CROSSING THE CHASM:

THE RHETORIC OF THE INEFFABLE IN

MARGERY KEMPE AND

JULIAN OF NORWICH

By

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INEFFABLE RHETORIC OF

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ABSTRACT

According to theories of negative theology, God cannot be known at all. The divinity cannot be spoken or written. Thus, the mystical text—a written account of the ineffable, divine encounter—is a contradiction in terms. Through an examination of the works of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, I discuss the contradictions inherent in mystical writing. How do these medieval women write their experiences if they cannot write (or even think) the ineffable? This dissertation focuses on the possibility of representing the apophatic moment of contact with the divinity through the structural movement of rhetorical figures.

Most work on Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich emphasizes the differences between the two writers and, moreover, focuses on their cataphatic or positive approach to the divinity. Contrary to such studies, this dissertation emphasizes the similarities between the writers in their apophatic or negative understanding of God. This work brings together theories of negative theology with rhetorical theory to argue that both mystics structure their texts on paradox and, in the process, create rhetorical icons that gesture
toward an unknown, ineffable God. In particular, the rhetorical figures of chiasmus and contentio (especially in relation to the coincidence of opposites) are examined for their ability to represent the paradox associated with the apophatic moment of crossing between the human and the divine.
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Introduction: The Dilemma

"For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face."
(I Corinthians 13:12).

"Our access to mystical experience is through texts and, unless we become mystics ourselves, we know of mysticism—-at least in its highest reaches—vicariously, at the level of concepts" (Hart 160). In an age when connections to our world and, perhaps, even to our faith, regularly arrive via television or computer, our access to most things is vicarious; vicarious understanding, then, is not the dilemma at hand. The dilemma is the topic of mysticism itself or, more accurately, the mystical texts that seek to express an ineffable divinity. How can one speak the unspeakable? How can one contemplate that which is beyond words? Or, to address an even more pertinent concern, how can one even experience that which necessarily remains hidden? According to theories of negative theology and apophatic language, which will be discussed at length in this dissertation, God in his essence cannot be known or spoken about at all. As one commentator on the pseudo-Dionysius argues, "Ultimately, theology is not only wordless but even thoughtless... God transcends every human word or concept, dwells on a plane
above them all, and yet is revealed to those who leave behind every perceptible light, every voice, every conceptual word from heaven" (Rorem 189). If every word is left behind, then the validity of the ineffable experience or encounter with the divinity must itself be questioned. Clearly, the mystics have experienced something, but that something is not necessarily a consciously recognized encounter with the divine.

The mystical text, then, presents two primary dilemmas. First, the divine encounter is a theoretical impossibility, and, second, the mystical experience (whatever that may be) cannot be fully represented in words. Any truly inoffable encounter cannot, by its own definition, directly be spoken or written in words; instead it can only be indirectly gestured toward. Acknowledging such a dilemma, David Thomson contends that "the ineffable moment does not appear in the fallen prose of the mystics. There is no such moment at all, which is to say that it is entirely of faith" (Thomson 112). In other words, perceived contact with God is only as real as an individual's faith; description of actual contact between humanity and divinity remains a theoretical impossibility. The mystics experience something out of the ordinary and, because of their faith in God, attribute that experience to divine revelation.
In attempting to capture these so-called divine revelations or ineffable moments, the mystics rely on human language. Although these attempts take the form of a written text, the mystics often claim that what they have experienced is beyond the power of words to describe. Such a statement gestures toward a realm outside of language (whether or not that realm is divine) without representing that realm in and of itself. As Kevin Hart explains, human "language is a medium that reveals mystical experience while simultaneously hiding it from inspection" (180). Language, that is, can only partially re-present the mystic's overall experience; the rest necessarily remains hidden. Consequently, the mystical experience is inevitably clouded by its subsequent representation in and as mystical text.

