from them in a subtle yet significant way. The *Revelation* narrator begins constructing her circumstantial scheme by letting character Julian study the lord and servant in general, which would be *Ancrene Wisse*’s ‘persone’. Character Julian then moves on to their physical position and their place (‘the manner of [...] of stonding [...] and the place, where and how’); this circumstantial matches the *Ancrene Wisse*’s ‘stude’. Then, she turns to the form and colour of their clothing, a *circumstantia* not found in the *Ancrene Wisse*. After this, she turns to their external expression and behaviour (‘his chere without [...] his outwarde behaving’) before finally turning to their inner traits. The *Ancrene Wisse* pays no attention to the penitent’s expression, but does mention the *circumstantiae* ‘cause,’ and ‘manner’ which includes motivation as well. The *Revelation* narrator, however, is more interested than the *Ancrene Wisse* author in how such actions and their manner affect others, and in more lasting characteristics; the *Ancrene Wisse* recommends a solipsistic description of changeable qualities rather than a social one. The

1 Millett, *Ancrene Wisse: A Translation*, p.120, 121 (pt. 5 12-14, 17).
2 Curry Woods and Copeland, ‘Classroom and Confession’, 376.
differences in *circumstantiae* between *Revelation* and the *Ancrene Wisse* thus reflect *Revelation*’s greater emphasis on God’s immanent presence.

The terms ‘characterization’ and ‘character’ were not yet used in the modern sense in the fourteenth century. However, the narrator’s attention to her construction of these characters and the influence of penitential *circumstantiae* on literature show that medieval literary practice and literary theory did pay attention to the construction of characters. This chapter, therefore, draws upon *Revelation*’s own *circumstantiae* in addition to the penitential *circumstantiae*.

**Constructing the Divine**

Since such *circumstantiae* as found in the *Ancrene Wisse* served a pastoral function in the historical reality of late-medieval England, I would like to emphasize that this analysis discusses the characters as textual and mental constructs rather than depictions of historical or supernatural beings. This analysis therefore is both narratological and structuralist in outlook. In Uri Margolin’s words, characters are ‘complexes of descriptions’, whose properties are determined rather than described by the authors creating their narratives.\(^1\) Similarly, H. Porter Abbott, in his discussion of self in narrative, stresses that even a self-portrait in an autobiography cannot avoid being a performative construct.\(^2\)

Such emphasis on the constructed nature of characters is particularly useful in the context of Julian of Norwich, since her works, radiating such self-assurance and intellectual integrity, do not invite such a reading to the extent that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or *Piers Plowman* do. Yet only investigating the characters as constructs reveals why the narrator and her character alter-ego come across in this manner. Lynn Staley recommends seeing a similar constructedness and fictionality in *The Book of Margery Kempe* as in *The Canterbury Tales* pointing out that ‘the Book of Margery Kempe is not what it appears to be; any more than *The Canterbury Tales* are stories Chaucer heard from ‘other’ pilgrims.’\(^3\) A similar claim can be made regarding Julian: characters in her text can be read as constructs to the same extent as the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* usually are.

In addition to this emphasis on the constructedness of characters, two other tenets of narratology regarding characterization need to be briefly introduced. First, characters belong to the story layer. When the fabula is turned into a story, the human-like entities are given distinct traits and qualities, which causes them to be individualized.\(^4\) Bal writes that characters

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1. Uri Margolin, ‘Character’, 68.
are ‘more or less predictable, from the time [they] are presented onward.’ She suggests that names, the personal pronoun, profession, sex, status and genre create an expectation, which the story may fulfill or frustrate. In the story, the image of a character is constructed by repeated references to external features, qualities and character traits, accumulation of these properties, the characters’ relation to other characters, and changes in the character. Julian’s calling herself a wretch in Vision is an example of repeated reference to a character trait. It should be remembered that the evencristen is a character at story level as well, since their actions form part of the events, sometimes even being seen in the visions.

The second tenet is that information about a character can be provided in several ways. Bal distinguishes between explicit qualification, when the narrator, the character itself, or another character describes a property, and implicit qualification, when the reader deduces characteristics from the character’s action. Fotis Jannidis in the Living Handbook of Narratology similarly distinguishes two sources of information: (a) textually explicit ascription of properties to a character; (b) inferences that can be drawn from textual cues. This distinction between implicit and explicit characterization is relevant for a discussion for Julian’s apparent self-effacement in Revelation, and her self-portrayal as a typical visionary in Vision.

A possible objection to deducing characteristics from the character’s actions might be that the assumptions in medieval religious narratives about human agency and causality differ from those in modern narratives, such as novels. The critical approaches meant to analyse these modern narratives, such as, narratology and most of modern literary theory, see characters as defined by agency. The character’s personality determines the events, and the events illustrate the character’s personality. Abbott writes: ‘Characters, to put this in narratological terms, have agency; they cause things to happen. Conversely, as these people drive the action, they necessarily reveal who they are [...] By their actions we know them.’

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1 Ibid., 125.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 126, 127.
4 For the sake of clarity, I will be using ‘characteristics’ when referring to all aspects that make a character distinct in any manner, such as looks, character traits, gender, age and so on.
5 Bal, Narratology, 131, 132.
6 Jannidis, ‘Character.’ Jannidis mentions as a third source inferences based on ‘historically and culturally variable real-world conventions;’ However, twenty-first-century readers have little to no access to fourteenth-century real-world conventions.
Several critics, however, claim that characters in many medieval religious narratives are defined by their lack of agency. For instance, David Mills, in his study of mystery plays, sees action as detached from characterization and as not expressing individuality: ‘within the mystery cycles […] characterisation is divorced from causation. Actions originate in the will of God, not in the characters of men; and they are manifestations of divine will, not of human individuality.’¹ Lawrence M. Clopper, in his discussion of tyrants and villains in Middle English theatre, similarly points out that the medieval playwright does not concern him or herself with why a character acts as he or she does.² This lack of agency would seem to problematize knowing a character by their actions.

However, this possible tension between modern and medieval characterization can be lessened by reading it in relation to Revelation’s understanding of the relation between human and divine actions. In her exposition of prayer and providence, narrator Julian states that prayer creates collaboration between humanity and God: ‘God […] will make us perteyner of his good wille and dede’ (Rev. 43. 5,6). [‘God […] wants to make us partners in his good work.’]³ Because of this collaborative focus in Julian’s works, I suggest seeing the characters’ actions as a dialogue between the human characters and character God, who is the transcendent subject. This allows for reading the character in Vision and Revelation like medieval mystery play characters, whose actions originate in the will of God, and like the characters in a twentieth or twenty-first-century traditional novel, about whom the reader can deduce traits from their actions. For instance, the visions can be seen as equally brought about by character Julian’s request and by transcendent subject God’s wishes. Reading the first scenes in both texts like ones from a novel, they implicitly characterize character God as sufficiently devout to bring about such a divine act, as God’s thanking Julian for her service in her youth also suggests. When read like a mystery play, these scenes imply that character God wishes to communicate the content of the visions, also suggested by the narrator’s frequent use of ‘by the grace of God’.

‘We Are Alle Ane’: Vision’s Strategic Avoidance of Doubleness

An (A)Typical Visionary

In Vision, the narrator attempts to avoid doubleness by letting her alter-ego’s explicit characteristics in the apologia match the implicit

³ Revelations of Divine Love, 95.
characteristics, both those deducible from actions before the visions and from the fact of her receiving the visions. By means of these, the narrator attempts to turn her alter-ego into a type of the visionary, that is, a visionary as general as an *exemplum*-character. Birgitta of Sweden was seen as the perfect instance of this type as prescribed by *discretio spirituum*-discourse. Rosalynn Voaden in her study of *discretio spirituum* and female visionaries describes this type as a passive, invisible vehicle for divine communication.\(^1\) Such a visionary should be nearly ignorant, with all her knowledge, including interpretations of the visions, derived from teaching from God or her confessor.\(^2\) Her behaviour should be virtuous, meek, humble and obedient, to her confessor most of all, and her body is expected to be so unobtrusive that it hardly exists.\(^3\) In order to be perceived as a visionary at all, as Voaden emphasizes, a woman would have to characterize herself and be characterized by others as an empty, clear channel.\(^4\) All her characteristics being forms of passivity, the visionary cannot display the dangerous duplicity, changeability and doubleness that medieval gender stereotypes ascribed to women.

Narrator Julian ascribes to her character alter-ego explicit characteristics, or in Bal’s terms, ‘explicit qualifications,’ evoking this type. This is done in the *apologia* and at a few other moments; most of these characteristics concern the *circumstantia* of ‘persone’. In the *apologia*, for instance, Julian the narrator at first appears to exhort the *evenchristen* not to pay attention to character Julian:

\[\text{I praye yowe alle for Goddes sake, and counsayles yowe for youre awne profit, that ye leve the beholding of the wrecid, sinfulle creature that it was shewed unto, and that ye mightye, lovandlye, and mekelye behalde God […] Botte God forbede that y e shulde saye or take it so that I am a techere. For I meene it n ought so, no I mente nevere so. For I am a woman, lewed, febille, and freylle […] Than shalle ye sone forgete me that am a wreche, and dose so that I lette yowe nought, and behalde Jhesu that is techare of alle. (Vis. 6. 3-5, 35-37, 44, 45)\]

\[\text{[I beg you all for God’s sake, and advise you for your own benefit, that you disregard the wretched, sinful creature to whom it was shown, and with all strength, wisdom, love, and humility}\]

\(^{1}\) Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*, 96.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., 100.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., 104.
\(^{4}\) Ibid., 98, 99.
contemplate God [...] But God forbid that you should say, or take it, that I am a teacher, for I do not mean that, nor did I ever mean that, for I am a woman, ignorant, weak, and frail [...] Then you must quickly forget wretched me, and not let me hinder you, and contemplate Jesus, who is teacher of all.] ¹

By instructing the *evencrafted* so emphatically to look away from character Julian, the narrator actually creates the opposite effect, similar to the thought suppression paradox ‘do not think of a white bear’, thereby emphasizing the aspects of the ‘persona’ *circumstantia* that turn character Julian into a type of the visionary.

First, she is not a teacher and she is ‘lewed’, uneducated or unable to read Latin, which makes all teaching God’s. Secondly, being weak and frail, neither her body nor her mind can distort the visions. Thirdly, by describing her alter-ego in such modest terms, the narrator comes across as humble and submissive as well, like visionaries were expected to be. Finally, with the explicit instruction to ‘leave the beholding of’, that is, not to look at character Julian, the narrator explicitly characterizes her character alter-ego as invisible, like visionaries were expected to render themselves.² Another instance of explicit characterization is that narrator Julian makes another character, the priest, address character Julian as ‘daughter.’ Narrator Julian thus lets the priest characterize her alter-ego as in a dependent position to male clergy, which turns her into a submissive visionary channel.

*Vision* lets the characteristics inferable from character Julian’s actions match these explicit qualifications: these implicit characteristics also suggest a typical visionary. Character Julian is introduced as listening to the preaching of ‘a man [...] of halye kyrke’ (Vis. 1. 36) and she is described as having a parish priest, ‘my curette’ (Vis. 2. 20). This implies submission to clerical figures, and supports the explicit characterization ‘lewed’ and ‘not a techere’. The narrator thus suggests that character Julian’s teachers are Christ and male authority figures instead of her own understanding.

Moreover, the narrator makes Christ himself ascribe to character Julian’s a ‘maner’ or ‘outward behaving’ that turns her into a true visionary as well. She lets him thank her for her devotion: ‘oure lorde saide, “I thanke the of thy service, and of thy travaile and namly in thy youth”’ (Vis. 8. 54). [‘[O]ur good Lord said: “I thank you for your service and your suffering, and especially in your youth.”’]³ Instead of a confessor testifying to the visionary’s devout and virtuous ‘maner’ or ‘outwarde behaving’, the narrator lets Christ himself assure the reader of character Julian’s sincere devoutness.

² Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*, 74.
Furthermore, the reference to her youth suggests that this piety and dedication is a durable characteristic, rather than a typically female, momentary whim. Almost all female saints, as well as exemplary visionary Birgitta, are characterized as having been deeply devout children and adolescents. With this implicit qualification of lasting devoutness, and by Christ ascribing it to character Julian rather than the narrator herself, the narrator underlines character Julian’s meekness and virtuousness, just as the explicit characterization of ‘wretch’ does.

What is more, one action or ‘outwarde behaviour’ that could possibly lessen character Julian’s visionary reliability, actually increases it. When falling ill once more, character Julian denies the validity of her visions to the visiting priest, first telling she has hallucinated, and then describing how blood flowed from ‘the crosse that stode atte [hir] bedde feete’ (Vis. 21. 6,7). Neither her individual assessment of her visions, nor her description of the opening vision, matches the behaviour prescribed by discreetio spirituum texts and practices. According to these, the visionary should immediately recount her supernatural experiences in detail to her confessor, who establishes whether these experiences are divine or demonic in origin. 1 Although character Julian does talk to this priest, which suggests obedience to clergy, the narrator Julian does not let character Julian recount all her visions. Instead, she lets the priest’s response suggest that the validity of the visions can be recognized from only a fragment. Hearing Julian’s words about the bleeding crucifix, the priest’s ‘chere’ immediately changes to ‘sade and mervelande […] with so grete reverence’ (Vis. 21. 9,12), ‘amazed […] very serious […] so very reverently’. 2 Character Julian also realizes that the priest takes her words seriously. To the priest, then, the validity of the visions is obvious, and so is by extension character Julian’s reliability as a visionary. In spite of hearing only a small part, he does not need to inquire any further or use any discreetio spirituum-checklists. The narrator thus creates another implicit qualification of character Julian as a true visionary, and has the implicit qualification match the explicit qualification.

Birgitta’s Vita and visions allow for a useful comparison, showing how implicit and explicit characterization were expected jointly to create a unified portrayal of the visionary. Such unity between explicit and implicit characterization underlines the reliability of the visionary. For instance, both her Middle English Life and the Liber stress Birgitta’s ignorance and silence. A Life of St. Bridget, translated from Gregersson’s Officium Sanctae Birgittae, reassures the reader of the celestial origin of Birgitta’s knowledge

1 Voaden, God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries, 73.
and that she does not suffer from what misogynist discourse saw as the most female of vices, garrulousness:

Sho was comforted with mani reuelacions, and was biden hir that sho suld lere grammere, [...] sho thought right wele [...] þat sho wald speke to no worde to none bot if sho ware asked, and þar als shortly as sho couthe with honeste.

[She was comforted with many revelations, and was commanded to learn the Latin language[...] she thought very appropriately [...] that she would speak no words to anyone except if she were asked, and then only as briefly as she politely could.]

In the Ancrene Wisse’s and Julian’s circumstantiae terms, Birgitta’s ‘maner’ and ‘outwarde behaving’ is silent and serious. The circumstantia ‘cause’ for her learning Latin is the divine command to do so. Birgitta, then, is explicitly qualified as lacking speech and individually acquired knowledge. Because of this lack, Birgitta’s own mind and words cannot distort the visions, making her a reliable channel.

The Liber also provides an implicit qualification of this lack of language and learning. Many of the visions consist of dialogues between several heavenly characters, or monologues from Christ. Character Birgitta’s voice is conspicuously absent in these scenes. She merely listens silently to these dialogues and monologues. Her vision of Mary being crowned implicitly characterizes her as both silent and ignorant:

The spouse saw the whene of heuen, modir of God, ha ve a precious croune and passingly worthi on hir heued [...] When þe spouse stode all in suspens, for the gret meruaile þat sho was of so faire a vision, and was all astoned inward in saule, anone aperid John th Baptiste and said, ‘Here besili what this betokens; þat sho is clennest meden’.

[The spouse saw the queen of heaven, mother of God, have a precious, exceedingly valuable crown on her head [...] While the spouse was in great mental anxiety, since she was very astonished by such a beautiful vision, and was overcome with wonder in her soul, immediately Saint John the Baptist appeared to her and said ‘Hear attentively what this signifies: that she is the cleanest maiden’.]


Though strongly puzzled by the vision and in need of more knowledge, character Birgitta does not speak. Nevertheless, John the Baptist immediately provides her with the understanding which she lacks, after first reminding Birgitta that her visionary function is to listen. These actions underlines that Birgitta’s words and her understanding are not her own, but wholly God’s. The implicit and explicit qualifications match: they jointly create a portrayal of the visionary as a clear channel, who obediently speaks only the words spoken through her, possessing only that true knowledge which divine sources give her.

**Including Contemplatives, Excluding the Evencristen**

Because of narrator Julian’s sustained effort to characterize her character alter-ego as a reliable visionary, the narrator cannot avoid separating her from the evencristen whom she is meant to represent. This separation creates the unwanted doubleness of evencristen Julian and visionary Julian.

For instance, in order to construct character Julian as highly devout, the narrator contrasts the evencristen, who does not live contemplatively, with individuals with a contemplative profession or contemplative mindset, such as that of character Julian and a few select others. After character Julian has seen Christ looking into his side and has had a vision of Mary, she sees Christ more glorified:

\[
\text{Oure lorde shewed him to me mare glorified as to my sight than I sawe him before. And in this was I lerede that ilke saul e contemplatyfe to whilke es giffen to luke and seke God schalle se hir and passe unto God by contemplation. (Vis. 13. 22.24).}
\]

[Our Lord showed himself yet more glorified than I had seen him before. I learned from this that each contemplative soul to whom it is given to seek and look for God shall see Mary and pass on to God through contemplation.]\(^2\)

Two oppositions in ‘outwarde behaving’ and ‘persone’ can be noticed. Character Julian has just seen Christ and is therefore a supremely contemplative soul; she has already been granted what those evencristen with a sufficiently contemplative soul and divine favoured may receive in the

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1 Windeatt reads these two passages as referring to professional contemplatives, while Watson and Jenkins suggest that they refer to a contemplative mindset. Barry Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Her Audience’, 6, 7; Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 70.
future. These *evencristen* are implicitly contrasted with those *evencristen* who do not possess these characteristics. The visions thus imply divine favour and the recipient’s spirituality, which emphasizes her reliability, but also places character Julian above the *evencristen*.

Character Julian is also set apart from others in her devoutness by being explicitly characterized as caring little for her earthly life. After the hazelnut vision, character Julian is shown three ‘noughtes’ and told that those living contemplatively have little regard for all earthly things:

> In this blissed revelation God shewed me thre noughtes, of whilke noughtes this is the firste that is shewed me. Of this nedes ilke man and woman to hafe knowinge that desires to lyve contemplatifelye, that him like to nought alle thinge that es made for to have the love of God that es unmade. For this es the cause why thaye that er occupied wilfullye in erthlye besiness, and evermar e sekes warldlye wele, er nought all in ese in herte and in saule. (Vis. 4. 36–41)

[In this blessed revelation God showed me three nothings, of which nothings this is the first that was shown me. Every man and woman who longs to live contemplatively needs to know this: that it should please them to count as nothing everything that is made, in order to have the love of God who is unmade. For this is the reason why those who deliberately occupy themselves in earthly business, and are constantly seeking worldly success, find no peace from this in heart or soul.]