Where, then, does this leave the student of mystical texts and, more specifically, of negative theology? Are we left to write about writing that itself fails in its attempts to fully capture the experience that it claims for its source? Hart maintains that the "negative theologian uses language under erasure" (203).¹ In other words, all

¹Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her "Translator's Preface" to Derrida's Of Grammatology (1974), defines "under erasure" as follows: "Inaccurate yet necessary...[A] certain philosophical exigency that drives Derrida to writing "sous rature," which I translate as "under erasure." This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)" (xiv). Although I do not actually cross words out in this dissertation, I do use the term "under erasure" at various points to describe words that must be used even though they are inaccurate for the subject matter—as all words used to describe the ineffable necessarily must be.
concepts put forth about the divinity must simultaneously be taken back. Nothing can ever finally be said or even thought about God since God, the divine Being, is beyond human thought and understanding; yet, something must be said, something inevitably is said. I suggest that the student of mystical texts and negative theology also uses language under erasure in his or her analysis and subsequent representation of God as He is portrayed in the mystical texts. As a student of English literature investigating the rhetorical construction of mystical texts, all I can hope to accomplish in this dissertation is a detailed outline of possibilities—possibilities, that is, for gesturing toward that which, according to theories of negative theology, can never be fully or finally written about.  

Short of submitting two hundred blank pages in an attempt to represent symbolically the chasm or void of unknowing—a concept that will be developed in the course of this dissertation—I am obligated to write something about the mystics who, themselves, felt compelled to write something. The question that begins my investigation, then, is one centred on the representation of the unrepresentable. Do the mystics attempt to represent structurally, through

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2I must stress here that this dissertation is a partial fulfillment of requirements for a Ph.D. in the Department of English. Although I deal with topics of theology, religion, and history, my primary concern is to analyze the texts as literature or, more precisely, as rhetorical constructions using, in part, post-modern literary theories.
their rhetorical patterns, that which cannot fully be represented? The answer, as the next few hundred pages attest to, is yes. Primarily using theories of apophatic language and/or negative theology put forth by Michael Sells, David Thomson, Vincent Gillespie, and Maggie Ross, I analyze the texts of two medieval mystics—Margery Kempe’s Book and Julian of Norwich’s A Book of Showings—to determine how spaces, chasms, voids, or “noughts” between the human and the divine are rhetorically constructed.3 I also make use of rhetorical theories put forth by Max Nanny, John Welch, Rodolphe Gasché, and Ralf Normman to analyze the structural function of the rhetorical figure chiasmus.

The purpose of this Introduction is to outline some of the basic concepts of apophatic language, define some of the terms that will be used throughout my work, present some background material on Julian and Margery, and begin to build a theoretical framework for my analysis. Many of the theories used to build this framework will be integrated into the body of the dissertation rather than discussed in detail here. For example, whereas I will outline several points from Sells’ “Principles of Apophatic Language” in this Introduction,4 I will incorporate Gillespie and Ross’ theories on the apophatic image and access to the apophatic

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3The word “nought” is discussed specifically in reference to Julian of Norwich’s Showings in the latter part of this dissertation.
4Sells’ “Principles of Apophatic Language” is a section within the “Epilogue” of his text Mystical Languages of Unsaying.
realm into my analysis of Margery Kempe. The material used with respect to Margery Kempe in the first three chapters of this dissertation should also be understood as part of the theoretical framework for my analysis of Julian of Norwich.

One of the terms used throughout this dissertation and, therefore, in need of definition, is "icon." Moshe Barasch, in his book Icon, claims that the "prophet's vision" is the source that "provides an ultimate basis for the icon" (243). Such a statement could prove illuminating in regard to an analysis of representations of visionary experience, especially in terms of my theories on what I have termed the mystics' rhetorical iconography. However, the definition of "icon" varies between disciplines, often to the point of controversy. "Icon," especially in contemporary culture, has numerous meanings beyond those traditionally associated with the icons of the Church. That is, although a physical representation of a sacred figure (such as Christ) can be called an icon, so, by definition, can any representation of anything or anyone. Such is the case with contemporary references to "icons" on a computer screen or references to real people as "icons" of fashion or "icons" of the music industry. Additionally, in terms of rhetorical connotations, "icon" has been used to mean "[a] simile" and to imply a

\[5\text{For a complete definition of "icon," please refer to the Oxford English Dictionary entry, Volume VII, page 608.}\]
"realistic representation in writing" (OED, 608). Clearly, one cannot argue for a stable definition of this term.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have decided to use the term rhetorical iconography. To define this term, I have combined ideas from the OED definitions of "icon" and here submit the following: In the context of mystical texts, rhetorical iconography refers to verbal representations of mystical understandings or theological concepts (garnered by each mystic from her mystical experiences) recreated through the mystic’s choice of rhetorical structures, such as specific rhetorical figures; these structures mimetically illustrate the mystic’s understandings or concepts through the pattern or movement of the rhetorical structure itself (rather than simply through the meaning of the individual words used to form the structure).

I note, in passing, that I originally chose the term "iconography" rather than "imagery" because of its ongoing association with representations of that which is sacred. Since the texts being discussed deal with issues of mystical vision, religion, and theology and, furthermore, because I will be analyzing these icons as places in the text that allow access to the divine (although they are not worshipped per se), "iconography" seemed the more appropriate choice. As you will note when reading quotations from other theorists, "icon" and "image" are rarely (if ever)
distinguished. Indeed, even an OED definition defines "icon" as "an image".\(^6\) "Image" itself, as with "icon," has several definitions which, in turn, contain terms that need defining. In order to avoid perpetual definitions, let me say here that the practice of *rhetorical iconography*, as I have defined it above, is the important element to understanding my textual analysis, not the choice of terminology.

W. J. T. Mitchell uses the term "iconology" to refer to a similar idea—similar, that is, in the sense that it involves both words and icons. In the introduction to his book *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, he explains the choice of this term: "This is a study of the 'logos' (the words, ideas, discourse, or 'science') of 'icons' (images, pictures, or likenesses)" (1). He further refers to his study as a "rhetoric of images" (1). Although one might argue that I could have used the term "iconology" rather than "rhetorical iconography," I wanted to stress the rhetorical aspect of this project—that is, the ways in which the mystics' thoughts are rhetorically constructed in their writing.

Having explained my terminology thus far, I am left with one question that inevitably remains when examining mystical texts from the perspective of negative theology. How can one (whether rhetorically or otherwise) construct an icon of something that cannot be seen in the first place? Yet this

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\(^6\)"An image, figure or representation; a portrait; a picture, 'cut', or illustration in a book" (VII, 608).
is precisely what I argue that the mystics do. They attempt, through their rhetorical structure, iconographically to represent nothing—that is, to represent the chasm or point of crossing (as I discuss primarily in terms of Margery Kempe) or the “nought” (as I discuss primarily in terms of Julian of Norwich) between the human and the divine. If one can create an icon of Christ because s/he believes He appears a certain way, why cannot one create an icon of the lack of appearance of the unknowable God? In other words, if God is absent and the crossing point between the human and the divine is unknowable, the icon should represent that absence and unknowability or at least (since such a representation is a theoretical impossibility), gesture toward that absence.\(^7\)

In terms of negative theology, then, icons are mere gestures toward that which remains unknown; and, in terms of mystical texts, these gestures are mere rhetorical constructions.

In the course of this dissertation I discuss how Margery and Julian gesture toward the apophatic realm through various rhetorical techniques. I focus in particular on the figures of adynaton, contentio, and chiasmus,\(^8\) as well as on the

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\(^7\)As mentioned above, all such “negative” terms (“lack,” “absence,” etc.) must be written under erasure. Since something that can never be fully spoken or understood or written can never fully be represented, one can only “gesture toward” such possibilities (or, perhaps more accurately, such impossibilities).