A simple binary opposition in ‘persone’ is created here. On one side of this dividing line, one finds ‘every man and woman’ who rejects earthly, created goods and can therefore experience God’s love. On the other side, there are those seeking earthly or worldly things, who cannot experience God’s love.

The narrator turns character Julian into an unusually devout instance of the first group. According to other moments of characterization, she has already achieved the state for which the other contemplatives still strive. In the opening scenes, when dying, character Julian is said to have ‘nothing that was in erthe that me likede to lyve for’ (Vis. 2. 7) ['not [...] anything on earth that I wanted to live for']. Later, narrator Julian explicitly characterizes her alter-ego —a part of creation— as nothing: ‘For if I loke singularly to myself, I am right nought’ (Vis. 6. 19). ['For if I look at myself in

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1 Ibid., 8.
2 Ibid., 4.
particular, I am nothing at all.’). Just as the servant in the parable has an
‘inwarde…chere’ (Rev. 51. 34, 30) [‘inward expression’] of goodness, narrator
Julian gives her alter-ego in Vision an ‘inward chere’ of devout contempt for
her life on earth and earthly things.

According to discretio spirituum texts and practices, a reliable female
visionary possesses this characteristic of little regard for created things and
oneself. This characteristic suggests that she has overcome her female need
for attention, another gender stereotype found in discretio spirituum
discourse and medieval culture in general.

Birgitta in her Life demonstrates the humble, self-abnegating
behaviour which visionary women should display:

She kept her eyes so well that she looked very few in the face, and if
there was any enjoyment in her seeing, she wrote it down in order to
confess it later [...] She loved voluntary poverty so much, that she put
all that she had in the hands of other people.

True visionaries, then, do not draw attention to themselves nor pay much
attention to other persons’ beauty; they care for the beatific vision and
heavenly creatures only. By constructing character Julian as a divinely
favoured contemplative soul, who has already accomplished the state of
‘lik[ing] to nought all that es made’, the narrator portrays her as a true
visionary. However, the result of this characterization is that character
Julian becomes more spiritual than even the most contemplative
evencristen. That is, the evencristen still needs to be instructed to regard as
nothing all that is made and has not yet seen a vision of God and Mary.

Consequently, the narrator cannot avoid characterizing her alter-ego
as double. Character Julian is on the one hand evencristen Julian, who is ‘in
anehede of charite with alle mine evencristen’ (Vis. 6. 20) [‘in oneness of love
with all my fellow christians’]. On the other hand she is visionary Julian, a
typical visionary, more virtuous and humble than the evencristen. The wish

1 Ibid., 9.
2 Voaden, God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of
Late-Medieval Women Visionaries, 99.
3 Ibid., 66.
5 Revelations of Divine Love, 9.
for a unified, reliable portrayal of character Julian as a true visionary and the wish for unity with her evencristen thus destabilize one another, making character Julian dangerously double.

By characterizing Julian as a reliable visionary, the narrator locates the auctoritas of Vision in the Divine auctor, the 'soeveryn techere,' rather than in the text. The text, like character Julian, is merely a means for the showing to reach the evencristen. Moreover, this portrayal encourages the evencristen to accept the visions as divine in origin, giving character Julian sufficient discretio spirituum credibility to make the evencristen accept her warning against the fiend at the end of the text. Yet this visionary reliability comes at a cost: it makes character Julian ‘singular’, individual in a negative manner, and places her above the character evencristen in spiritual maturity. Character Julian is separated from the evencristen, although the narrator claims they are one. The characterization the narrator thus implicitly creates ends up differing from the one she wishes to create.

‘Which Sight Was Shewed Double in the Lord, and...Double in the Servant’: Doubleness in Revelation

In Revelation, all characters are constructed differently from their earlier Vision incarnations. The narrator excises not only the apologia but almost all autobiographical information; all believers and possibly all of humanity is included in the evencristen; the fiend has been given more characteristics, and Christ is portrayed as the Mother behind all mothers and as a suffering, half-naked servant. As a result of these changes, the characters (with the exception of the devil) acquire doubleness in the sense of consisting of two parts and in the sense of displaying changeability.

This characterization dramatizes Revelation’s ontology of the soul as ‘double,’ that is, having two levels, expounded in discussions found only in Revelation and which follow the parable of the Lord and Servant. In these, the narrator states for instance that God in ‘his foreseeing perpos in his endless wisdom wolde that we were doubl’ (Rev. 56. 50, 51). ‘[I]n his endless wisdom his prescient purpose wished that we should have this twofold nature.’ According to narrator Julian, the human soul being divided is a universal, a priori-fact and a sign of God’s care and wisdom.

The narrator distinguishes two levels in the soul, the substance and the ‘sensualite,’ sensuality, two deeply polysemous terms which Revelation uses in a rather idiosyncratic way and with material overtones. Julian the narrator brings many denotations of ‘substance’ and ‘sensualite’ into play and lets them interact. Julian’s ‘substance’ is often seen as referring to the human essence or to being a person, while sensuality refers to embodied
consciousness or lived experience, with all the physical and mental experiences this entails.¹

The soul, according to Revelation, is made in God’s image (Rev. 43. 1, 2; 54. 13). The substance is derived from God and eternally dwells in God, but the sensuality of the soul only comes into being ‘when oure soule is enspired in oure body’ (Rev. 54; 55. 13, 14). However, both substance and sensuality form an integral part of the soul (Rev. 56. 17-19). The human substance being made out of God and by God means that the human soul shares God’s ‘kinde’, nature or family bond (Rev. 57). Out of the substance, the godly will arises, which ‘may never wille eville but ever good,’ (Rev. 37. 17) that is, is only capable of only desiring good and wanting to do good, and incapable of the opposite.² Out of the sensuality, the animal will arises, which ‘may wille no good’ (Rev. 37. 16), that is, as Daily reads it, ‘may, if it chooses distance itself from the good’.³ Sinful actions belong to and harm the sensuality only (Rev. 57. 1-4). However, both are created by God, as well as connected to God: the substance dwells in God, and God dwells in and looks after the sensuality (Rev. 57. 50; 58. 38-57).

Furthermore, both substance and sensuality benefit from the Incarnation, according to narrator Julian. First, human nature, in its doubleness, was created for Christ to take on (Rev. 58. 3). Secondly, one of the main achievements of Christ in the Incarnation is that he united substance and sensuality and Christ continues to hold the human substance and sensuality together (Rev. 57. 14-21; 58 1-14). I suggest that Revelation creates a double Imago Dei: in their substance, humanity shows a family resemblance to God the Trinity, including Christ; in their sensuality, humanity shows a family resemblance to incarnated Christ.⁴ That is, like

¹ The general denotations ‘substance’ range from ‘essence’ to ‘matter’; Grace Jantz sums up Revelation’s use of the term as ‘the inalienable essence of what it means to be human’, whereas Turner defines it as ‘our being as created and eternally held in the knowledge and love of God’. Though ‘sensualite’ often has denotations of an inferior mental power of sensory awareness, bodiliness and sinfulness, narrator Julian, however, does not depict it as inferior, nor as inherently sinful or purely bodily; nor does she employ a simple body-soul dualism, as Bynum points out. Watson and Jenkins define Revelation’s ‘sensuality’ as ‘the psychic and physical self as it knows itself, cut off from knowledge of its substance’, while Windeatt translates it as ‘sensory being’, Jantzen describes it as ‘our physical and empirical nature’, Turner defines it as ‘our being in time and history’. ‘substaunce’ (n.) MED; Jantzen, Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian, 139. ; Turner, Julian of Norwich, Theologian, 174.; ‘sensualite’ MED; Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion, 361.; Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 296. Jantzen, Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian, 121; Turner 187.
² Turner suggests this reading of Revelation’s complex model. Julian of Norwich, Theologian, 174.
³ Dailey, Promised Bodies, 168. My interpretation of the animal will is also inspired by Dailey’s.
⁴ A characteristic inversion can be seen here: in the incarnation, Christ does not so much become human as human beings Christ-like.
Christ, each human being consists of divine substance and of sensuality. Thus, in emphasizing the doubleness of the characters, the narrator underlines how both substance and sensuality are central to the Imago Christi, that is, to how humanity in its humanness and doubleness resembles Christ.

**Of One Substance with One Another**

*Revelation* emphasizes the divine substance which all human beings share by characterizing character Julian as one with the evencristen. In *Vision* this characterization is only explicitly ascribed to her. *Revelation*, in contrast, expands this characterization by removing explicit characteristics that set character Julian apart from the evencristen. Character Julian is, then, made the ‘nought’ she is already said to be in *Vision*.

The characteristics that made character Julian a typical visionary in *Vision* have been removed in *Revelation*. The justification or apologia Julian gives for her visions, from ‘Botte God forbede’ to ‘Jhesu that is the techare of alle’, has been removed (**Rev.** 9. 13 – 15). Similarly, the narrator no longer makes the priest address Julian-the-character as ‘daughter’ (**Rev.** 3.18 -19). The only remaining explicit characteristics ascribed to character Julian is that she is thirty and a half year old at the time of the visions, has a bodily sickness, and a curate (**Rev.** 3.1, 17). Without the rubrics at the beginning and the end, which identify her as ‘a simple creature unletterde’ (**Rev.** 2. 1) and ‘Juliane anacorite Norwiche’ (**Rev.** 86. 24,25), it would not be possible to construct character’s Julian ‘persone’ with such characteristics as her name, gender, whether she belongs to the laity or not, and so on. The rubrics can be seen as metatextual; they do not form part of the story. Within the story, then, character Julian lacks almost all particularity. She is no longer a submissive, frail, ignorant woman, or a woman at all, and therefore no longer a typical visionary. Thus, the reliability of the visions becomes situated in their content instead of in the visionary experience and how channel-like the visionary is. In short, the narrator assumes that the evencristen, sharing God’s substance, will immediately recognize the divine origin of the visions. The evencristen, in effect, is made character Julian’s confessor and the priest, expected immediately to believe the visions with ‘grete reverence’ (**Rev.** 66. 18).

These changes naturally also have gender implications. This excision of references to character Julian’s gender has been seen as reflecting maturing confidence and exegetical abilities\(^1\), or, conversely, fear of being

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\(^1\) However, the reference to Christ thanking her for her service in her youth is kept (**Rev.** 6. 1), perhaps because it is linked to a vision.

linked to Lollardy with its preaching women.\(^1\) In either case, the effect of the removal is similar. Julian the character no longer has many explicit characteristics at all. In Revelation, Character Julian shares her substance with *evencristen* of all genders; this substance derives from a divine being ‘very fader and moder of kindes’ (*Rev.* 62. 12) ["true father and mother of nature"]\(^2\). The narrator therefore no longer considers the gender aspect of character Julian’s ‘persone’ a characteristic that needs to be either defended or emphasized.

Likewise, character Julian’s union in her substance with all *evencristen* is emphasized by the removal of linguistic markers of her individual identity. Many personal pronouns referring to character Julian have been removed in Revelation, as several other scholars also have pointed out.\(^3\) A comparison between the same scene in *Vision* and *Revelation* reveals the thoroughness of these changes and their self-effacing effect. In both *Vision* and *Revelation*, the narrator describes God revealing the words ‘Herewith is the feende overcome’ to character Julian after the vision of Christ’s copiously bleeding body. Placing the removed personal pronouns and other phrases in square brackets reveals the consistent changes:

This worde saide oure lorde menande his passion, as he shewed [me] before. In this,oure lorde [brought unto my minde and] shewed [me] a perte of the fendes malice.’ (*Vis.* 8. 33, 34; *Rev.* 13. 1,5, 6)

[Our Lord said these words referring to his Passion, as he had shown [me] before. In this our Lord [brought into my mind and] showed [me] a part of the devil’s malice.]\(^4\).

In *Vision* this moment is an interaction between the individual visionary and God. In *Revelation*, God does not show the vision to individual Julian, but rather to all *evencristen*:

The accumulation of personal pronouns in the *Vision* scene creates a distinct presence of character Julian. Every time the first person pronoun is used, the reader is reminded of the presence of a character both implicitly and explicitly qualified as a typical visionary, surpassing the *evencristen* in devoutness and contemplative living. By turning ‘God shewed me’ into ‘God shewed’ in *Revelation*, narrator Julian changes the configuration of the

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\(^1\) Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich’, 131.

\(^2\) *Revelations of Divine Love*, 134.

\(^3\) See for instance A. Lewis, ‘A Picture of Christendom: The Creation of an Interpretive Community in Julian of Norwich’s *A Revelation of Love*’; Miles, ‘Julian of Norwich and Bridget of Sweden: Creating Intimate Space with God’ and ‘Space and Enclosure in Julian of Norwich’s *A Revelation of Love* ’ (162).

\(^4\) *Revelations of Divine Love*, 12.
interaction between God, the *evencristen*, and Julian. *Vision* depicts this interaction as God showing a vision to Julian, who in her turn shows it to the reader.

In *Revelation*, in contrast, Julian is removed from this interaction; there is no explicit reference to any character doing the seeing. Furthermore, although the scene logically demands a character who sees, this character has become a ‘nought’ rather than a typical visionary. The narrator thus encourages the *evencristen* to do two apparently opposing actions: they are invited both to look at the scene, and be united with character Julian in seeing. Since all *evencristen* share the same substance, not only a typical visionary but all *evencristen* can experience the visions.

**Making Julian a Sensual Sinner**

While substantial unity is emphasized, the construction of character Julian in *Revelation* also underscores the individuality of the sensuality, being the level in which the person is situated in time. Character Julian is characterized as distinct from the *evencristen* in her sinning and by her timeboundness, yet unlike her distinctness as a visionary in *Vision*, it is a distinctness which the *evencristen* possesses as well. All *evencristen*, according to *Revelation*, are bound to time, cannot avoid sinning, and are looked after by mother Christ, but how this happens differs for each individual.

Whereas in most descriptions of the visions such markers of character Julian’s individual presence have been removed, in scenes in which she sins, or is told to she cannot avoid sinning these phrases have been preserved. The vision about the inevitability of sin provides an intricate example. Collating the equivalent sections of *Vision* and *Revelation* shows how both substantial changes and subtle syntactical changes underline the more inclusive theology and double characterization. Phrases removed in *Revelation* are in square brackets, additions in italics, and relevant unchanged personal pronouns in bold:

God brought to my minde that I shulde sinne... [And than oure lorde broughte to my minde with my sinnes the sinne of alle mine evencristen] *But by alle the gracious comfort that foloweth, as ye shalle see, I was lerned to take it to alle mine evencristen*, alle in generally and nothing in specialle....though oure lorde shewed me that I shulde sinne, be me alloyn I understode alle. In this, I consayved a softe drede. Oure lorde anserwerde [me thus]: ‘I kepe the fulle sekerly.’ This worde was saide [to me] with mare love and sekerness of gastely keeping than I can or maye telle. For as it was before shewed to me that I shulde sinne, right so was the comforth
shewed [to me]: sekernes of kepinge for alle mine evencristen. (Vis. 16. 22, 24, 26, 17:1-6; Rev. 37. 1-11)

[God brought to mind that I would sin... [and then our Lord brought to mind, along with my sins, the sins of all my fellow Christians, all in general and not in particular.] but through all the consolations of grace which ensue, as you will see, I was taught to apply it to all my fellow Christians in general and not to anyone in particular. Although our Lord revealed to me that I would sin, by me alone is understood everyone. And at this I began to experience a quiet fear, and to this our Lord [to me] replied, ‘I am keeping you very safe.’ This was said [to me] with more love and assurance of spiritual safekeeping than I can or may tell. For just as it was revealed to me that I would sin, so was the consolation revealed: assurance of safekeeping for all my fellow Christians.

In Revelation the intellectual vision of the evencristen's sin has been removed. This is one of the few instances of a visionary moment being removed in Revelation rather than added, which suggests thematic significance. Furthermore, the use of pronouns shows a number of minute but telling changes. The preservation of ‘me’ in the fourth and eighth lines underscores that Julian sins individually, since her sins arise out of her individual animal will in her sensuality. However, the removal of two instances of ‘to me’ and of ‘me thus,’ suggests that the revelation of the comfort, and the comfort itself, apply to all. Thus, the narrator now makes Christ direct his words of comfort not only to character Julian but to all evencristen. Each person sins differently, but Christ wishes to comfort all to the same extent.

Revelation also preserves explicit qualifications concerning character Julian’s timeboundness and ability to change. These make her as distinct from the evencristen as the references to gender and education in Vision do, and therefore suggest that these changes are not about character Julian becoming fully indistinct from the evencristen. Rather, these changes emphasize unity in those aspects that concern substance, and stress distinctness in those aspects that concern sensuality. In the Ancrene Wisse’s terms, the totagge of ‘time’ is kept and even further developed. In both Vision and Revelation character Julian is described as thirty and a half years old. Unlike Vision, Revelation gives the visionary experience an exact date: ‘This revelation was shewed to a simple creature unletterde, living in deadly

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 24, 87. Windeatt’s translation, omits the last ‘to me’, which has therefore been added to this quotation to make it match the Middle English.
flesh, the yer of our lord 1373, the thirteenth day of May’ (Rev. 2. 1,2). ‘These revelations were shown to a simple, uneducated creature in the year of our Lord 1373, on the [thirteenth] day of May.’ ” The narrator gives the two secondary moments of visionary insight a point in time as well, the first one ‘fifteen yere after and mor,’ (Rev. 86. 12), the second one ‘twenty yere after the time of the shewing...save three monthes’ (Rev. 51. 74), making it February 1393. As Nicholas Watson writes, ‘dates, numbers of years, Julian’s own age, are carefully brought before us at the work’s most crucial moments, as though they are of thematic significance.’

Such possible thematic significance of dates, years and Julian’s age is that narrator Julian thereby underlines character Julian’s ‘being in time’, to use Turner’s phrase. That is, the narrator stresses her alter-ego’s sensuality and its inherent distinctness, but also Christ’s acting in time, as mother to the sensuality. Just as character Julian sins individually and changes over time, Christ performs unique, maternal actions in her individual time span, changing these if necessary, like the mother does in the motherhood meditation: ‘And ever as [the childe] waxeth in age and stature, she changeth her working, but not her love’ (Rev. 60. 46,47). ‘[And as the child grows older she changes her method but not her love.]’ In Revelation, thus, the narrator has character Julian no longer differ from the evencristen essentially, and in received divine favour and willful detachment from the world, but rather contingently and in experience, like twins do.

Revelation, then, draws attention to the shared quality of Julian’s substance by characterizing her as one with the evencristen, and to her individual sensuality by making her distinct from the evencristen. Vision’s hierarchical difference in spiritual maturity between the evencristen and character Julian consequently becomes merely a non-hierarchical difference in lived experience.

Moreover, the narrator also constructs another form of doubleness and distinctness by means of the new differences between explicit and implicit characterization, giving both character Julian’s evencristenness and her individuality a performative quality. In Vision, implicit and explicit characterization overlap strongly; in Revelation, the narrator creates discrepancies between them.

One explicit characteristic which the narrator ascribes to character Julian in both Vision and Revelation is her lack of significance as a single individual: ‘If I looke singularly to myself, I am rought nought. But in general I am, I hope, in onehede of cherite with all my evencristen’ (Rev. 9. 7,8; Vis. 6. 19, 20). ‘[For if I look at myself in particular, I am nothing at all; but in

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 40.
general I am, in oneness of love with my fellow Christians.’] Character Julian is thus explicitly qualified as a non-character. Almost all autobiographical information being removed in Revelation dramatizes this ‘nought’.

However, in terms of implicit characterization, or ‘outwarde behaving’ as Revelation calls it, character Julian becomes more distinct, in particular because these traits no longer can be subsumed into the portrait of character Julian as a typical visionary. Instead, she is implicitly characterized as a critical, self-aware visionary, thoroughly familiar with visionary conventions and visionary literature, persistent and even stubborn in her quest for understanding, and aware of the theological discourse of her time. For instance, by letting character Julian know local saint John of Beverley and Saint Denys of France instead of only the widely known Cecilia, the narrator makes character Julian not only a lover of saints’ legends but also a critical reader of these.

Character Julian is also portrayed as both more familiar with visionary practices and more critical. A request to see hell and purgatory has been added to her wish to see Mary and to know about a friend’s afterlife destiny, all three of which are denied. Dutton argues that by denying character Julian such sights the narrator criticizes the notion that religious women have unique intercessory powers as well as visionary knowledge of the fate of the departed. Narrator Julian criticizes part of her own job description, so to speak. Moreover, because the typical visionary characteristics have been removed, this unusual visionary behaviour becomes more noticeable. Character Julian is no longer a typical visionary who sees unusual sights, but a visionary as unusual as her visions. In her critical attitude, and her agnosticism about hell and purgatory, she also becomes distinct from her evencristen.

Finally, the narrator increases character Julian’s desire and ‘seking’ for more understanding, and this desire is no longer rejected as pride. In the terms of the Ancrene Wisse, the circumstantia ‘cause’ of character Julian’s actions differs; in Revelation’s own terms, character Julian’s search becomes her dominant ‘outwarde behaving’ properte. Especially because of her explicit contrasting of God’s beholding and human beholding, the characteristic of submissiveness to clerical, male or divine authority can no longer inferred from Julian’s actions. This sets character Julian apart from meek visionaries such as Birgitta, as the scene with John the Baptist suggests. This lack of submissiveness also makes her quite distinct from the evencristen, or at least, the evencristen as constructed by the final scribal rubric. This last note warns that this book is only appropriate for those who

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 9, 52.
2 Dutton, Devotional Compilations, 113.
‘submit them to the faith of the holy church, and obey the wholesome understanding and teaching of the men that be of virtuous life, saddle age, and profound learning’1 ['submit themselves to the faith of the holy church, and obey the wholesome knowledge and teaching of virtuous men of a respectable age, that have profound learning'].2 Only submissive, orthodox believers are allowed to read the book, this rubric warns, and only these can therefore be considered evenchristen. Character Julian, then, is allowed to be more stubborn, intellectually independent and heterodox than a scribal part of Revelation allows the evenchristen to be. In short, in Revelation, the narrator implicitly qualifies character Julian as a rather idiosyncratic visionary and evenchristen. In Vision, such difference implies a hierarchical difference, whereas the substance and sensuality model in Revelation makes this difference non-hierarchical and merely the result of a difference in lived experience of Christ’s maternal care.

This doubleness of explicit unity with the evenchristen and implicit distinctness evokes the demonstrative acting style of medieval theatre, which Sarah Carpenter terms the ‘demonstrative mode’.3 The characterization of Christ also has resonances of this style, as I show later. The contemporary reader is likely to have been familiar with this feature of medieval drama: mystery plays were performed in many large cities, including Norwich, and people would often travel to different cities to see mystery plays.4

In such plays, and in medieval theatre in general, the acting and mise-en-scene was most likely rather stylized, as medieval rhetorical manuals and stage instructions show. Meg Twycross points out that the role was expected to evoke an image or an icon rather than an individual.5 This acting style created a strong sense of the role itself and a large amount of distance between the individual performer and the role.6

In terms of the text of the plays and dramaturgy, this stylization included for instance characters introducing and describing themselves, even though they were very well-known characters clearly recognizable by their costumes. They would also often provide a running commentary on their own acting. This strongly noticeable presentation has been termed the ‘demonstrative mode’ by Carpenter, who states that the characters ‘move in and out’ of their roles: ‘Sometimes they speak almost as members of the audience, observing themselves from the outside; at other times they speak

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2 Revelations of Divine Love, 165.
3 Carpenter, ‘Morality Play Characters’, 22.
4 Mullini, ‘The Norwich Grocers’ Play(s) (1533, 1565): Development and Changes in the Representation of Man’s Fall’; Normington, Gender and Medieval Drama, 45.
6 Ibid., 42,43.
from inside, demonstrating that quality by impersonation.’¹ In the demonstrative mode the character thus switches between two roles: the performer on the stage, and a member of the audience.

To return to Revelation, a similarly demonstrative mode is created in Revelation by means of the relation between the explicit and implicit characterization. On the one hand, the narrator still explicitly ascribes the characteristics of ‘nought’ and invisibility (‘leve the beholding of a wretch’) to character Julian in Revelation; at that moment she takes up the evencristen’s perspective. This seeing herself from the outside resembles how characters on stage explicitly describe themselves with their name and other significant traits. By thus placing her among the evencristen by means of the explicit characterization, the narrator makes character Julian a blank space on the stage, at which the narrator points. This blank space suggests that in her substance character Julian only exists to the extent that she is united with the evencristen.

On the other hand, in terms of her sensuality, character Julian is not only implicitly characterized as critical and knowledgeable; the narrator also lets character Julian comments on her actions in the way medieval mystery play characters do. After her lapse of faith she makes her dramatic claim from Vision even more theatrical by adding an ‘A’: ‘A, lo, I, wretch. This was a gret sinne and unkindnesse [...] here you may se what I am of myselfe’ (Rev. 66. 21, 22, 26). [‘Ah, look what a wretch I was…This was a great sin and a great ingratitude [...] Here you can see what I am in myself.’]²

Like an actor on stage gesturing broadly and speaking loudly in order that all audience members can hear and see the action, character Julian directs the gaze of her audience towards herself, in particular to the circumstantiae ‘cause’, ‘persone’ and ‘maner’. By her use of ‘lo’ (‘look here’) and ‘here you may se’ character Julian points at herself and simultaneously positions herself among all her evencristen: she invites them to share her interpretation that these actions are sinful. Thus, as an evencristen, sharing her substance with God and humanity, character Julian should not be ‘beheld’ by the evencristen, but he or she is encouraged to behold character Julian in her individual sensuality, that is, as both a sinner and critical thinker. Like a character in a medieval play, character Julian is both a member of the audience, observing the ‘nought’ she is, an an actor, impersonating herself on stage.

What is more, because of the removal of many of character Julian’s explicit characteristics, her shared substantial self and her individual sensual self both become demonstrative, with each aspect commenting on the other. In Revelation, character Julian no longer is a laywoman without an official

¹ Carpenter, ‘Morality Play Characters’, 21,22.
² Revelations of Divine Love, 140.
theological education, nor a typical visionary: her role or character lacks a fixed core. It is therefore no longer possible to infer whether the implicit characteristics and few explicit characteristics left fit character Julian. Consequently, both the substance and sensuality become equally central to character Julian’s characterization. Both are ‘characteristically Julian’ and both are integral to her performance. In sum, narrator Julian lets her character alter-ego, like a medieval actor, move back and forth between the two different sides of her role, commenting on both and demonstrating both.

**Enfolding All Into the Twofold Evencristen**

The narrator also constructs the *evencristen* as characterized by doubleness. In *Vision*, limiting explicit characteristics divide the *evencristen* into contemplatives and non-contemplatives, as well as into divinely favoured *evencristen* and those lacking this favour. In *Revelation*, the narrator no longer ascribes these characteristics to the *evencristen*. Barry Windeatt writes of the changed relation between writer and audience in *Revelation* that ‘the author casts aside aloof distinctness to be united with every reader or hearer’. The spiritual distinctness of some readers and hearers is also cast aside in favor of characteristics of unity and likeness.

The passages on contemplatives have been changed; the narrator has ‘*evencristen*’ include all Christians, perhaps even all human beings. The section comparing those living contemplatively with those living actively now discusses the *evencristen* seeking God, and the visionary moment of the three ‘noughtes’ has been removed. Collating the equivalent sections from *Vision* and *Revelation*, with excisions in square brackets and additions in italics, reveals the extensive changes:

[In this blissede revelation God shewed me thre noughtes, of whilke noughtes this is the first that was shewed me] Of this nedeth [ilke man and woman] us to have knowinge [that desires to leve contemplatifelye] that [him] us liketh to nought all that thing that is made, [to hafe the lofe of] for love of God that is unmade. For this is the cause why [thaye that er occupiede wifullye in ethelye besines, and evermare sekes wardlyye wele, ere] *we be* not all in ease of heart of soule: for [thay love and seekes] *we* seeke heer rest in this thing that is so little, where no rest is in. (*Vis.* 4. 36-49; *Rev.* 5. 20-23).

[In this blessed revelation God showed me three nothings, of which nothings this is the first that was shown me.] [Every man and woman who longs to live contemplatively] *we* need to know about this so as to delight in setting at nought everything that is made in

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1 Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Her Audience’, 6.
order to [have the] love and possess God who is unmade. For this is the reason why [those who deliberately occupy themselves in earthly business, and are constantly seeking worldly success find no peace from this] we are not entirely at ease in heart and soul: because we seek rest here in these things which are so small.¹

Significantly, an entire visionary moment has been removed, presumably to reserve the characteristic ‘nought’ wholly for sin. Moreover, the narrator no longer explicitly qualifies other characters as secular or contemplative. No character, then, is depicted as more spiritual than others or condemned as seeking for worldly wealth. Instead, all are characterized as sharing the cause circumstantia or ‘inward chere’ of spiritual confusion. Even the ‘ilke man and woman’, that is, gender as an essential, distinguishing characteristic, has been removed. Thus, all possess the divine substance, all are substantially included in God, and therefore all are included in Revelation’s ‘we’. Finally, because of the change from ‘to hafe the love of God’ to ‘for love of God’, the extent of God’s love no longer depends on the individual’s effort at rejecting worldly things. According to Revelation Julian, it is an a-priori, unchangeable fact that God loves each individual equally.

By these changes in characterization, the narrator illustrates her bold claim that ‘God demeth us upon our kindely substance, which is ever kept one in him’ (Rev. 45. 1,2). ['God judges us according to the essence of our human nature, which is always kept united in him.']² Thus, narrator Julian depicts God as seeing no contemplatives or secular persons, but only his children, who resemble him in essence, nature and body.

The second passage in which Vision creates distinct groups has also been changed to underline the shared substance. The characterization no longer implies that only true contemplative souls shall see Mary or God. In fact, the narrator no longer mentions contemplation or visions of Mary at all. The two versions can be collated once more, with phrases removed in Revelation in square brackets, and additions in italics:

Our lorde shewed him [to me] more glorified as to my sight than I saw him before. Wherin I was lerned that [that ilke saule contemplatyfe to whilke es giffen to luke and seke God schalle se hir and passe unto God by contemplation] that oure soule shall never have reste tille it come into him, knowing that he is the fullhede of joy. (Rev. 26. 3,4, Vis. 13. 22-24, italics added.)

¹ Revelations of Divine Love, 8. Italics added.
² Ibid., 98.
[Our Lord showed himself yet more glorified [to me] than I had seen him before. I learned from this [that each contemplative soul to whom it is given to seek and look for God shall see Mary and pass on to God through contemplation.] our soul will never find rest until it comes to him, recognizing that he is the fullness of joy.]¹

The description of the soul has been changed, and the reference to the vision has been removed; as a result, the characteristics of a contemplative soul and divine favour can no longer be deduced from character Julian’s actions. Nor can these characteristics any longer be inferred the behaviour of a select group of evencristen. Instead, the narrator has character Julian and the evencristen share the explicit characteristic and ‘inwarde chere’ of not being at rest. By uniting all evencristen, the narrator performs an action she ascribes to God in this meditation: the ‘comes to him’ can refer to either the afterlife or to Christ’s unknown great act that will make everything well and in which he will draw all people (in)to him. Thus, when uniting all characters, narrator Julian foreshadows the union of all evencristen and Christ at the end of time: she makes her narratorial activity God-like.

The narrator in Revelation underlines how character Julian and the evencristen share God’s substance by consistently replacing third person pronouns and other phrases relating to the evencristen as a distinct individual with more inclusive ones. For instance, ‘if a man be in so mekille paine’ (Vis. 20. 42, 43) ['if someone be in so much pain'] becomes ‘though we ben in so much pain’ (Rev. 65. 22,23) ['though we are in so much pain’]². Just as phrases referring to Julian as ‘singuler’ have been removed, similar phrases referring to the evencristen as essentially distinct have been excised as well. Revelation thus stresses that each individual evencristen has the same substance as his or her fellow evencristen, and as character Julian.

Yet the narrator allows the evencristen to differ from one another in their sinning and their sensuality. One strategy in which this is done is by replacing the paradigmatic saint in the text. Instead of sinless saint Cecilia, sinful saint John of Beverley becomes the exemplar for each evencristen’s life. Susan K. Hagen sees the excision of Cecilia’s ‘storye’ and the addition of the brief narrative of John of Beverley as a change in the narrator’s self-representation, from seeking self-validation to a greater focus on instructing the evencristen.³ It is also possible to investigate its effect on the characterization of the evencristen.

² Revelations of Divine Love, 29, 139. These changes have also been discussed extensively by Barry Windeatt, Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich and Her Audience’, 6.
³ Hagen, ‘St. Cecilia and St. John of Beverley’, 92, 93.
Cecilia receives heavenly rewards for her sinless life and unique martyrdom. This status is even more unattainable for the evenencristen than character Julian’s visionary status. In contrast, John of Beverley’s individuality lies not in his sainthood, but rather in how ‘God allowed him to fall, mercifully protecting him.’¹ For these sins, he receives ‘manifold joyes, overpassing that he should have had if he had not fallen’ (Rev. 38. 27, 28). ['manifold joys in heaven, surpassing what he would have had if he had not fallen.']² His individual, unique sins ultimately lead to an individual, unique reward.³ The instructive, communal function of the narrative is also underlined: ‘[o]ure lorde shewed him full highly in comfort of us [...] And alle was this to make us glad and mery in love’ (Rev. 38. 18, 30). ['Our Lord showed Saint John of Beverley [...] so as to encourage us [...] and all this was to make us and cheerful in love.']⁴ The narrator, then, lets God provide an exemplum of an evenencristen; this narrative embodies a claim found only in Revelation about the correspondence between the individual sinner’s sin and the heavenly honour bestowed on him or her: ‘for every sinne to the same soule is geven a blisse by love’ (Rev. 38. 2, 3). ['For every sin the same soul is given a joy by love'].⁵ Instead of needing to be a unique saint in order to receive a unique reward from God, the evenencristen only needs to be his or her own sensual and sinful self.

In addition, in Revelation the character evenencristen him- or herself is implicitly characterized as individual in their sins. In the vision cited earlier in which God shows Julian that she should sin, a visionary moment has been omitted. In this excised scene, character Julian has an intellectual vision of the sins of all her evenencristen ‘alle in generally and nothing in specialle’ (Vis. 16. 25, 26) ['all in general and not in particular'].⁶ In Vision, the narrator explicitly characterizes the evenencristen as generally sinful. That is, all evenencristen are defined by their common sinfulness. In Revelation, in contrast, the narrator not only focuses more on the comfort given by Christ; she also lets character Julian see only the fact of her future sinning, not her sins as such, or those of the evenencristen. The description of Christ comforting all, however, does implicitly qualify the evenencristen as sinful.

In both Vision and Revelation, the narrator builds several argumentative claims out of this vision, arguing that there is an animal will in the soul which is capable of sinning, and a godly will which is only capable

2. Ibid.
3. Julian creates a positive version of Dante’s contrapasso, as it were.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 87.
6. Ibid., 24.
of willing good (Vis. 17. 8,11; Rev. 37. 15,16); she then discusses God’s perspective, claiming that her vision shows part of it: ‘And this shewede oure good lorde in the holhed of love that we stande in, in his sight’ (Rev. 37. 18, 19; Vis. 17. 11, 12). [‘And our Lord revealed this to me in the completeness of love we stand in in his sight.’] Both these claims are found in Vision and Revelation; in both the narrator suggests that character Julian’s intellectual vision resembles God’s perspective. However, the change in the vision preceding this statement changes the implication of this statement. By no longer letting character Julian see her evencresten’s sin in Revelation, the narrator suggests that each evencresten is so distinct in his or sins that only that individual evencresten can see and know these. In terms of sensuality, then, he or she is distinct from other evencresten. God, however, lovingly focusing on the substance, sees no sins at all but only ‘holhed of love’; in their common substance, all evencresten are one. In Revelation, then, the evencresten is characterized as double. All evencresten are one with one another in their substance, but distinct from one another in their individual sins and sensuality.