\(^8\)These figures are defined in the course of the dissertation. I have taken the definitions for the figures from Leo A. Sonnino’s *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric*. Sonnino gathers definitions for rhetorical figures from various sources up to the sixteenth-century and then provides a basic definition for each. My aim is to provide the
repetition and explanation of key terms used by the mystics themselves, and on the principles behind the coincidence of opposites. Ewert Cousins, in his discussion of Bonaventure’s uses of the coincidence of opposites, outlines a framework of coincidence called “unity and difference” in which “opposites genuinely coincide while at the same time continuing to exist as opposites” (180; emphasis added). As will be explained in more detail throughout the course of this dissertation, I use the terms “coincide” and “coincidence” to refer to the crossing point or point of “unity and difference” between apparent opposites. A significant proportion of my analysis of coincidence and other rhetorical strategies centres on the way in which these strategies evoke paradox. According to H. Lawrence Bond in his discussion of the medieval philosopher Nicholas of Cusa, “(t)he theologian can speak of the divine only in the language of paradox, of the reconciliation of opposites, which exceeds logical discourse” (94). I extend this observation from theologians to mystics who, one could argue, are theologians in that they endeavor to interpret the word of God.

Gillespie and Ross, moreover, suggest (in a quotation that I refer to throughout this dissertation) that a paradox can be “a sign of contradiction, allowing the creative

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most succinct definitions possible and Sonnino’s definitions serve that purpose.

9By “key terms,” I am referring primarily to Julian’s use of “nought,” “hidden,” and “point.”
tension between its conflicting significations to generate a
precious stillness, a chink in the defensive wall of reason
that allows slippage into apophatic consciousness” (56).
Further examination of the access to the apophatic realm
through paradox will be covered in the chapters on Margery
Kempe; for now, a definition of “paradox” is needed. Paradox
is “[a] statement or proposition which on the face of it
seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common
sense, though, on investigation or when explained, it may
prove to be well-founded (or, according to some, though it is
essentially true)” (OED XI, 185). For the purposes of this
dissertation, the “self-contradictory” nature of paradox is
the one most relevant. That is, a paradox involves a
contradiction between two apparent opposites; these opposites
exist together as two parts of a whole. All of the
rhetorical figures mentioned above represent this “self-
contradictory” aspect of paradox in one way or another. For
example, in the case of contentio, antithetical terms are
placed in close proximity; and, in the case of chiasmus, one
“half” (so to speak) of the figure is reversed in the second
“half.” In that the pattern of these figures rhetorically
recreates self-contradiction, they can be considered icons of
paradox; at each occurrence, then, rests the possibility of
the tension necessary to open a “a chink in the defensive
wall of reason that allows slippage into apophatic consciousness" (Gillespie and Ross 56).

"Apophatic consciousness" is in itself a contradiction of terms. How can one enter a consciousness that is beyond human consciousness? Necessarily, Gillespie and Ross use this term, along with "apophatic image," under erasure; they never state directly that they do so—at least, not in the way Hart does (as quoted above)—but the process is implied at various points throughout their exploration of the subject. When they discuss the "movement from the world of signs to the world of the apophatic," they supplement their argument with the following footnote: "The world of signs belongs to self-consciousness and the apophatic to the progressive loss of self-consciousness, the noughting of the self so often described in mystical writing" (55). The "apophatic consciousness" (and, by extension, the "apophatic image"), then, can be understood as a lack thereof; however, neither they nor I can simply and finally make this assertion. That is, as with attempts to describe God, any descriptions of the apophatic realm, consciousness, or image—even descriptions that function through the denial of positive descriptions, such as "a lack thereof"—must be written under erasure since, "For us to affirm or deny God would be to seek to fetter him into the chains of human signification" (Gillespie and Ross 54). Or, as Paul Korem
explains in terms of the pseudo-Dionysius' *The Mystical Theology*, "In the very end, even the denials are denied....Negation itself is a human concept, and thus cannot capture an infinite and transcendent God" (213). Apophatic consciousness, or access to the divine realm, is a state (again, under erasure) beyond consciousness, beyond human signification, beyond, therefore, any explanation or definition. As is becoming evident, discussion of such ephemeral subject matter becomes increasingly difficult.

Nonetheless, Sells, in *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, attempts to outline what he terms the "Principles of Apophatic Language." Sells admits that he offers the outline "with some reservations" since it risks resembling "a mechanism" when taken out of context (206). However, having said this, he explains his reasoning for doing so: "[G]iven the absence of studies of apophasis as a literary mode and the tendency, discussed previously, for the modern commentator to transpose apophatic language into a nonapophatic paraphrase, it is worth taking the risk to present a schematic and formal outline" (207). I must draw attention here to Sells' reference to the study of apophasis as a literary mode; indeed, he claims that the "goal" of his study is "the exposition of mystical apophasis as a cross-cultural mode of discourse" (206). Likewise, my intention is
to seek out and describe this literary mode as it functions in the texts of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe.¹⁰

Sells' "Principles of Apophatic Language" is divided into seven main categories; under these categories, Sells lists over two dozen individual principles. Clearly, I cannot reprint all of them here. Instead, I list only those principles that are most relevant to my analysis of Julian and Margery. Throughout this dissertation, these principles are to be understood as the basis from which I build my argument; that is, whether I refer to them directly or indirectly in the chapters on Julian and Margery, they continually inform my reading of these medieval mystics and my understanding of apophatic mysticism.

Here, then, is a condensed version of Sells' "Principles of Apophatic Language":

1. X transcends all names and referential delimitation.

2. If the major premise ["I"] is true, it must also be false or incomplete, because if X is ineffable in this rigorous sense, it cannot be called X.

3. No statement about X can rest as a valid statement but must be corrected by a further statement, which itself must be corrected in a discourse without closure.

¹⁰By "literary mode" I refer to the way in which the text is constructed through language and rhetoric.
4. The meaningfulness of the apophatic moment of discourse is unstable, residing in the momentary tension between two propositions.

5. The effort to express and affirm transcendence leads to an affirmation of radical immanence. That which is beyond is within. That which is other, is the non-other.

6. The undoing of self-other dichotomy occurs in mystical union.

7. The transcendent is not a thing, an entity. It is not being, a being, or substance. It is nothing, nothing.

8. Because it must be named and reified if we are to use language, the language of unsaying continually turns back upon the spatial, temporal, and ontological reifications it has posed.

9. In the apophatic use of the metaphors [of emanation, procession and return], causal explanation is displaced as the metaphor turns back upon itself in the hard version of paradox: the emanation is the return.

10. The above formal principles make up the meaning event of apophatic language as literary mode. The meaning event is a reenactment (within grammar, syntax, and metaphor) of the fusion of self and other within mystical union.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11}I have not retained Sells' numbering system. All of the principles listed are found on pages 207-209 of the "Epilogue" of Mystical Languages of Unsaying.
Even in its abbreviated form, this list of ten principles (from the original twenty-six) may appear lengthy. However, they are the mere basics to a complex subject matter and must be understood as such before progressing further.

To my knowledge, other than Gillespie and Ross’s “The Apophatic Image: The Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich,” a detailed analysis of apophatic principles in Margery Kempe’s Book and Julian of Norwich’s Showings has never been undertaken. Other critics have focussed instead on the vivid detail (or cataphatic description) used by each woman in her respective representation of the mystical experience. B. A. Windeatt, for example, claims that “Julian has a way of thinking which progresses naturally in terms of pictures and the development within pictures” (“Julian” 8). Although such arguments are valid on one level, I maintain that, on another level, the works of Julian and Margery must be read in light of apophatic tradition and theory. This dissertation is a study of apophatic language; it is not meant to be an analysis or compilation of source material for Julian’s and Margery’s representation of mystical experiences or theological ideas. Other than a few suggestions as to how or where these mystics may have gained their understanding of negative theology, my intention is to analyze the rhetorical technique in these medieval texts using (and bringing
together) post-modern perspectives on apophatic language and rhetorical theory.