A comparison with the Ancrene Wisse reveals Revelation’s unique mildness towards its audience, as well as its narrative audacity in allowing for a double characterization. The Ancrene Wisse author is worried that the text itself will cause the readers to commit the sins he describes. This worry reflects his less optimistic understanding of human sinfulness. For instance, in the chapter on confession, the Ancrene Wisse author explicitly characterizes its readers as sexually promiscuous: ‘Lay yourself bare and say, ‘Father, God, have mercy! I am a filthy stud-mare, a stinking whore!’ The narrator characterizes the reader as lecherous with a metaphorical ‘persone’ and a particular ‘maner’, and exhorts the readers to do the same to themselves. This characterization can also be inferred from the possible behaviour which the narrator often ascribes to its audience. The author considers his readers to be so prone to sin that even the reading of his text may lead to such behaviour:

The scorpion of lechery (that is, of lust), has the kind of offspring whose names cannot all be decently mentioned in refined speech, since even the name might [...] pollute pure hearts [...] those of you who know nothing about such things need not wonder or speculate on what I mean, but should give thanks to God that you have not experimented with such filthy practices.3

1 Ibid., 24, 87.
3 Trans. Ibid., 78, 79 part 4:25.
The reader is so naturally sinful that speculation suffices to make her behave promiscuously. Thus, the explicit and implicit characterization match one another. This unity underscores the Ancrene Wisse's perception of sin as an essential characteristic of the human being: 'None of the goodness in us is ours; our goodness comes from God. But sin is part of us, and our own.’ Sin is part of the human essence, while goodness is alien to it. The reader can therefore only be characterized, both implicitly and explicitly, as wholly sinful and as one with other human beings only in this sinfulness. Any doubleness in characterization would deny this sinful essence.

The ‘Properte of Motherhed’ (Rev. 58. 17)

Revelation constructs an even more transformative doubleness by characterizing both the Trinity and Christ as mother to the substance and mother to the sensuality. By turning both into mothers and making both double, the narrator deifies the doubleness which misogynist discourse saw as characteristic of women and which Vision still feared.

Revelation’s portrayal of God as a mother is one of its most extensively discussed elements. Although the image of God or Christ as a mother has a long tradition, Julian’s use of the image is often considered unique in the history of Christian theology and Christian writings, because of its extensiveness, complexity and centrality to the whole work. As Barbara Newman points out, this characterization unites ‘a sapiential, Trinitarian theology of creation with the devotional theme of Christ’s sacrificial maternity.’

The theme of God’s motherhood pervades the whole of Revelation. McNamer, for instance, notes that the image of God-as-mother is one of the ‘dominant cognitive metaphor[s]’ in Revelation, while Liz Herbert McAvoy sees the motherhood matrix, ‘motherhood as a literal truth, metaphorical tool, textual matrix, religious ideology and philosophy,’ as omnipresent in both Vision and Revelation. Andrew Sprung discusses ‘her inversion of the ‘Jesus-as-mother metaphor,’ pointing out that in ‘Julianic assertions such as ‘our saviour is our very mother’ and ‘verily God is our mother,’ ‘God is tenor, not vehicle.’ That is, Julian describes earthly motherhood as an image of Christ’s motherhood, rather than the other way round. God’s motherhood

1 Trans. Ibid., 127 part 5.27.
2 It occurs in the Bible as well as in patristic, scholastic and mystical writing, and is used by both male and female authors, Bynum lists over thirty medieval authors who use this image. Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages, 140.
3 Newman, God and the Goddesses : Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages, 226.
therefore acquires a stylized, abstract quality, even when described as intensely physical.

There is no explicit characterization of God-the-Trinity or Christ as mother is found in *Vision*: all of these occur in *Revelation*. Nevertheless, some features such as his side wound, his addressing character Julian as ‘my childe’ (Vis. 13.2), and his physicality can be said to implicitly characterize him as maternal; McAvoy argues that the gynaecentric imagery of blood, childbirth and wombs, use of ‘becloses’ and references to maternal suffering and depictions of Mary and Julian’s mother also do so.¹

In *Revelation*, the implicit becomes explicit. The narrator introduces the theme of the motherhood of God after the parable of the Lord and the Servant and its exegesis. She writes ‘And thus I saw that [...] God enjoyeth that he is our moder’ (Rev. 52. 1, 2). ['And so I saw that [...] God rejoices that he is our mother.']² She returns to this theme a number of times in her discussion of substance and sensuality. Christ as a mother is shown in three ways (Rev. 59. 31-41). First, he is a mother because he is both the source of human nature, and the first instance of human nature. Secondly, Christ made himself a mother by taking on human nature and thereby substance and sensuality. Thirdly, he is a mother in his constant activity of caring for each individual and ultimately returning them to the divine womb. This meditation in turn leads narrator Julian to explore this third aspect, enthusiastically describing Christ’s everyday ‘werking’ [working, acting] as a mother (Rev. 60-63); her *circumstantia* equivalent would be ‘outwarde behaving’. These maternal actions are birthing humanity to true life, feeding humanity with the sacraments, hiding humanity in his breast, and being the one actually giving birth or parenting whenever a human mother gives birth or a human being parents (Rev. 60).

After claiming that Christ is more genuinely motherly than earthly mothers, the narrator ascribes more explicitly maternal acts to Christ, such as washing and healing his children and wanting the fallen child to run to him (Rev. 61-63). Narrator Julian then skilfully ends her meditation on the motherhood of Christ by summing up her entire motherhood theology in a single line of prose poetry: ‘Thus I understode that all his blissed children which be come out of him by kind shall be brought in to againe into him by grace’ (Rev. 63. 43, 44). ['So I understood that all his blessed children who have come forth from him by nature shall be brought back within him by grace.']³ In sum, narrator Julian depicts the *evencresten* or all humans as God’s children, who share mother God’s nature and have been naturally born

¹ McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 77–85.
³ Ibid., 136.
out mother God; mother God is characterized as intending to bring these children back by means of his/her actions.

**Three Persons, One Substantial Motherhood**

According to narrator Julian, the human substance originates from God. I suggest that in her exposition of the substance and the sensuality, it is not only Christ but the whole Trinity that is depicted as mother to the substance. The relation between the substance and God evokes that between foetal Christ and Mary’s body. My argument takes one step further what a number of other scholars already have suggested to some extent, for instance by Andrew Sprung when he writes that ‘For Julian [...] human perfection entails being born into, rather than out of, the maternal substance.’ Because of God’s providing this maternal substance, God the Trinity is as physically maternal as Christ the mother of sensuality.

Tracing the development of ‘substance’ reveals how an element from *Vision* is developed further in *Revelation* and made an integral part of the narrator’s characterization of the Trinity as mother to the substance.

In *Vision* ‘substance’ does connect humankind and God, and makes humanity resemble God, but in an abstract, unspecified manner. One example is the discussion of prayer, in which the narrator claims that ‘though the saule be ever like God in kinde and substance, it is oft unlike in condition’ (*Vis.* 19. 34, 35). ‘[T]hough the soul is always like God in nature and substance, it is often unlike him in condition.’[2] It is thus implied that God is the source of human substance, but the narrator does not describe how. Moreover, this substantial bond is flawed. It should also be noted that the narrator stresses that sin has ‘no maner of substance’ (*Vis.*, 13. 55) ‘[no kind of substance].’[3] Evil lacks the essence that defines humanity, implying that in *Vision* humanity’s essence is already thought of as wholly good.

In *Revelation*, in contrast, the narrator depicts the characteristic ‘having substance’ in tangible terms instead of abstract ones. Simultaneously, she describes the relation between God and substance in great detail. Two changes to passages already found in *Vision* give the term ‘substance’ overtones of materiality, the maternal body and maternal love. These passages occur early in *Revelation* and thus prime the reader to associate ‘substance’ with motherhood before encountering the discussion of substance and sensuality.

The first of these changes is the addition of a reference to substance to the vision of the copious bleeding of Christ’s body. In both *Vision* and

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1 Sprung, “We Nevr Shall Come out of Hym’: Enclosure and Immanence in Julian of Norwich’s *Book of Showings*, 48.
Revelation, the narrator describes how Christ’s body seems to bleed so copiously that character Julian fears it will overflow her bed (Vis. 8. 22–23); Revelation adds a reference to substance in this scene:

‘This was so plenteous to my sight that methought, if it had ben so in kinde and in substance for that time, it shulde have made the bedde all on bloude, and have passed over all about.’ (Rev. 12. 6–8, italics added)

[And it was so abundant to my way of seeing that it seemed to me that if it had been the real thing in nature and essence at that time, it would have saturated the bed with blood and overflowed all around.]¹

The attention is drawn to the materiality of Christ’s body by the narrator’s use of ‘plenteous’ and the vivid image of blood streaming over the edges of the bed. Consequently, the material and bodily denotations of ‘substance’ are emphasized: having substance, in the sense of bodily matter, is what Christ’s body in the visions and the human body have in common. The earlier identification of Christ with the substance is thus reinforced and made physical.

The second change is also an addition of the term ‘substance’. This change makes substance a feature of the love between mother and child. During the vision of Christ’s slowly dehydrating body, character Julian also sees Mary in a co-Passionate state. In Vision this scene already emphasizes maternal love: Vision does not turn Mary into a spectacle, and sees the love between them as the cause of their co-Passion rather than their common flesh.

Revelation takes this one step further, making all creatures love Christ in a manner that resembles Mary’s love. The added phrases, shown here in italics, universalize Mary’s love:

Here I saw in parte the compassion our our lady, Saint Mary. For Christ and she was so oned in love that the gretness of her love was cause of the mekillhede of her paine. For in this I saw a substance of kinde love, continued by grace, that his creatures have to him, which kinde love was most fulsomly shewde in his swete mother, and overpassing. For so mekille as she loved him more then alle other, her paine passed alle other. (Rev. 18. 1–5.)

[Here I saw part of the compassion of our Lady, Saint Mary, for

Christ and she were so united in love that the greatness of her love caused the greatness of her pain. For in this I saw an essential basis of the natural love, continued by grace, that his creatures have for him. This natural love was most abundantly and surpassingly shown in his dear mother, for in so much as she loved him more than anyone else, her sufferings surpassed those of all others.¹

By means of this change, Mary, Christ and the evencresten are now explicitly qualified as sharing an ‘inwarde chere’ of ‘kinde love’. This is the love between lovers or close relatives, and in Julian between a mother and a child.² Christ and all creatures feel the love of a close family member for one another, which is made possible by their shared essence. According to narrator Julian, all creatures are as ‘oned’ in love and essence with Christ as he is with his mother.

What is more, since this ‘substance of kinde love’ is most clearly seen in Mary, ‘substance’ acquires overtones of not only the love between mother and child, but also of Mary’s miraculous motherhood. The narrator thereby foregrounds another denotation of ‘substance’, ‘the matter of which the body [...] is made’³, and alludes to Mary’s providing Christ’s substance in the Incarnation. As a fourteenth-century Middle English translation of the Athenasian Creed states, Christ is ‘of þe substaunce of þe moder born in þe world’.⁴ Unlike Vision, then, Revelation provides the relation between the human substance and God’s with highly specific layers of significances, and tightly weaves it into its fabric of motherhood imagery.

The narrator primes the reader to see substance as matter-like, a property of Christ’s body, and a feature of the love between mother and child and Mary and Christ. Having done so, the narrator then portrays the Trinity as providing humanity with their substance and matter in a manner that evokes Mary’s providing Christ with his humanity and matter. God, in brief, is made mother to the human substance. This characterization is found in the exposition of substance and sensuality. For instance, the narrator depicts God’s substantial motherhood when reflecting on how God is both the maker of the human soul and that out of which the soul is made:

¹ *Revelations of Divine Love*, 64; A gloss by Watson and Jenkins on ‘a substance of kinde love’ has been added. ‘Sidenotes’, 184.
² Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 184.
³ ‘substaunce (N.)’, 3b., *MED*.
And thus is mannes soule made of God, and in the same pointe knite to God. And thus I understode that mannes soule is made of nought. That is to sey, it is made, but of nought that is made, as thus: whan God shulde make mannes body, he toke the slime of the erth, which is a mater medeled and gadered of alle bodely thinges, and therof made he mannes body. But to the making of mannes soule he wolde take right nought, but made it. And thus is the kinde made rightfully ones to the maker, which is substantial kinde unmade, that is God. And therefore it is that ther may ne shall be right noughte betwene God and mannis soule. (Rev. 53. 33-40)

[And thus man’s soul is made by God, and joined to God at the same point. And so I understood that man’s soul is made of nothing, that is to say, it is made, but of nothing that is made, in this way: when God was to make man’s body he took the slime of the earth, which is matter mixed and gathered from all bodily things, and from that he made man’s body; but for the making of man’s soul he would not take anything at all, but made it. And so created nature is rightfully united to the creator, which is essential uncreated nature, that is, God. And so it is that there neither can nor shall be anything at all between God and man’s soul.]

This complex passage needs some unpacking. As Watson and Jenkins point out, ‘made of God’ indicates that the human soul is both made by God and made from God, as also suggested by the statement that the human soul is made out of nothing created. Yet, this ‘nought’ can nonetheless be shaped and joined to another being. God’s immaterial body, then, is sufficiently matter-like for other entities to be made out of it.

The narrator then states that humanity, which is and has a ‘created nature’, has since creation always been united with God, who has and is ‘substantial uncreated nature’. In addition to ‘essential’, ‘substantial’ can also denote having substance. The human substance comes from God, just as Christ’s substance comes from Mary.

1 Norwich, Watson, and Jenkins, The Writings of Julian of Norwich / A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love, ch. 53: 33-40; Revelations of Divine Love, 119. Although historical Julian probably did not possess a Bible in the vernacular, as Sutherland points out, this passage shows some remarkable similarities to the creation account in the ‘Wyclif Bible’, in which includes a ‘of nought’ not found in modern editions of the Vulgate or the Authorized Version: ‘And God made of nouȝt a man to his ymage and liknesse/God made of nouȝt a man: to the ymage of God/ God made of nouȝt hem, male and female.’ (Genesis 1. 27)ed. Lindberg, p. 49; Annie Sutherland, ‘Oure Feyth Is Groundyd In Goddes Worde’ – Julian of Norwich and The Bible’, (p. 6).
2 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 294.
Moreover, the human soul is described as a smaller entity closely attached to a greater entity, out of which the soul is made and to which it is ‘knit,’ fastened or tied. The relation between God and the human soul thus becomes reminiscent of that between a mother’s body and a foetus. ‘The same point,’ connects the human substance and God’s, as Windeatt points out.¹ This point consequently becomes an umbilical cord, fastening the human and the divine to one another. In other words, God is characterized as eternally pregnant with the human soul and with the human substance.

Another description of how the human substance dwells in God turns the Trinity into the eternal mother to the substance to an even greater extent. This description, however, draws more attention to how this is central to humanity having being. Having described the mutual indwelling of God and humanity, the narrator immediately links this mutual indwelling to substance:

[O]ure soule, that is made, wonneth in God in substance, by which substance, by God, we be what we be. And I sawe no difference between God and oure substance [...] And yet [...] God is God and oure substance is a creature in God. (Rev. 54. 11-15)

[[O]ur soul, which is made, dwells in God’s substance; and through this substance—God—we are what we are. And I saw no difference between God and our substance [...] and yet [...] God is God, and our substance is a creation within God.]²

Humanity and God are explicitly characterized as sharing the same substance. This substance is what gives humanity being. Humanity therefore essentially resembles God, a characterization not dissimilar to the Trinity in Genesis 1 suggesting to themselves ‘Make we man to oure ymage and liknesse’.³

However, narrator Julian figures this abstract, ontological resemblance between humanity and God in terms of a complete, smaller being dwelling inside a larger being. The smaller being resembles the larger being and is dependent upon it for its existence. This relation between God and the substance has many resonances of a particular understanding of the relation between Mary’s body and foetal Christ. According to some strands of

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¹ Revelations of Divine Love, 193.
² Ibid., 120.
thinking about the Incarnation, Christ appeared as a tiny, fully formed human being in Mary’s womb, instead of needing to be shaped and formed in the womb like regular babies. Inside God’s womb, then, the human substance is as sinless and perfect as Christ was in Mary’s womb, but unlike Christ, this matter-like human essence never needs to leave the supernatural womb.

The next lines develop this characterization of God further. Citing the last line shows how the different claims flow into one another, and how the narrator intertwines substance and parenthood:

God is God and oure substance is a creature in God. For the almighty truth of the trinite is oure fader, for he made us and kepeth us in him. And the depe wisdom of the trinite is oure moder, in whom we are all enclosed. And the hye goodnesse of the trinite is our lord, and in him we are beclosed and he in us. (Rev. 54. 15-18)

[God is God, and our substance is a creation within God; for the almighty truth of the Trinity is our father, for he made us and keeps us in him; and the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed; and the exalted goodness of the Trinity is our Lord, and in him we are enclosed and he in us.]

Not only is the ‘wisdom of the Trinity,’ one of Julian’s epithets for Christ, explicitly given the characteristic of being a mother. The use of ‘kepeth us in him’ and ‘beclosed’ makes ‘oure Fader’ and ‘oure Lord’ mothers as well, since ‘kepeth’ means both ‘to protect’ and ‘to contain’ in Revelation. humanity is equally enclosed in the Lord as it is in ‘oure moder.’

Only a few chapters later the narrator provides detailed instructions about ‘beclosed’ needing to be read as suggesting gestation and prenatal existence:

And oure savioure is oure very moder, in whome we be endlessly borne and never shall come out of him. Plenteously, fully, and

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1 Tasioulas, “Heaven and Earth in Little Space”: the Foetal Existence of Christ in Medieval Literature and Thought.
2 Revelations of Divine Love, 120.
3 It is used in the sense of ‘to protect’ when the narrator describes the Trinity as ‘our keper’ (‘our protector’) and in the sense of hold or contain when character Julian is described as keeping in mind both her insights about the parable of the servant. (Rev. 4. 8; 50. 39; trans. Windeatt 44, 107).
sweetly was this shewde, and it was spoken of in the furst, where it saide 'We be all in him besclosed.' (Rev. 57. 43-44)

[[O]ur Saviour is our true mother, in whom we are endlessly born and and out of whom we shall never come to birth. Abundantly, fully and sweetly was this shown, and it is spoken of in the first revelation, where it says that we are enclosed in him.]

According to narrator Julian, each reference to ‘besclosed’ characterizes God as an eternally pregnant mother. When the previous passage is read in accordance with this, the entire Trinity and each Person of the Trinity becomes a mother endlessly bearing humanity.

Finally, by referring to the substance as a ‘creature’, a part of creation, the narrator evokes the material resonances ‘substance’ has acquired earlier in the text. God the Trinity thus eternally contains, protects and encloses the matter-like, created human substance like a mother’s body that of her unborn child, and in particular like Mary’s body was thought to enclose Christ’s. It is this eternally prenatal state which gives each person being. Just as Christ is described in the Nicene Creed as ‘of one substance’ with the Father, narrator Julian gives humans in Revelation the explicit characteristic of being ‘on one substance’ with God the Mother.

**Trinitarian Mothering to the Sensuality**

Revelation not only turns the whole Trinity into the mother to the substance, but also to the sensuality. God is characterized as a mother in his actions of looking after the human sensuality. This characterization reflects the narrator’s claim that ‘in oure sensualite God is’ (Rev. 55. 21.) ['God is in our sensory being.'] Such ‘werking’ in Julian’s theology necessarily implies changing over time. In the motherhood meditation, the mother adapts her caring actions to the child’s changing needs (Rev. 60. 47). Narrator Julian makes the changeability often seen as characteristic of human women thus becomes a characteristic of mother God.