This is not to say that studies of source material and historical background are irrelevant to studies of mysticism; most certainly, they are not. Indeed, many of the theories on apophatic mysticism put forth by post-modern scholars are founded on the premises and principles of medieval mysticism.\textsuperscript{12} Moreover, in addition to post-modern writers such as Sells, I make several references to the sixth-century pseudo-Dionysius, his work, and the effect that his ideas had on the proliferation of apophatic theology during the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{13} Nonetheless, numerous studies that discuss possible influences on or sources for Julian and Margery already exist (as a glance at my bibliography will indicate),\textsuperscript{14} whereas a relatively small number of works exist which analyze medieval material from post-modern theoretical approaches. I must reiterate that my analysis is not on negative theology in and of itself but on mystical language and its rhetorical

\textsuperscript{12}I am thinking here of Sells' analysis of Meister Eckhart and Marguerite Porete, Gillespie and Ross's study of the apophatic image in Julian of Norwich, and Clifton Wolter's introduction to The Cloud of Unknowing.
\textsuperscript{13}Paul Rorem concludes a chapter on the pseudo-Dionysian theology with the statement that "page for page, no treatise influenced medieval spirituality more than The Mystical Theology" (225).
\textsuperscript{14}See, as a small sampling, the following examples: Gunnel Cleve's "Margery Kempe: A Scandinavian Influence in Medieval England?," Susan Dickman's "Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman," B.A. Windeatt's "Julian of Norwich and Her Audience," and Wolfgang Riehle's chapter in The Middle English Mystics on "The Interrelation Between Continental and English Mysticism."
construction as a textual means of access to the apophatic realm.

With this in mind, it should not be surprising that some of my work appears as a direct contrast to earlier scholarship on Julian and Margery. Take, for example, comments made by R. M. Wilson in 1956 on Julian’s rhetorical technique: “It may even be that on occasion some of the rhetorical devices which depend on repetition are used accidentally, and are due to the efforts of an unskilled writer to emphasize and drive home her points” (97; emphasis added). Similarly, in 1970, Robert Stone makes the following observation: “[Julian] makes little effort, apparently, to think about her descriptions creatively, and is content to use figures that for the most part lack originality and vigor” (71-2). One cannot help but suspect a gender-based bias of the times in such analyses of women’s writing when, by the 1990s, opinion of Julian’s rhetorical skill has dramatically changed. Take, as a contrast, Joan Nuth’s statement on the function of rhetoric in Julian’s Showings:

In many cases, the rhetorical figure is so intimately connected with the meaning of the theological idea being expressed, that to remove the figure would destroy the meaning altogether. Julian was a pioneer here, in that she was transcribing into English linguistic rules and conventions that had been devised for the Latin language. (9; emphasis added)
I use these examples from Julian criticism to illustrate a general trend in the study of medieval women’s writing over the past several decades toward a greater appreciation and acknowledgment of the literary skill and creative endeavor involved in writing their mystical texts. Equally varied interpretations of Margery Kempe could have been used to illustrate the same trend.¹⁵

Indeed, Margery Kempe generally fares worse than Julian in the critics’ eyes when the two mystics are compared with each other. Eluned Bremner, in her survey of twentieth-century criticism of Margery, outlines what she calls “the prevalent and pejorative comparisons with Julian of Norwich” (125). In such cases, Margery’s work has been described as an emotional narrative in comparison to Julian’s analytical approach.¹⁶ Yet even when Julian is not directly privileged over Margery, the two women are nonetheless discussed in terms of their marked differences of approach to visionary experience.¹⁷ Denise Despres, in a 1985 article, notes that Julian “repeatedly acknowledges the difficulty in conveying

¹⁵For a detailed interpretation of the changes in Kempe scholarship throughout the twentieth century, see Eluned Bremner’s “Margery Kempe and the Critics: Disempowerment and Deconstruction.”
¹⁶See, for example, Robert Stone’s Middle English Prose style: Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich. (The comparison between Julian’s analysis and Margery’s narrative is made on page 28 therein.)
¹⁷See, for example, Susan Dickman’s “Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe: Two Images of Fourteenth-Century Spirituality” where Julian is called “speculative, conceptual, and abstract” and Margery is called “emotional, sensual, and concrete” (178).
mystical experience with words shaped by worldly experience,“ and then compares her to Margery as follows:

By contrast, Margery’s meditations energetically consume pages of print, forming a wandering narrative that parallels her external experience. There is none of the passivity of the via negative [sic] in her participation in Christ’s nativity or Passion. (12-13; emphasis added)

As I have already argued in my M. A. thesis, “The Mimetic Quality of the Rhetorical Figures in Julian of Norwich’s Showings,” Julian’s work does parallel her experience; and, as I intend to prove in this dissertation, Margery’s work does exhibit some qualities of apophatic mysticism or the via negativa. It is my contention that the works of both Julian and Margery exhibit precise rhetorical construction and that, furthermore, when analyzed on a rhetorical level, exhibit similarities in approach to visionary experience that have been previously overlooked.