An added action implicitly characterizing God as a mother to the sensuality is his wrapping humanity in the swaddling clothes of his goodness. In Julian’s and the Ancrene Wisse’s terms, his ‘outwarde behaving’ gives him the ‘persone’ of a mother. In an oft-cited and frequently discussed description, the narrator depicts God as caring for humanity in one the most basic human functions, defecation, and offers an ‘an unusually affirmative response’.

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 126.
2 Ibid., 121.
3 Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich’, 120.
A man goeth upright, and the soule of his body is sparede as a purse full of fair. And when it is time of his neccesery, it is openede and sparede ayen full of honestly. And it is he that doeth this, it is shewed ther where he seith: ‘he cometh downe to us, to the lowest part of oure nede.’ For he hath no dispite of that he made, ne he hath no disdaine to serve us at the simplest office that to oure body longeth in kinde, for love of the soule that he hath made to his awne likenessee. For as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skinne, and the bones in the flesh, and the harte in the bowke, so ar we, soule and body, cladde and enclosedde in the goodness of God. Yee, and more homely […] The goodnesse of God is ever hole, and more nere to us without any likenes. (Rev. 6. 25-39)

[A man walks upright, and the food inside his body is shut up as if in a very fine purse; and when it is his time of necessity the purse is opened and shut again in a very decent way. And that it is God who does this is shown where he says that he comes down to us in our lowest need. For he does not despise what he has made, nor does he disdain to serve us in the simplest task that is part of our bodily nature, for love of the soul which he has made in his own likeness. For as the body is clad in cloth, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the chest, so are we, soul and body, clad and enclosed in the goodness of God. Yes and more inwardly […] God’s goodness is always complete, and incomparable closer to us.]

God’s acting here clearly concerns the human sensuality, that is, human time-bound, sensory experience. Narrator Julian describes God as wrapping humanity more tightly in his goodness than human clothes can; the second use of ‘for’ implies that this wrapping in goodness supports defecation. The references to cloth and enclosing evoke Mary’s clothing Christ in her own flesh, and transfer these actions to mother God. These strongly interlinked resonances of enabling defecation, Mary’s clothing of Christ, and wrappings turn God’s goodness into swaddling clothes, such as those used by Mary in the Nativity narrative. Ena Jenkins sees the juxtaposition of this image with those of the hazelnut and Mary as briefly calling to mind swaddling. However, the strong emphasis on supporting defecation, protecting humanity and tight wrappings gives the goodness stronger overtones of swaddling than Jenkins suggests. Swaddling clothes, after all, were meant to

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 47.
protect and comfort the child as well as collect the digested ‘saule’ ejected by the baby.\(^1\) God’s action of wrapping mankind in the swaddling clothes of his goodness thus forms part of the ‘motherhood matrix’, to use McAvoy’s phrase, creating a connection between this early moment in *Revelation* and the motherhood theology.\(^2\) The Trinity is both the eternally pregnant mother of the substance, and the sensual mother who acts in time, changing the child’s diaper whenever it is ‘the time of his necessity.’

In addition to ascribing maternal actions to God that are not found in *Vision*, narrator Julian also changes aspects of God’s existing ‘outwarde behaviour’ in *Revelation*, namely his tone and his expression. These changes implicitly characterize God as the mother to the sensuality. Both *Vision* and *Revelation* feature a meditation on how the believer finds rest once more after sin and contrition, realizing that God is angry at the sin rather than at him- or herself.

In *Vision* the narrator does not give God’s speech act specific qualities, but the contents of his utterance are joyful and loving:

> And than is God, in the sight of saule, turnede into the beholding of the saule, as if it had bene in paine or in preson, sayande thus: ‘I am gladde that thow erte comen to reste, for I hafe ev er loved the and nowe loveds the, and thowe me.’ (Vis. 19. 63-66)

[And then, in the sight of the soul, God is moved to look upon the soul, as if it had been in pain or in prison, saying, ‘I am glad that you have come to rest, for I have always loved you, and I love you now, and you love me.’]\(^3\)

An implicit characterization ‘loving’ can be deduced from the content of Christ’s words, but the serious tone of the scene overshadows the gladness and love which Christ’s utterance is meant to express. In *Revelation*, the narrator gives God a warm tone and expression and loving actions, while the contents of his utterance likewise have been given a larger amount of tenderness:

> And than sheweth our curtesse lorde himself to the soule merely and fulle of glad chere, with frendfulle welcoming, as it had ben in pain and preson, seyeng thus: ‘my dere darling, I am glad thou arte come

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\(^1\) Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages*, 92.

\(^2\) For other connections, see Staley, ‘Julian of Norwich’, 120; McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 145.

\(^3\) *Revelations of Divine Love*, 28.
to me. In alle thy woe have I ever ben with the and now seest thou my loving and we be oned in blisse.’ (Rev. 40. 8-12)

[And then our courteous Lord reveals himself to the soul, very joyfully and with an expression of gladness and a friendly welcome, as if the soul had been in pain and in prison, saying this sweetly, ‘My [dear] darling, I am glad you have come to me. In all your misery I have always been with you, and now you see how I love you, and we are united in bliss.’]

To use Julian’s circumstantiae, the narrator makes God’s ‘outwarde behaving’ consist of a joyful and friendly ‘chere’, a loving tone, and welcoming actions, which can be read as maternal. Furthermore, ‘Darling’ is the term of endearment used for the child in the Ancrene Wisse exemplum; this portrayal of God therefore strongly anticipates the description of Christ in the motherhood meditation as a courteous mother, who wants her child to run to her for help instead of running away in fear.

In addition, God in this scene acts in time as suggested by ‘and then’: he responds to each occasion that the individual sins and repents, actions which arise out of the sensuality. God, then, adapts his actions to those of the sinner; he therefore resembles the mother in the motherhood meditation who adapts her ‘werking’ to the different stages in her child’s life. In sum, just as humanity is ‘doubl of God’s making: [...] substantial and sensual’ (Rev. 58. 32, 33) ‘twofold by God’s making [...] in substance and sensory being’[2], the Trinity is twofold by narrator Julian’s making. Providing the substance and caring for the sensuality, God is made as double and as continuously changing as women were thought to be.

**Cross-dressing Christ: Christ as Mother to the Sensuality**

Although her characterization of the Trinity as a twofold mother is evocative, narrator Julian seems to be most intrigued by the twofold or even threefold motherhood of the Second Person. She first briefly gives Christ the explicit qualification or ‘persone’ of mother to the human substance, for instance writing ‘the seconde persone [...] is oure moder substantially’ (Rev. 58. 31); she then explicitly characterizes Christ as mother to the sensuality and enthusiastically explores what this entails at great length.

In the resulting motherhood meditation and elsewhere, narrator Julian makes Christ perform a stylized yet physical motherhood. Both Grace Jantzen and Claire Barbetti recognize how Christ’s maternal actions have a

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conceptual and ideal quality, in the sense of being a Platonic idea.\(^1\) I would like to add that these actions manage to be both abstract and particular, making Christ’s ‘persone’ a mother who is both ideal and physical. The beginning of her exuberant investigation of Christ’s sensual motherhood offers an example of this process.

First, narrator Julian compares physically possible actions of human mothers to physically impossible actions of mother Christ, for instance stating that: ‘The moder may ley her childe tenderl y to her brest. But oure tender moder Jhesu, he may homely lede us into his blessed brest’ (\textit{Rev.} 60. 33, 34). [‘The mother can lay the child tenderly to her breast, but our tender mother Jesus, he can lead us intimately into his blessed breast.’]\(^2\) Christ’s ‘outwarde behaving’ surpasses that of earthly mothers, but still resembles it sufficiently to allow for a comparison, making Christ’s maternal body as physical as that of earthly mothers. That is, the mother’s ‘breste’ may be a vehicle for the tenor of Christ’s breast, yet the simile also turns Christ’s breast into an earthly mother’s breast.

Each of Christ’s maternal actions is then turned into an embodiment of an earlier visionary locution. Christ’s hiding humanity in his breast, for example, is also revealed ‘in the tenth […] where he seyth “Lo, how I loved thee.”’ (\textit{Rev.} 60. 37-39) [‘He showed that in the tenth revelation […] where he says, “See, how I love you.”’]\(^3\) Christ’s maternal actions thus illustrate his earlier utterances, and vice versa: the narrator detaches both from their particular circumstances, and as a result makes Christ’s actions conceptual and abstract.

Finally, however, the narrator encloses the earthly mother’s actions into Christ’s maternal actions, including giving birth and parenting: ‘oure bodely forthbrin[g] […] it is he that doth it in the creatures by whom it is done […] This werking, all that be fair and good, our lord doth it in hem by whom it is done’ (\textit{Rev.} 60. 43, 44, 49, 50). [‘The birth of our body […] it is he who does it in the created beings by whom it is done […] Such actions […] our Lord performs through those by whom they are done.’]\(^4\) In other words, Christ protects humanity by leading them into his breast and through mothers laying their children to their breast, breastfeeds both with the sacraments and through earthly mothers, and so on. The cumulative effect of these different steps is that Christ’s sensual motherhood is ideal yet present in mundane reality, conceptual yet intensely physical.

\(^{2}\) \textit{Revelations of Divine Love}, 130.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., 131.
\(^{4}\) Ibid.
Narrator Julian detaches this Neo-Platonic yet material maternal body from gender, as Aers and Staley have also noted about the motherhood portrayal in general. She frequently gives Christ first the explicit ‘persone’ characteristic ‘mother’, which is immediately followed by an explicit qualification ‘male’. The first chapter of the ‘set piece’ on Christ as mother is punctuated with constructions such as ‘oure kinde moder, oure gracious moder, for he’ and ‘oure very moder Jhesu, he’ (Rev. 60. 5, 16, emphasis added) [‘our mother in nature, our mother in grace, because he...our true mother Jesus, he.’]. The use of ‘very’ and the polysemous adjective ‘kinde’, denoting among many other things ‘natural’, underlines this detachment of Christ’s maternal body from gender: Christ’s maternal body is more naturally and truly a mother’s body than that of a woman.

With his degendered maternal body and non-naturalistic yet physical actions, Revelation’s Christ calls to mind Mary in mystery play performances. I suggest that by means of these theatrical resonances, the narrator underlines that the sensuality is as central to the Imago Christi as the substance. It should be remembered that the role of Mary, like that of all female characters in mystery plays, was performed by boys in their late teens and possibly by young men, since the advent of puberty was later in the Middle Ages. Twycross and others term this practice ‘cross-playing’, a term which I will adopt here.

Three features of Mary in medieval mystery play performances are likely to have jointly created an effect analogous to that of Christ in Revelation. The first of these is the demonstrative mode outlined earlier, in which the actor presented or represented an image or icon rather than an individual. The second feature is the ‘dual consciousness’ activated by the cross-playing. That is, the mystery play audience remains aware that the females role were performed by young men, while at the same time they are absorbed in the dramatic illusion, accepting the portrayal and the narrative. This simultaneous suspension of disbelief and awareness of the tension between the actor’s gender and the role is termed ‘dual consciousness’ by Michael Shapiro in his discussion of Elizabethan boy actors. The third feature is the construction of the supernatural maternal body during the performance.

Modern reconstructions of medieval mystery plays suggest that the combination of dual consciousness and the demonstrative mode gave Mary’s motherhood on stage an abstract, non-naturalistic yet dramatically effective

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2 Rastall, ‘Female Roles in All-Male Casts.’
3 Twycross, ‘Transvestism in the Mystery Plays’, 154; Shapiro, Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage: Boy Heroines and Female Pages, 146.
quality. Two of the plays performed in these reconstructions were the Purification and the Doctors from the Chester Cycle. In these the Virgin Mary interacts with her son, who is a baby in the first play and a child in the second.1 When a male actor played Mary, the audience experienced Mary as an icon rather than an individual, with the actor ‘standing for Mary’ rather than inhabiting her. Performances by a female actor lacked this detached, iconic quality. The cross-playing and the dual consciousness were felt to stress the narrative content and spiritual force of the play, and to emphasize the stylized nature of the gestures.2 As a result, it is probable that Mary’s motherhood and maternal actions struck the medieval audience as ethereal and other, and as a generic and abstract rather than individual, which gave these actions greater narrative emphasis. The actor thus presents the concept of (miraculous) motherhood rather than an individual experience thereof.

The third feature of Mary in medieval mystery play performances similar to Christ in Revelation is how her supernatural maternal body is called into being during the performance by means of the demonstrative mode, the narrative and the dialogue. An instance of this interpellating of Mary’s body is found in the N-Town cycle. In scenes inspired by a popular, extra-biblical story of three midwives assisting the Virgin Mary, a midwife thinks Mary’s Virgin motherhood impossible and insists on examining her physically. As a result, her hand withers.3 The action of the midwife focuses the spectator’s gaze on Mary’s miraculous and maternal body and affirms that this body has been created by being performed: the narrative encourages the viewer, like the midwife, to believe in Mary’s supernaturally maternal body.

These three features of Mary in medieval mystery play performances jointly detach motherhood from gender and give the maternal actions an abstract, generic and idealized yet physical quality, creating many points of analogy with Julian’s characterization of Christ. In both Revelation and mystery plays a young man enacts physical, maternal actions and a supernatural, ideal motherhood, which is constructed in and on a human body or bodies. These actions, motherhood and body are performed in the time-bound experience of the audience.

By characterizing Christ in a manner evocative of Mary in mystery plays, Revelation draws attention to Christ’s sensual motherhood, that is, his acting in time, and therefore to Christ’s doubleness. The motherhood meditation concerns itself explicitly with Christ as the mother to the sensuality, and the theatrical echoes emphasize this characteristic. These

2 Ibid., 150, 152.
resonances do so by drawing attention to the performative aspects of Christ’s motherhood, or, in Julian’s terms, his ‘office’, role or duties. According to narrator Julian, Christ is a mother not only because of the shared substance, but also because he acts as a mother to each individual’s sensuality, and does so differently in each life. Like the portrayal of Mary in medieval theatre, this characterization thus shifts the emphasis from the individual agent, the actor, the mother, to the narrative of each individual life and to humanity in general.

Additionally, these echoes make Christ’s doubleness indispensable to his motherhood. The viewer needs to accept the demonstrative mode, dual consciousness and creation of Mary’s supernatural body on stage in order for the narrative to be effective. Likewise, only by accepting that Christ’s maternal actions change over time, that is, that he is as sensual as he is substantial, can the evenchristen discern Christ’s actions in her or her individual life. In sum, by emphasizing Christ’s doubleness, the narrator underscores that the human doubleness so disdainfully associated with women is nothing less than an image of mother God.

**Speaking ‘Fair, Lovely Worde[s]’ to the Sensuality**

Christ’s utterances from *Vision* are made more maternal in *Revelation*, which underscores his acting in time, that is, his maternal caring for human sensuality. Compared to *Vision*, in *Revelation* Christ’s manner of addressing Julian and humanity is made like the behaviour of mother Christ in the motherhood meditation: the narrator gives Christ’s speech acts a tone from which the same maternal traits can be deduced which narrator Julian also explicitly ascribes to Christ in the motherhood meditation.

In *Vision*, when Christ tells character Julian that he is willing to undergo even more suffering than his death on the cross for her sake, he does so in quite a grave manner: ‘And that shewed he me wele soberly, sayande this worde: “i f I might suffere mare”’ (*Vis*. 12.24). ['And he revealed that to me very gravely, saying these words, ‘If I could suffer more.’] In *Revelation*, this becomes ‘For which love he said full swetely this worde: “If I might suffer more, I wolde suffer more.”’ (*Rev*. 22. 40–42) ['On account of this love he said very lovingly these words: “If I could suffer more, I should suffer more.”'] The narrator changes Christ’s tone from very serious to filled with love.

The adjective ‘swete’ is a common epithet of mother Christ and of the concept ‘mother’ itself in the motherhood meditation. Narrator Julian resolutely states that ‘this fair lovely worde, ‘moder’ is ‘so swete and kinde of itselfe’ that it should only be used to refer to Christ, the ‘very mother of life

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2 Ibid., 70.
and of alle’ (Rev. 60. 39,40). Moreover, the narrator gives mother Christ ‘swete, gracious hands’ and a ‘werking’ that is ‘fair and swete’ (Rev. 51. 56; 63. 20). In Revelation, Christ’s statement about being willing to die innumerable times thus becomes that of a loving mother.

By weaving of Christ’s statement into what McAvoy calls the ‘motherhood matrix,’ the narrator makes Christ’s wish to suffer more a wish for maternal self-sacrifice, and, Christ’s death on the cross an act of giving birth, a wish for eternally giving birth. Narrator Julian, then, replaces the image used by Christ in John 15. 13, of a man who ‘lay(s) down his life for his friends’ (KJV) with that of a mother who is willing to undergo the pains of childbirth countless times for each child individually.

An Insubstantial Monster

Revelation also emphasizes how both substance and sensuality are central to the Imago Christi by characterizing the devil as lacking this divine doubleness. In Revelation, the devil is made to lack substance, reflecting the narrator’s claim that sin has neither substance nor being (Rev. 51. 56; Vis. 13. 55).1 The fiend exists only as a pale imitation of the sensuality and an painful effect on the sensuality, and is unable to change.

Revelation accomplishes this by turning the fiend into a mystery play devil, giving him a pathologically choleric temperament, and making the sounds which he produces lack content. These changes make Revelation use discretio spirituum differently. Whereas the narrator in Vision still needs to warn the reader explicitly against the fiend and his deceptive disguises, the narrator in Revelation enables the evencristen to recognize the fiend and false visions easily. The detailed but anxious warnings have been removed.

Previous scholarship on Revelation has drawn attention to how, especially in the first assault, the fiend’s face and expression are a parody of that of Christ.2 Yet since humanity is made in Christ’s image, according to Revelation narrator Julian, it is also possible to read the fiend in Revelation as a parody of humanity, a portrayal created by the added details.

The characterization of the fiend in the demonic assault changes significantly from Vision to Revelation, with more description and more added details in the later text. The earlier account is, in the words of McAvoy, ‘muted and almost dismissive.’3

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3 McAvoy, Authority and the Female Body, 151.
And I laye stille tille night, tristande in his mercye, and than I began to slepe. And in my slepe, atte the beginninge, methought the fende sette him in my throte and walde hafe strangelede me, botte he might nought. Than I woke out of my slepe, and unnethes had I my life. The persones that ware with me beheld me and wette my temples, and my herte began to comfort. (Vis. 21. 21-26)

Later, in Revelation, the narrator creates a horrifying scene with highly specific details: the monster and his threatening actions are described by Julian in "some of her most vivid and concrete language." When the additions in Revelation are italicized, the differences between the two accounts can be seen:

And I ley stille tille night, trusting in his mercy, and than I began to slepe. And ine my slepe, at the beginning, methought the fende set him in my throte, putting forth a visage fulle nere my face like a yonge man, and it was longe and wonder leen. I never saw none such. The coloure was red, like the tilestone when it is new brent, with blace spottes therein like freknes, fouler th an the tilestone. His here was rede as rust, not scored afore, with sidelockes hanging on the thonwonges. He grinned upon me with a shrewde loke; sheude me whit teth and so mekille, methought it the more ugly. Body ne hands had he none shaply, but with his pawes he helde me in the throte, and woulde have strangled me, but he might not. This ugly shewing was made sleping, and so was none other. And in all this time I trusted to be saved and kepte by the mercy of God. And oure curtesse lorde gave me grace to wake, and unnethes had I my life. The persons that were with me beheld me and wet my temples, and my harte beganne to comfort. (Rev. 67. 1-12.)

[And I lay still till night, trusting in his mercy, and then I went to sleep. And as soon as I fell asleep, it seemed to me that the devil was

1 Revelations of Divine Love, 30.
at my throat, thrusting forward very close to my face a face like a young man’s; it was long and strangely thin; I never saw the like. The colour was red like a tilestone, when it is newly fired, with black spots on it like black freckles, but filthier than the tile. His hair was red as rust, [not] trimmed at the front, with side-locks hanging down at his temples. He grinned at me with a wicked expression, showing white teeth—and so big as to seem all the more menacing to me. His body and hands were misshapen but with his paws he gripped me by the throat and would have strangled me, but he could not. This horrible apparition occurred while I was asleep, as none of the revelations did. And during this whole time I trusted I would be saved and protected by the mercy of God. And our courteous Lord gave me grace to wake up, and I was barely alive. The people who were with me watched over me and bathed my temples, and my heart began to take comfort.]

Revelation has expanded the Vision account in accordance with its ‘pointes and propertes’ apparatus also applied to the Lord and Servant. Just as the narrator ascribes to circumstantiae-like characteristics relating to position, place, clothes, inward attitude, outward behaving to the parable characters in her re-telling of the parable, the fiend is now given more ‘pointes and propertes’ as well. His ‘manner of sitting’ or ‘standing’ is very close to Julian ‘in my throte [...] putting forth a visage fulle nere my face’. His ‘chere without’ is that of a young man’s face, strangely skinny and very red. His ‘outerde behaving’ consists of holding Julian by the throat and trying to strangle her, but being unable able to do so. Like the narrator has the lord in the parable look ‘with a lovely loking’ on the servant, the fiend’s look directed at character Julian is ‘shrewde’ ‘wicked’.

A number of these changes give the fiend a greater lack of substance in general: his ontological status is destabilized more. To begin, the narrator states more often that the fiend appears in a dream, a state which medieval dream theory and discretio spirituum discourse considered deceptive and illusory. The devil forms part of an experience which lacks substance in the sense of being. Furthermore, although monstrous and gripping Julian by the throat, he is unable to bring physical harm to Julian. More importantly, his face merely unconvincingly resembles that of a young man; his ‘persone’ is

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1 Revelations of Divine Love, 140, 141, italics added. The manuscripts disagree on whether the fiend has shaggy or trimmed hair (Watson and Jenkins, ‘Textual Notes’, 104); Windeatt chooses differently from Watson and Jenkins here, hence my addition to the translation. The shaggy hair seems more in line with medieval iconography; in illuminated manuscripts, for instance, the devil often is often covered in pelt-like hair.

2 Kruger, Dreaming in the Middle Ages, 47–48; Voaden, God’s Words, Women’s Voices: 51, 52, 88.
simply that of a flawed imitation of a human being. The fiend, then, lacks the divine substance which gives humanity its being and its human identity.

The added traits also turn the fiend into a stage devil, thereby likewise suggesting that the fiend lacks substance. The use of the phrase ‘a visage’ is revealing: ‘visage’ denotes not only ‘face’ but also a mask. Significantly, this is the sole occurrence of the term in Julian’s writings: Christ and humanity always have a ‘chere’ and ‘face’. The mask-like quality of the face is emphasized by the grin and the many teeth. The devil’s face, then, reminds character Julian that of a mask depicting the face of a young man; it is clearly recognisable as a mask. In mystery plays, the actors enacting the role of devils wore grotesque masks without exception, sometimes both on their face and on the back of their head; these masks would often have large teeth, fangs or tusks. These stage devils also often wear hairy coats. Although the narrator does not state that the fiend’s body was covered in hair, she does give him shaggy hair on his head, giving him resonances of stage devils.

Such echoes of mystery plays draw attention to the sensual aspects of the human self rather than to substance. Theatre by definition is a form of art that is more strongly situated in time than, for instance, literature or graphic arts. The narrative unfolds over time, and the audience cannot skip forward to a later scene or backward to an earlier scene as when reading a narrative. Moreover, mystery plays, and medieval theatre in general, were highly sensory, with their music and singing, loud proclaiming, pyrotechnics, special effects, elaborate costumes and their hell mouth emitting smoke on to the stage. Although mystery plays are life-like in this sensory quality, and were often called ‘quick books’, that is, living books, a character in a mystery play naturally never ‘lives’ longer than a day a year. The strong detachment of the role from the actor can be said to emphasize this evanescent quality. Consequently, by giving the fiend characteristics of a stage demon, the narrator turns the fiend into an effect on the sensuality only. He resembles a familiar figure that causes fear in the spectator’s time-bound existence, but can only do so for a brief moment, existing only fleetingly in these actions, and ultimately lacking being.

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1 ‘visage, (n), MED, def. 2,3.
2 Butterworth, Staging Conventions in Medieval English Theatre, 120; Davidson, From Creation to Doom: The York Cycle of Mystery Plays, 33; Twycross and Carpenter, ‘Masks in Medieval English Theatre’, 71, 76.
3 Twycross and Carpenter, ‘Masks in Medieval English Theatre’, 74.
4 Davidson, From Creation to Doom: The York Cycle of Mystery Plays, 33.
These theatrical echoes differ from those in the characterization of Christ and character Julian. Unlike Christ and character Julian, his acting and disguise are not very successful: his body merely ‘seems’, and the mask is unconvincing. According narrator Julian, then, the fiend is a flawed parody of sensual part of human life. The stage demons may have been sufficiently convincing frightening creatures for the audience to be absorbed in the theatrical illusion.¹ The fiend in Revelation, in contrast, fools no one. This characterization differs from the earlier characterization in Vision, in which the devil is described as being able to disguise himself convincingly, and from that in several saints’ lives.² The fiend, then, exists only as a brief performance. Lacking the substance and the doubleness central to the Imago Christi, he is a mask without an actor. The evenestren, character Julian, and God, who do possess both substance and sensuality, can be an actor, a role, and an audience member. They can both be and seem. The fiend is only capable of seeming. The other characters laugh at him because he lacks the divine doubleness and is only a role and an effect.

Fiendishly Substanceless Rattling
Narrator Julian also underlines the centrality of both substance and sensuality to the Imago Christi by making the fiend in Revelation incapable of human speech. Only God and humanity are given the ‘properte’ of being able to utter sounds that possess ‘substance’ in the sense of ‘content’.³

In the last attack character Julian sees smoke, feels dreadful heat, smells vile stench and hears several demons squabble softly and indistinctly, so that she cannot understand what is said. Julian tries to counteract this with ‘speche of Cristes passion’ (Vis. 23. 12) [‘speaking of Christ’s Passion’].⁴ This scene is changed only slightly in Revelation, but these changes are telling nonetheless.

In Vision character Julian hears ‘a bodely jangelinge and a speche,’ (Vis. 23. 3) [‘an audible jabbering and a talking’].⁵ This description implies that if the demons had been somewhat closer or talking a little louder Julian might have been able to overhear their words, creating a verbal psychomachia between Julian’s speech and that of the fiends, and by implication an equality in strength. In Revelation, ‘a speche’ has been removed, leaving only ‘a bodely jangling’. Thus, only Julian uses and is

² In the legend of Saint Justina, for instance, the devil convincingly disguises himself as a young man. De Voragine, The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints, 580.
³ “Substaunce” (n) def. 6, MED.
⁴ Revelations of Divine Love, 33.
⁵ Ibid., 32.
capable of speech; even if she had been closer to the frightening creatures, the sounds they produced would still have been gibberish only.

Additionally, the demonic muttering is specified more; the narrator describes it as ‘seeming to me as they scorned bidding of bedes which are said boistously with mouth’ (Rev. 69. 6, 7). [‘It seemed to me] as if they were parodying the recitation of prayers when they are said crudely with the mouth’.) The narrator classifies their action as only appearing to be ridiculing. The demons, then, are incapable of actual ridiculing, that is, using words with ridiculing content. Instead, it is the tone only which makes Julian think that they appear to be ridiculing. This din reminds character Julian of ‘bidding of bedes said boistously’. Both the form and content of this phrase draw attention to the demons’ sounds being nothing but empty noise. There are three alliterating words (‘bidding’, ‘bedes’, ‘boistously’) with assonance as well (‘bid’ and ‘bed’). This feature emphasizes the sound of the words over their content, and thereby sound in general, stressing that the demons produce noise devoid of content instead of speech.

Furthermore, although Watson and Jenkins and all translators translate ‘bedes’ as ‘prayers’, it can also be read as ‘prayer beads’, as Georgia Ronan Crampton does in her edition, like the ‘peire of bedes’ worn by the Prioress in the Canterbury Tales.2 Given narrator Julian’s fondness for wordplay, it is possible that the term suggests both prayers and rosary beads. ‘Bedes’ therefore also alludes to the ticking sound made of one rosary bead hitting the other when someone prays, implying once more that the demons’ only produce senseless rattling din, presumably because they lack the substance which God and humanity share. Possessing substance, character Julian can drown out and overcome the noise and non-language of the demons by means God’s and her own substance-filled language.

This characterization of the fiend is rather unusual in comparison to that in other visionary texts and in mystery plays. In the heavenly courtroom scene in the Liber the devil speaks at great length. In the Book of Margery Kempe the devil both speaks to Margery’s mind and expresses coherent thought telling her she prefers some men more than others.3 Similarly, the N-Town cycle features an extensive, extra-biblical dialogue between Pilate’s

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1 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 340.
2 Footnote to line 2853, in Crampton, The Shewings of Julian of Norwich, n. 2853. Colledge and Walsh think this is an impossible reading, because the earliest depictions of a rosary are from the early 1400s; however, this is only impossible because of their early dating of Revelation; it is possible according to Watson’s dating. A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich, vol. 2 648, 649.
wife and the devil. This change in characterization in *Revelation*, and the resulting difference from portrayals of the fiend in contemporary texts should therefore be read in relation to *Revelation*’s anthropology of the soul and claims about sin lacking substance. That is to say, *Revelation* suggests that only those with substance, who consequently are double, can utter speech with substance. By extension, this change in characterization also has important implications for the *auctoritas* of the text and the validity of the visions: the intelligibility of the text and visions in *Revelation* becomes a sign of their divine origin.

**Changing the Fiend into an Unchangeable Hothead**

Other added ‘propertes’ and the fiend’s action of strangling also imply that the fiend lacks substance and doubleness. *Revelation* achieves this by making the characterization suggest a pathological form of a choleric humor, making the fiend unable to be anything but wrath and envy.

My reading differs here from that of a number of critics, for example David F. Tinsley and Jay Ruud, who see the devil as threatening Julian with lust. McAvoy likewise reads the fiend as associated with corrupt sexuality. However, any sexual components in the assault are far less noticeably present in *Revelation* than in for instance Margery’s trials or in female saints’ legends in *The Golden Legend*. With the emphasis in the nightmare scene on physical harm, the fiend’s actions are first and foremost violent and angry.

Furthermore, I argue narrator Julian ascribes to the devil the wrath which contemporary religious discourse ascribed to God. Earlier, in a meditation found only in *Revelation*, narrator Julian explicitly characterizes God as incapable of anger: ‘But in God may be no wrath, as to my sight’ (*Rev.* 13. 14, 15). ‘[But there can be no anger in God’.* This depiction of God is heterodox. As Baker writes, ‘in rejecting a depiction of God as wrathful, [narrator Julian] calls into question a central premise of orthodox medieval theodicy.’ Julian’s contemporaries would frequently encounter descriptions of God as angry in their Books of Hours and other religious texts.

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1 Sugano, ‘Play 31, Satan and Pilate’s Wife; Second Trial before Pilate | Robbins Library Digital Projects.’
3 McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 159.
4 *Revelations of Divine Love*, 58.
6 In the *Little Office* or *Hours of the Virgin Mary*, recommended by the Ancene Wisse, God states already at Matins in Psalm 95 that he ‘yswore in [his] ire’ [‘swore in his wrath’] to humanity that they will not receive his peace. Anchorites thus heard God daily
on the Bubonic Plague as divine retribution show that Julian’s contemporaries sometimes deduced the ‘inward chere’ ‘wrathful’ from what they saw as God’s actions.1 In Revelation, in contrast, God is all goodness (Rev. 56. 10), and, I suggest, the devil is all wrath. The latter characterization is achieved by giving the fiend ‘pointes and properties’ which to the contemporary reader likely suggested an unusually choleric complexion, usually associated with anger and envy.

In medieval literary practice, a common feature of characterization was the use of physiognomy, ‘the art of reading faces’ as well as of bodies as a whole.2 An author could give a character certain physical traits and behaviour which would signify that the character had a certain personality. Medieval medical theory saw each individual as having a dominant moisture or ‘humour’. There were thought to be four humours: blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile. The predominance of each one of the four humors was associated with having a particular mental and emotional disposition (called ‘temperament’), and a particular general constitution (‘complexion’). Which humour was predominant could be read from the individual’s body and behaviour. The portraits of the pilgrims in The Canterbury Tales and the Sins in Piers Plowman show how this discourse allowed texts to create recognizable yet unique characters.3

In Revelation, some of the added ‘pointes and propertes’ of the devil in the nightmare scene repeatedly link the fiend to heat and the colour red. Not only are his face and hair red, his face is compared twice to a hearthstone newly fired, the second time to a hearthstone with heat marks.4 Furthermore, his face is so emaciated that Julian has never seen its like. By ascribing to the fiend such redness, heat, and an emaciated face, the narrator gives him traits which to the contemporary reader would suggest a pathologically imbalanced form of the choleric humour, a humour associated with a predominance of yellow bile, derived from air and fire. Characteristics indicating a choleric humour are for instance an increased heat of the head, and a ‘fyr-reed face,’ like Chaucer’s Summoner has.5 Other choleric characteristics are being ‘slender and small full light in existens’ and prone to envy and wrath, ‘irous in hert’ [‘irascible of heart’] as a Middle English poem...
on the four complexions states. These traits would be even more exaggerated in the case of a pathological imbalance, or dyskrasia, of yellow bile. The extreme skinniness of the fiend’s face suggests an extreme version of the slenderness of cholerics. By giving the fiend a choleric complexion, the narrator thus invites the evencristen to interpret the devil’s ‘chere’ (grinning) and his ‘outwarde behaving’ (trying to strangle her) as wrathful. The devil is both literally and figuratively hot-headed.

What is more, dyskrasia of yellow bile is sometimes portrayed as incurable in Middle English literature. This is for instance the case with the Summoner in the Canterbury Tales, as Laurel Braswell- Means has shown. The fiend, then, then, can only ever be choleric in temperament, that is, in disposition. As a result, he is only capable of great wrath, envy and slyness. Whereas God and humanity can change over time, that is, in their sensuality, and be double, the fiend is unchangeably made up of wrath. By changing the brief moment in Vision to a vivid depiction of a being lacking God’s goodness, the narrator dramatizes and supports her more heterodox portrayal of God in Revelation, suggesting that surely God would not possess such a monstrous characteristic as wrath.

**Double Auctoritas and Do-it-Yourself Discretio Spirituum**

By means of the increased doubleness, the narrator situates auctoritas in the text and in her authorial persona rather than in the visions. That is to say, by ascribing to God a similar doubleness and changeability as to she ascribes to her character alter-ego, the narrator not only implies God’s continuous engagement with the text, as Watson suggests; she also makes the narrator’s doubleness, her being unlike her character alter-ego, part of the Imago Christi. In other words, the narrator no longer needs to be a unified, transparent channel. Instead, her doubleness, and her looking back with empathy on the actions of her younger self, become signifiers of her resemblance to mother Christ, and therefore expressions of divine auctoritas.

The fourteenth-century use of the Latin term ‘character’ is helpful here. Sacraments such as baptism and confirmation were thought to imprint on one’s soul a seal or distinctive sign from God. This indelible imprint on the soul was called a character in Latin. Thomas Aquinas for instance writes in his Summa Theologica ‘Deus per sacramenta nobis suum characterem

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3 Ibid., 274.
4 McAvoy, ‘For We Be Doubel of God’s Making’: Writing, Gender and the Body in Julian of Norwich., 27.
imprimat.’ [Through the sacraments, God imprints his own character upon us.]

According to Aquinas, receiving such a sign makes the recipient resemble Christ: ‘characterem accipiunt quo Christo configurantur’

Thus, when receiving a sign from Christ by means of the sacraments, the believer him- or herself becomes a signifier, a character, of Christ. Likewise, in Revelation the narrator makes the evenchristen and character Julian a character of Christ in their female doubleness. Consequently, whereas Vision places all auctoritas in the divine auctor of the visions, Revelation locates auctoritas in the text and in the human auctor, who in her doubleness and changeability signifies the divine auctor.

The effect on discretio spirituum of this changed characterization is that the devil and experiences originating from him are made instantly recognisable: both express anger and lack content. The characterization thus illustrates character Julian’s realization that ‘alle that is contrarious to love and to peace, it is of the feende and his partye’ (Rev. 77, 2,3).

Moreover, by letting the devil possess all wrath which God lacks, the hopefulness and lack of wrath in the visions, and by extension of Revelation, becomes an indication of its authenticity and its divine origins. Vision contrasts supernatural experiences from the fiend and visions from God argumentatively in an explicit warning. In Revelation, narrator Julian contrasts these experiences narratively. The resulting expanded, highly memorable characterization of Christ and the fiend enables the evenchristen to perform discretio spirituum themselves. Revelation thus suggests that any text or vision that expresses Christ’s ever-loving, forgiving motherhood is authentic and spiritually beneficial, and any text or vision filled with wrath or lacking content has demonic origins. The latter is an unorthodox discretio spirituum claim in a time when sermons and devotional and visionary texts frequently referred to God’s wrath. For instance, it would render Margery’s vision of the punitive earthquake demonic instead of divine.

Shared Longing and Hints of Heavenly Unity in Revelation

Although emphasizing doubleness by characterizing God, humanity and character Julian as twofold, in Revelation the characterization,

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1 III Q. 63, art. 1 ed. Bourke, Summa Theologiae: The Sacraments (3a. 60-5), 78, 79.
2 III Q. 63, art. 3.
especially in the last chapters, also reflects the future, complete union of
substance and sensuality. This union takes place in heaven and at the end of
time when Christ brings ‘oure sensualite [...] up into the substance’ (Rev. 56.
31) [‘our sensory being [...] up to the substance’]. According to narrator
Julian, both Christ and humanity long for this moment. In Watson’s words,
Julian’s theology ‘looks forward, utopically, to a world [...] in which the
‘lower’ sensual (and symbolically female) part of the soul and the higher
‘substantial’ (male) part are fused in a union in which hierarchy is
meaningless.’ According to Revelation, then, both Christ and humanity are
‘doubel of God’s making’ but will ultimately be ‘aned’ [united] in their
substance and sensuality and with one another.

The Lonely Servant Once More

The characterization of Christ in the latest chapters in Revelation hints at
this future unity of substance and sensuality. The anxious attempt at human
unity of Vision is thus replaced in Revelation by a self-assured
foreshadowing of unity in God. This final, unified characterization is built
out of the earlier characterization; it situates the characters at the beginning
of the parable once more, with the servant already signifying humanity and
Christ early in the parable.

In one of the last chapters, the narrator implicitly characterizes Christ
as incomplete. This characterization is found in what possibly is a new
revelation, taking place after the original experience. In these scenes,
narrator Julian claims that whenever a believer sins, Christ experiences a
painful longing for this person, giving Him human frailty and incompleteness:

For he stondeth all alone, and abideth us continually, swemefully,
and moningly, till whan we come. And he hath haste to have us to
him [...] And what time that we falle into sinne and leve the minde of
him and the keping of oure owne soule, than bereth Crist alone alle
the charge of us. And thus stondeth he swemly and moning. Than
longeth it to us for reverence and kindnesse to turne us hastely to
oure lorde, and let him not alone. He is here with us alle. That is to
sey, only for us is he here. And what time I be straunge to him by
sinne, dispair or sloth, then I let my lorde stonde alone. (Rev. 79. 31-
34, 80. 27-30)

1 Revelations of Divine Love, 123.
2 Watson, “Yf Wommen Be Double Naturally’: Remaking ‘Woman’ in Julian of Norwich’s
Revelation of Love’, 32.
3 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 370.
Christ’s ‘outwarde behaving’, his standing, calls to mind the Servant’s standing in front of the Lord as both Christ and Adam. Yet, by giving him a ‘chere’ and ‘inwarde chere’ of swooning in grief (‘swemly’), moaning and sorrowing and overall ‘maner’ of being ‘all alone’, the narrator also turns him into the fallen servant, who also ‘moneth’ and ‘leye alone’ (Rev. 51. 13, 25). Watson and Jenkins also note these echoes of the servant early in the parable. I would like to draw attention to how these echoes return the characters from the end of the exemplum almost full-circle to its beginning again. This return emphasizes Christ’s painful incompleteness without all humanity, and the incompleteness of the divine narrative, but it also unites humanity and Christ in the servant. The narrator, then, fully unites Christ and humanity in her narrative before God does in the parable.

Christ’s longing, moreover, arises out of his sensuality. That is, it takes place in time and changes, since it is affected by time as well as by humanity’s turning to him. By making his sensuality this noticeable, the narrator makes his sensuality dominate his substance. Christ’s doubleness was complete and perfect in the earlier discussion of substance and sensuality and in the motherhood meditation; it is now made more dynamic but fraught and filled with tension. Christ’s doubleness, the narrator suggests, seeks union between substance and sensuality, and between the human and the divine. The characteristics that previously allowed for an explicit qualification of Christ as complete in his doubleness, now implicitly qualify him as incomplete and longing for the union of his doubleness. That is to say, Christ is turned into the servant looking forward to the end of the exemplum when he displays ‘a fair and semely medolour’ (Rev. 51. 253) [‘beautiful and befitting mixture’], a union that is richer for having united its twofoldness than if it had been undivided all along.

1 Revelations of Divine Love, 158, 159.
2 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes’, 370.
3 Revelations of Divine Love, 114.
'Fro the Paine...Into the Blisse': Human Hints of Heavenly Unity
Likewise, although doubleness is central to the *Imago Christi*, in these last instances of characterization in *Revelation* the *evencresten* is characterized as experiencing such longing in their sensuality that it seems to overshadow their substantial union with God:

And ther I sey ‘He abideth us, swemefullly and moningly’ it meneth alle the trew feling that we have in oureselfe in contrition and in compassion, and alle sweming and moning for we not oned with oure lorde. (*Rev.* 80. 22-24)

[And where I say he waits for us, sorrowing and lamenting, it signifies all the true feelings of contrition and compassion that we have in ourselves, and all the sorrowing and lamenting that we are not united with our Lord.]¹

The *evencresten* or humanity is given the ‘pointes and propertes’ of the servant in the beginning of the parable as well: like him and Christ, they are ‘moning’ and either sorrowing or swooning in grief. The narrator thus unites all *evencresten* and Christ in the character of the servant before the *exemplum* does, foreshadowing the heavenly unity.

Thematically, however, in this characterization humanity seems separated from God in their sensuality. Earlier, in the substance and sensuality discussion, humanity was characterized as united with God in their doubleness: ‘oure substance is in God [...] in oure sensualite God is’ (*Rev.* 55. 20,21). In the characterization in this later passage, in contrast, this union seems painfully incomplete, although an ontological fact. The narrator lets this longing dominate human existence:

For kinde longing in us to him is a lasting penance in us [...] for this penance cometh never fro us, tille what time we be fulfilled, whan we shall have him to oure mede, and therefore he wille that we set oure hartes in the overpassing: that is to sey, fro the paine that we feele into the blisse that we trust.’ (*Rev.* 81. 15, 16, 19-22).

[For our natural longing for him is a lasting penance for us and mercifully [...] for this penance never leaves us until the time when we shall have him for our reward. And so he wants us to set our hearts on our transition: that is to say, from the pain that we feel to the bliss in which we trust.]²

¹ Ibid., 158.
² Ibid., 160.
The *evencristen* and character Julian are explicitly qualified as continuously experiencing ‘kinde longing.’ Emphasizing suffering and temporality, the narrator foregrounds sensuality, making it more central to human life to the substance as well as more saliently present in it. In the motherhood meditation, longing is mostly directed towards mother God and towards experiencing God’s sensual and substantial motherhood. However, in the characterization in this later meditation, in contrast, humanity experiences such longing that they are not complete (‘fulfilled’) until their sensuality is taken up into mother God’s substance, in which their human substance already dwells. Narrator Julian thus unites both humanity and Christ by characterizing both as experiencing a painful longing in their doubleness for union with one another and of their substance and sensuality.

**The Yearning, Performing Text**

This shared longing not only dominates the last characterization; the narrator also describes this yearning for union of substance and sensuality in God as driving her telling of the text and God’s showing of the visions:

This boke [...] is not yet performed, as to my sight [...] For truly I saw and understode in oure lordes mening that he shewde it for he will have it knownen more than it is. In which knowing he wille gave us grace to love and cleve to him [...] [H]e will give us more light and solace in hevenly joye, in drawing our hartes fro sorrow and darknesse which we are in. (*Rev.* 86. 2, 5-10).

[This book [...] is not yet completed, as I see it [...] For I truly saw and understood in what our Lord conveyed that he revealed it because he wants to have better known than it is, and through this knowledge he will give us grace to love him and cleave to him. [...] [H]e wants to give us more light and more comfort in heavenly joy in drawing our hearts to him, because of the sorrow and the darkness we are in.]

The narrator explicitly characterizes herself, the *evencristen*, God, and the text as expressing and experiencing this longing for union. Consequently, the changeability of the text is made to represent this divine longing for heavenly unity. The narrator thereby turns the text’s changeability, into a signifier of its divine origin and Christ’s maternal ‘werking’ instead of an indication of literary and doctrinal instability or of the unreliability which misogynist

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1 Ibid., 164.
gender stereotypes ascribed to women. Additionally, by emphasizing this shared longing, the narrator characterizes herself as humble and virtuous, and therefore as a true visionary and reliable auctor. Moreover, she depicts herself Christ-like in her concern for the text and the evencristen: she implies that she longs as much for the evencristen to perform her text as Christ longs for giving ‘light and solace’ and that this performing is as necessary for the evencristen’s wellbeing as turning to Christ is.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, whereas in *Vision* the narrator first depicts her female frailty and lack of education as an obstacle, but then strategically exploits it, in *Revelation* she reconfigures these stereotypes from the inside out. Characteristics which misogynist discourse ascribed to women are ascribed to God, while these characteristics never lose their gendered connotation. God accrues female doubleness; female doubleness is made divine.

*Revelation*’s model of the soul as twofold can solve the apparent tension between implicit characterization and actions pre-ordained by God. On the one hand, it encourages a reading of character Julian’s moment of doubt as an act of her ‘animal will,’ which arises from her sensuality. Not being caused by God, this action therefore allows for a characterization of character Julian as a ‘wretch,’ instead of a passive, blank space. On the other hand, the narrator has these implicitly characterizing actions lead to an action pre-ordained by both character God and the narrator, the sixteenth showing. *Revelation*, then, implies that within the time-bound telling of the story, characters have individual characteristics inferable their actions, while from God’s omnitemporal perspective all actions are his and characterize Him as caring and loving. On a practical level, this aspect of the characterization in *Revelation* and *Vision* illustrates that when studying medieval narratives, it is illuminating to bring their characterization into dialogue with the text’s own understanding of human and divine agency.

This chapter also reveals that medieval narratives can enrich and question modern literary theory and practice. Both medieval drama and *Revelation* challenge the assumption that characters need to be ‘round’ or display a certain degree of naturalism to inspire emotional and cognitive engagement in the reader. As modern reconstructions of medieval drama also have shown, medieval morality plays and mystery plays still construct audience engagement and catharsis, even though their characters are not ‘naturalistic’ nor come across as individuals. Although not as explicitly individual as her *Vision* equivalent and even lacking a name, character Julian still resembles a human being; she has what Bal terms a ‘character-

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effect’ perhaps even more strongly so than in Vision.¹ Yet this distinctness does not prevent Revelation from encouraging the reader to join character Julian on stage, that is, to participate in the showing, as evidenced by Serenus Cressy, Revelation’s earliest editor, recommending Lady Mary Blount in 1671 to ‘afford her a place in your closet.’² Moreover, although mother Christ does not perform three years of naturalistic actions as he does in the Gospels, narrator Julian’s portrait of him is equally vivid and memorable, according to medieval theory on memory and as suggested by the many modern devotional responses to the motherhood meditation.

In terms of narrative strategies, by these allusions to theatre, narrator Julian democratizes her complex ontology and motherhood theology, while also underlining the performativity and endlessness of her telling. The evencresten may not know Neo-Platonist philosophy or may not be able to read other meditations on Christ’s motherhood; however, he or she is likely to have seen a Nativity in a mystery play, have seen the demonstrative acting style, and experienced the dual consciousness it evokes. The evencresten can therefore easily imagine Christ as the cross-playing actor behind all parents and as guiding the evencresten’s own actions. Furthermore, the resonances of medieval theatre suggest that just as mystery plays pageants happen repeatedly throughout the day, the narrator never tires of re-telling her story; she makes her narrative as omnipresent in the evencresten’s sensuality as Christ’s daily mothering. Finally, these echoes reassure the reader that, just like annual performances allow the viewer to discover new elements in a familiar mystery play, he or she can always return to Revelation to witness a new performance of the narrative. By doing so, he or she can ‘wit more in the same’, finding more in and more of an endless narrative, which ‘concludes’ with the words ‘withouten ende’ (Rev. 68. 22, 23).

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¹ Bal, Narratology, 113.
² ‘Appendix: Records and Responses, 1394-1674’, in The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman And a Revelation of Love.
Conclusion: A Story by Julian, Told to Julian

‘The further up and the further in you go,
the bigger everything gets.
The inside is larger than the outside.’
(Mr. Tumnus describing Aslan’s Country in *The Last Battle*)

Narrator Julian never stops telling the parable of the Lord and Servant. Even when the *exemplum* fluidly changes into a meditation, she will still return to this embedded narrative, adding new events and layers of significance. She also continues to make the characters comprehend and signify one another. That is, in the meditation that flows out of and is intertwined with the parable, she lets humanity signify and contain both Adam and Christ, bringing Christ’s heavenly ‘fair semely medolour’(*Rev.* 51. 264) ['beautiful and befitting mixture'] down to earth. Simultaneously, she promises that this mixture will ultimately be brought to greater union in Christ:

[F]or in this time of this life we have in us a marvelous medelour of both wele and of wo. We have in us oure lorde Jhesu Crist upresin, and we have in us the wretchednesse and mischief of Adams falling [...] [Crist] is with us in heven, very man in his own person, us updrawing (*Rev.* 52. 6-8, 28, 29).

[[W]hile we are in this life, we have in ourselves a marvelous mixture of both happiness and sorrow. We have in us our risen Lord Jesus; we have in us the misery and the harm of Adam’s falling [...] [Christ] is with us in heaven, true man in his own person, drawing us upwards].

Humanity contains both God and humanity in itself, but will ultimately be united in and with Christ’s divine humanity. Likewise, just as she keeps retelling the parable, narrator Julian keeps re-telling the entire *Revelation* as well. All narrative structures therefore display a similar movement towards more union with distinction. What is more, just like she makes the servant comprehend Christ and humanity, she encloses all characters, narrators and addressees in one another like McInerney’s Russian nesting dolls, until all are contained in character Julian, who listens intently to narrator Julian’s ‘storye’.

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1 Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 224.
3 Ibid., 115, 116.
Julian’s Narrative Strategies

The re-telling of the parable allows the narrator to depict humanity as containing both Christ and Adam. Similarly, the poetics of Revelation of continuous developing and enveloping of Vision’s and its own narrative structures allows the narrator to make character Julian enclose the evencristen and to make herself enclose God. That is, both thematically and formally, she makes the evencristen in the image of her alter-ego, and herself in God’s image and vice versa. Thus, she makes both God and the evencristen contribute to the constructing and constructedness of the text. This narrative mutual indwelling and this co-narrating, I suggest, together are one of Revelation’s most effective narrative strategies.

In Revelation the evencristen’s reading or listening is made more like character Julian’s continuous experience of the whole revelation, transforming the evencristen to character Julian’s ‘ymage and liknesse’ (Gen. 1:26), or in Julian’s tems, ‘figure and liknes’ (Rev. 10. 28). Not only is the plot made as circular as the visions are said to be, it is also made as omnitemporal as the visions have been in character Julian’s memory inventory since then. As a result, the evencristen’s memory of the narrative is made to resemble that of character Julian’s of the visionary experience and her reflectin on it since then. Furthermore, the narrator encourages the evencristen to visualize the visions in a manner identical to how character Julian saw them, and also makes this the only possible focalization. Finally, the evencristen is made as double as character Julian, and like her, is expected to fall but to be protected by God while doing so.

Similarly, through the increased developing and enveloping the narrator makes herself and auctor God resemble each other more. She lets God tell exempl, and has herself and God collaborate in the telling of the parable of the Lord and Servant; it is ultimately her contribution which creates its conclusion. Likewise, in Vision the order of events follows the chronological path of nature, still suggesting the time-bound, human perspective, and the progression of events is dependent on God’s wishes and actions. In Revelation, in contrast, the narrator makes character Julian’s desires and actions fuel the plot to the same extent as God’s. She also daringly ends her narrative with the event of ‘love was his meaning,’ which is not the last event chronologically. The narrator thus arranges the events in such a manner that it reflects God’s arranging of events in salvation history. God’s narrative ‘ends’ with, and in, endless love, the narrator suggests. She thereby presents her narrative as participating in God’s narrative, since her narrative too ends with endless love.

1 King Henry’s Bible, ed. Lindberg, p. 46.
Finally, by means of the omnitemporal plot, twofold beholding and union of Christ and the *evencristen*, the narrator lets her narrative prefigure heavenly structures. The narrator thus makes her storytelling a signifier, a part, and a prefiguration of God’s storytelling, while she herself likewise signifies and participates in *auctor God*, just as the fallen servant in the last chapters of *Revelation* signifies both glorified Christ and earthly humanity. God is a storyteller, *Revelation* suggests, and each storyteller displays and participates in this divine image. Narrator Julian thus bestows divine *auctoritas* and reliability on her text and storytelling.

This narrative strategy allows *Revelation* to make its constructedness imply the *evencristen*’s and God’s participation in its construction, instead of causing suspicion. To use Roland Barthes’ terms, whereas *Vision* is mainly a readerly text, ‘what can be read, not written’, *Revelation* is highly ‘writerly’, that is, the human and divine reader are not only consumers of the text, but also producers. For instance, *Revelation* implies that the images have acquired their defamiliarized quality, which the Russian formalists call *ostranenie* or bestrangement, as a result of God repeatedly showing character Julian the visions. Character, transcendent subject God brings about the non-naturalistic, constructed quality of the visions, the narrator suggests. Similarly, through the increased cross-referencing, *Revelation* gives the locutions and sights as many layers of significance in the *evencristen*’s ‘memory inventory’ as they do in the text. That is, the *evencristen*, having gone back and forth a number of times, recognizes the layered quality of the images; he or she consequently experiences a sense of participation in their construction. Instead of suggesting that the visionary has interfered with the word of God, the openness, changeability and compilation-like quality of the text signify God’s continuous interacting with the text and with the reader’s minds. Instead of hinting at textual instability or visionary unreliability, the constructedness of *Revelation* thus infuses the text with divine stability. In other words, narrator Julian suggests that God continuously constructs the text in the reader’s mind, together with the reader. Medieval prologues often appeal to the reader to emend or correct

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1 Narrator Julian making herself in the image of the Maker perhaps sounds like an anachronistic application of a Romantic understanding of creativity. However, medieval religious discourse frequently portrayed Christ as a storyteller, and that medieval theology often compared human creating and human language to God’s creating and God’s language. Twelfth-century theologian Hugh of St. Victor for instance wrote that ‘universus enim mundus iste sensibilis quasi quidam liber est scriptus digito Dei.’ [‘The whole visible world is like a book written by the finger of God.’] of St. Victor, *Hugonis de S. Victore Canonici Regularis S. Victoris Parisiensis Tum Piateate, Tum Doctrina Insignis Opera Omnia*, 814b vol. 2; Singleton, *Commedia: Elements of Structure*, 25.


the text; narrator Julian depicts God and the *evencristen* as doing so 'kindely', naturally, in many senses of the word.

Lynn Staley has shown that by letting the reader overhear 'extended dialogue between [character Julian's] spiritual understanding and her belief in the teachings of the church' the narrator turns the potentially critical reader into an advocate of the narrator's questions and theology. Likewise, this overarching narrative strategy of making the *evencristen* resemble character Julian also supports the *evencristen*'s acceptance of the narrator's unique, sometimes heterodox theology. This theology, after all, grows out of visions which the *evencristen* also sees and a narrative which the *evencristen* also participates in. In other words, by letting the *evencristen* see and act like character Julian, the narrator makes the *evencristen* 'kindely' think like herself and her character alter-ego.

A closely related effect of the narrator's strategy of making herself in God's image, is that it allows her to turn her narrative into a playground for theological speculation, blurring the boundary between religion and literature on the one hand, and (academic) criticism of religion and literature on the other hand. Amy Hollywood argues in her study of mysticism and history that religious people and mystics in particular can both claim eternal, transcendental authority in their talking about God and subvert their own claims: 'Of course religious people play religiously, recognize absurdity, and think critically while thinking religiously.'

Telling several religious narratives allows narrator Julian to question tenets central to that religion. For instance, the added *exempla* in *Revelation* contribute strongly to character Julian's noticing a discrepancy between God's perspective on human sinfulness and the orthodox and human perspective on this. The reply which she receives is a narrative, the parable of the Lord and Servant; it is only by re-telling it that the narrator and character Julian create an answer of sorts. Moreover, the parable, no matter how often it is interpreted, continues to give the narrator's most intricate meditations a narrative pull. Narrator Julian thus develops and thinks through her theology by means of narratives; her theology cannot be separated from the overarching narrative or from the embedded narratives.

The late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century saw a growth in both confidence in, and anxiety about, the ability of the vernacular to describe the divine. The narrator's strategy of making herself and *auctor* God in each other's likeness can be read in relation to this confidence and anxiety. This anxiety in Middle English literary culture is evidenced by the Arundel

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2 Staley, 'Julian of Norwich', 141.
constitutions, but also by how several Oxford theologians claimed that
Middle English was too carnal and too clumsy to express divine matters.¹ In
Sarah Beckwith’s words, ‘God in the vernacular was a different God from a
God in Latin.’² In Vision, the narrator lets God only speak in the vernacular;
he is the ‘techere’. In Revelation, in contrast, the parallels between the
narrator and God have increased, and his continuous engagement with
writing and reading is implied. The narrator thus has God write in Middle
English, certainly an audacious act at a time when translating even verses
from the Word of God into the vernacular was illegal and considered
heretical.³ This strong verbal presence of God in Revelation may have made
it too heterodox to be circulated in the early fifteenth century.⁴ One of
Revelation’s most effective narrative strategies thus perhaps prevented it
from reaching the evencristen the wishes to include.

**Medieval Creativity**

This dissertation has argued for the critical possibilities of drawing on a
text’s self-referential narrative remarks and its attention to its own
storytelling. Since several other visionary texts and other medieval religious
narratives are also interested in their own narrating, I would like to suggest
that such attention in other texts can likewise provide hermeneutic
inspiration for the modern critic.

Other narratives, however, are equally central to Vision and
Revelation’s self-understanding. I have argued in particular for the
intertextual relation between these works and medieval theatre and women’s
vernacular literary culture. On the basis of this intertextuality, some
suggestions concerning medieval creativity can be made, which may be
helpful for further research.

Two traits shared by medieval mystery plays and women’s vernacular
literary culture can also be discerned in Vision and Revelation, and are
integral to its narrative strategies. In Vision, but even more so in Revelation,
the telling is an oral or aural, communal event, with the text and the
performance strongly encouraging audience participation. This oral,
communal aspect and this strong emphasis on audience engagement are
central to medieval theatre and women’s vernacular culture as well. The
presence of such narrative intertextuality hints at the fruitfulness of

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³ Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409’, 829.
⁴ Watson, ‘Composition’, 681.
contextualizing medieval visionary texts and medieval religious narratives with other narrative arts.

The communal aspect of mystery plays was one of the reasons for its existence and success. Moreover, in medieval cities, it must have been impossible to avoid seeing and hearing the mystery play pageants performed in the street. Women’s vernacular literary culture was also highly communal and aural. As Felicity Riddy points out, these groups of devout women would not only read out texts to each other, but also recount texts from memory. In Riddy’s words, this textuality ‘begins in the book [...] but is then transmitted among the women by word of mouth’. It is presumably in such a setting that Margery’s priest reads out to her ‘Seynt Brydys boke, Hyltons boke, Boneventur [...] and swech other’.

Medieval theatre strongly encouraged audience participation. In the morality play Mankind, for example, the audience is expected to join the Vices in singing a scatological song; in mystery plays, characters would sometimes step down from the stage and perform their role among the spectators, and stage demons would assault audience members. A similar emphasis on active engagement with the text and its telling is found in the textual culture shared by both lay and religious women. Affective meditation texts and other devotional texts, genres frequently read in this subculture, explicitly instruct the reader to engage emotionally and imaginatively with the narrative, and as Riddy points out, these female reading communities would not only share books, but also discuss them, creating, as it were, a book club.

Vision and Revelation similarly assume an oral and aural context. Several critics have discerned an oral quality in the writing style; in Vision the narrator refers to ‘ye that heeres and sees this vision’ (Vis. 6. 7, emphasis added). What is more, Revelation turns the audience participation into one of its most pervasive narrative strategies. That is, instead of explicitly instructing the evencristen to see, act, or characterize themselves in a particular manner, narrator Julian includes the reader in her alter-ego’s actions, focalization and characterization, so that the evencristen cannot help but participate.

3 ed. by Barry Windeatt, ch. 58 ll. 3391.
4 Bale, The Book of Margery Kempe, 130.
In light of this intermediality between a visionary text and other medieval narrative art forms, I suggest that when studying women’s visionary and autohagiographic texts, a broad contextualization of their formal features is illuminating. These texts can be brought into dialogue not only with other religious narrative texts and secular narrative texts, but also with textual genres resembling narratives, such as Books of Hours and rules, and with other art forms, such as theatre, church art and architecture. Such an approach will help bring out the rich inter-arts allusions and resonances as well as the situatedness of medieval women’s religious writings.

Another aspect of Vision and Revelation that can inform the analysis of medieval literature is closely related to this embeddedness in a tissue of other narratives. Both Vision and Revelation pay attention to the workings of memory and show an overlap between the craft of writing and what Carruthers calls ‘the craft of thought’. I have argued that the formal matching of mater and entent, the vivacity of the events and demonstrativeness of the focalization facilitates the evenchristen’s remembering of these.

Literature and the memory arts strongly shaped one another in medieval culture. According to Carruthers, ‘memoria […] was basic to both writing and composition’. Medieval texts drew upon many aspects of the craft of thought and expected its hearer and reader to do the same. Therefore, when analyzing medieval religious narratives, the analysis can be enriched by bringing these texts into dialogue with mnemonic models, theories and practices. Such a dialogue allows for examining how the narrative facilitates its own remembering and gives particular events and elements mnemonic emphasis. Naturally, a cross-disciplinary approach drawing on cognitive narratology is likely to be fruitful in such examinations. Another possibility is drawing inspiration from manuscript studies in order to investigate how material aspects of the artifact facilitate remembering and underline certain elements of the narrative.

**Enriching Narratology**

In addition to hinting at possibilities for further research on medieval visionary texts and women’s religious writings, this analysis of Vision and

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1 Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*.
2 Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 16.
3 A foray into ‘neuromedievalism’, focusing on medieval visual culture, is made by Kinch, ‘Re-Visioning the Past: Neumedeivalism and the Neural Circuits of Vision.’
Revelation also shows that these two works, and medieval narratives in general, can enrich narratology.

In the first place, this study illustrates that narratological distinctions can be fruitfully used to discuss works that are more interested in blurring distinctions than in preserving them.Originating from the study of novels and folktales, narratology emphasizes the usefulness of ‘horizontal’ or ‘syntagmatic’ distinctions, for instance between scene and summary, and of ‘vertical’ or ‘paradigmatic’ distinctions, for instance between fabula, story and text. Such distinctions serve a wide range of purposes, ranging from how each of these elements and aspects contribute to the ‘literariness’ and bestrangement of the text to facilitating the communication of an interpretative description. These narratological approaches, however, have in common that a distinction is made in order to keep that element or aspect and the text itself distinct. That is, the distinction is made to examine how that element relates to other elements or aspects and the text as a whole, and how it makes this particular text distinct from other texts.

Such an emphasis can be valuable when analyzing medieval narratives. For example, going back to the example of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, when ignoring Genette’s warning against conflating narrator and focalizor, it is the narrator who intently perceives Bertilak’s wife rather than character-bound focalizor Gawain. Conflating the focalizor and narrator thus obscures the narrator’s ironic distance and mastery over the events, while using Genette’s distinction between ‘who sees’ and ‘who speaks’ brings these out.

Nevertheless, although the narrator of Revelation is fascinated by distinctions in themselves, she is ultimately more interested in collapsing distinctions and uniting all into God’s greater structure. Laura Moncion has described how narrator Julian crosses borders and blurs boundaries between the material and spiritual, and between inside and outside the anchorhold; I suggest that narrator Julian especially in Revelation blurs narrative distinctions as well. However, she does so by first distinguishing different elements and aspects, only to enfold them in a union which is richer for first having consisted of distinct parts.

This separating for the sake of union can for instance be noticed when taking another look at the two central distinctions used throughout the whole of this analysis. In Vision, although closer to her alter-ego in years, narrator Julian strongly sets herself emotionally apart from character Julian by harshly criticizing her for her sins and by depicting her as spiritually

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1 Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa, 4–7.
2 Susana Onega, ‘Structuralism and Narrative Poetics’, 259–79 (p. 265); Bal, Narratology, p. 4.
3 Moncion, ‘Paradoxes of Proximity: Food and Community in Julian of Norwich.’
immature. In Revelation, the narrator is milder towards her character alter-ego; additionally, narrator Julian gives her alter-ego the same desire for (in)sight which drives the narrative process and text as a whole. The distinction between narrator Julian and character Julian is also blurred by the use of direct speech which can belong to either of them, and by exegesis by means of direct speech. Both character Julian and narrator Julian thus utter the words that make up the text. As a result, the two can no longer be told apart. In Revelation’s own terms, character Julian differs from older, wiser narrator Julian in sensuality, but in substance they are one.

A similar ‘aning’ or uniting of distinctions can be seen with regards to the distinction between fabula, story and text. Medieval literary thought also made a distinction between the narrative material (materia or mater) and its presentation, as the passage by Bokenham in the plot chapter suggests. The former overlaps with the fabula, and the second with story and text. This distinction is also suggested by narrator Julian’s interruption of the chronological order of events when she states that she must first tell of a later or earlier event.

However, especially in Revelation the narrator often collapses events and presentation. Nicholas Watson also observes that narrator Julian in Revelation sometimes treats the text of Vision as identical to the visionary experience, claiming that ‘it seems that she may have forgotten that there is any distinction between experience and written record’. Yet this conflating of story material and record, or text, fabula and story also reflects Revelation’s overarching poetics of continuous enveloping and uniting. This is for instance suggested by the narrator’s statement that her ‘inwarde lerning’ after the visions cannot be separated from the visions (Rev. 51:67-68). The narrator often implies that this ‘inwarde lerning’ consists of her writing process, or of her meditating on words from the text. The text thus becomes an event in the story and the fabula.

Furthermore, although also referring to her work as ‘this boke’ (Rev. 86. 1), the narrator conflates her ‘boke’ and the visions by making particular lexical items (‘moder’, ‘ever’) unfamiliar and making them accumulate layers of significance. She also collapses the distinction between them by using ‘Revelation’ to refer both to the work and to the visions, as Watson and Jenkins also point out. For example, narrator Julian opens her text with ‘This is a revelation of love’ (Rev. 1. 1). Vision already considers the visions and the text one, as implied by ‘ye that heeres and sees this vision’ (Vis. 6. 7). Thus, in Revelation, earlier and later visions, years of reflection, writing and re-seeing are all depicted as ‘aned’ in character Julian’s mind and narrator Julian’s text. Especially since texts were thought to produce images in the

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1 Watson, ‘Composition’, 679.
2 Watson and Jenkins, ‘Sidenotes.’
mind as well, the Revelation which the narrator shows to the reader is thus identical to the Revelation shown by God.

Revelation can therefore be said to unite its text, story and fabula. Yet this palimpsest-like union is richer for having been separated, because the resulting whole contains qualities of each of these hermeneutic layers. That is, it possesses the linguistic sensitivity of the text, the vivid details of the story, and the action of the fabula.

Several other medieval religious narratives likewise unite different aspects or elements of the narrative. In the Liber, for instance, Birgitta explicitly presents herself as an empty channel; she has Christ refers to her as the ‘canalis’ of the Holy Spirit, the pipe or channel.\(^1\) It is therefore possible to investigate if narrator Birgitta and character Birgitta are as united in their unobtrusiveness as this self-portrayal suggests, and if both passively transmit the divine characters’ locutions. Narratological distinctions, then, can help reveal how a medieval text creates an impression of unity and transparency.

An aspect of Vision and Revelation, and religious texts in general, which can likewise expand narratological models, is the strongly dialogic or even trialogic quality of its narrative structure. That is to say, the evenecristen is equally central to the text as the narrator, but so is God. This trialogue suggests that certain texts, such as myths and religious texts, do not share the atheist, occidental assumptions underlying many narratological models, such as unidirectionality, a clear distinction between addressee and narrator, and the immanence of these agents. In other words, this dissertation’s dialogue between medieval texts and narratology suggests that models brought to a text should be chosen or adapted to reflect the individual text’s assumptions about who is involved in the communicative act.

It might even be possible to argue that Revelation challenges some aspects of Barthes’ concept of the death of the author, instead offering a poetics and literary theory of natality. Barthes, in his influential essay, argues for a ‘scriptor [...] born simultaneously with the text’.\(^2\) He claims that it is no longer possible to postulate an author who ‘nourish[es] the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, and lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child’ nor a ‘subject with the book as predicate’.\(^3\) Although the language in this passage is disturbingly sexist, Barthes’ emphasis on the ‘text [...] eternally written here and now’, which produces the ‘scriptor’ is admittedly of critical value.\(^4\) Nevertheless, according to feminist theologian Grace M. Jantzen, the concept of the death

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\(^1\) ed and trans. Morris and Searby, bk. 3:30, ll.7-9, p. 318, 319.

\(^2\) Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, 145.

\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Ibid., 145 (emphasis in the original).
of the author reflects the preoccupation of the Western moral imaginary with death and gendered violence: ‘The habitus of modernity is premised on the death of God, and this leads to ideas of the death of ‘man’, the death of the subject, the death of the author’.\(^1\) Jantzen therefore recommends emphasizing an ethic or moral imaginary of natality.

*Revelation* suggests that no death is needed for the text or ‘scriptor’ to come into being, replacing this obsession with death with an emphasis on birth. Instead, the narrator depicts herself and her character alter-ego as a mother to the text and the divine Word. This is achieved by placing her character alter-ego in a setting with overtones of a medieval birthing chamber, as several studies suggest.\(^2\) She also describes her alter-ego as experiencing ‘traveyl,’ labour, (*Rev.* 50. 14), a term she also uses to refer to Christ’s giving birth to humanity on the cross. To use Barthes’ terms, both narrator and character Julian suffer and think for the text. Yet Barthes’ statement about the scriptor being born simultaneously with the text also applies, although in an entirely different manner than Barthes describes. Character Julian recovers from her illness at the very start of the visions, receiving new life when seeing Christ’s suffering on the cross; the narrator will later compare this suffering to child birth. Thus, in a sense, the events give birth to character Julian. Likewise, as Lynn Staley argues, and I also suggest, the narrator’s ‘fictional self-fashioning’ in *Revelation* is very much that of an author. Like Christ giving birth to himself, the narrator gives birth to the text and is born within it, as is character Julian. Narrator Julian’s understanding of her telling, then, emphasizes natality. *Revelation* therefore contributes to the moral imaginary of natality by offering an alternative to the death of the author and a more life-affirmative conceptualization understanding of narrators and authors.

Closely intertwined with this alternative narratorial theory is the unifying conceptualization offered by *Vision* and *Revelation* of the critic’s activity. Many literary theories posit sharp distinctions between the agency, activity, and assumptions of the text, critic, reader, and narrator. Bal, for instance, emphasizes the utilitarian and communicative aspect of theoretical approaches and criticism, seeing narratology as ‘intellectual tools for interpretation’:\(^3\) the text is a passive object, to which the critic applies tools. Paul Strohm in his study of theory and the premodern texts recommends subjecting a text to psychoanalytic violence to ‘provoke a text into

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\(^1\) Jantzen, ‘Flourishing: Towards an Ethic of Natality’, 227.


\(^3\) Bal, *Narratology*, 4.
unpremeditated articulation’:1 the more powerful critic needs to force open the resistant text. Both Bal and Strohm, then, see text and critic as not only distinct but also as possibly in conflict. Revelation, in contrast, offers a theory and hermeneutics of union with distinction: narrator, reader, critic and text enclose one another while remaining distinct. Applying Jantzen’s metaphor for Julian’s understanding of God’s mysteries,2 in Revelation narrative is seen as a well from which one can endlessly draw but which always leaves a surplus. By means of this drawing up of more narrative, narrator, text and evencristen all equally construct one another, give birth to and support another, and unite their contributions to form a whole that is richer than the sum of the parts.

**An Endless Story Without Beginning**

This discussion has thus returned full-circle to where it began, with character Julian listening to an intriguing tale being told by a local theologian, thinker and writer. The tale fascinates her from its beginning, but also invites years of reflection. However, unlike during that sermon, character Julian and narrator Julian now are both the devout audience member and the ‘[wo]man of halye kirke’. Already in Vision, but most of all in Revelation, narrator Julian and character Julian tell the narrative to themselves. Looking around her, both narrator and Julian notice that they have made God and her fellow Christians join them. These likewise listen intently to her ‘storye’ of Julian, mother Christ and the evencristen, thus being carefully wrapped in her closely-knit text and her universe-sized anchorhold, and in the entent of beginningless, endless love.

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1 Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text*, xiii.
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