Certainly, Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich led different lifestyles. Julian is known to have been enclosed as an anchoress at Norwich (though her exact dates of enclosure remain unknown), whereas Margery—if the adventures of her “Creature” are understood to be autobiographical—is known to have been a worldly woman whose various pilgrimages contribute to the structure of the text. As Marion Glasscoe

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18 Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, McMaster University, 1990.
suggests, "[t]he ethos of pilgrimage made possible an existential validation of Margery's faith, it provided her with a figurative mode of understanding her whole life and it governs the shape of her book" (Games 287). One could argue that Julian's life of enclosure similarly influenced her text or, at least, the theology presented therein since she emphasizes the concept of human enclosure within God on numerous occasions. ¹⁹ No one knows for certain whether or not Julian was already enclosed in the anchorhold at the time of writing her Showings; however, as Nuth contends, "it seems logical to assume that she was enclosed sometime before writing of the Long Text to provide herself with the solitude conducive to such work" (8). ²⁰ In light of this comment, one must wonder how Margery, a mother of fourteen children, found the solitude conducive to writing her Book! ²¹

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¹⁹See, for example, Julian's comment that "we, soule and body [are] cladde and enclosyde in the goodnes of god" (307.43-44). See, furthermore, my M.A. thesis in which I analyze several examples of rhetorical figures (such as inclusio) which mimic Julian's understanding of this concept.

²⁰Julian wrote two versions of her Showings which are referred to as the "Short" and "Long" texts. Debate on when each version was written and how much time passed between writing the two versions still continues. On the one hand, "[i]t is generally supposed that the shorter version represents an account first written down soon after the original experience and that the longer version came later and incorporates her growth and understanding over the subsequent twenty years" (Glasscoe 217). This general understanding would date the versions circa 1373 and 1393. However, Nicholas Watson (in "The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Love," Speculum 68.3 [1993]) argues that the long text "was written ten to fifteen years later than is supposed" (641).

²¹See page 115 of Book where Margery makes reference to her husband, "be whom I haue born xiiiij childeryn."
Although this statement may seem humorous in its present context, it must be taken seriously on another level. How did Margery find the time to travel the world, deal with all her critics (that is, with people such as the clerks who continually question her authenticity), look after all her children and her husband, and write a book? The question cannot be adequately answered. She makes reference to all of these subjects in the Book, but not in enough detail to create a credible explanation, especially in terms of her numerous children. Is it not possible—-even "logical," to use Nuth's word—-to propose that Margery's Book does not report a factual account of her life and travels but is, at least in part, fiction? I am not suggesting that Margery Kempe wrote the first English novel; I am merely questioning whether Margery's Book could be a creative elaboration of her actual experiences. Certainly, several studies have been done which emphasize continental influence on various aspects of Margery's text.\(^{22}\) For the most part, moreover, Margery's Book is written in the third person with the main character (so to speak) referred to as the "Creature." Nonetheless, most of the scholars of Margery Kempe whom I consulted for this dissertation assume that Margery, the author, is the

\(^{22}\)See above, footnote 14. Wolfgang Richle, for example, emphasizes specific parallels between Margery and other mystics, posits access to other mystical works, and concludes: "For the way in which [Julian]—-together with Margery Kempe—-fits the pattern of the late medieval female mystic as this pattern developed on the continent is quite remarkable and cannot be due to mere chance" (27).
same as Margery, the character. Lynn Staley is the one exception; in her recent study, *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions*, Staley argues that Kempe “makes a world” and that she “like Chaucer...used the literary tradition to which she was heir as well as the world around her to compose fiction” (xii). Although I cannot prove one way or another how much (if any or all) of the Book is fiction, I nonetheless often distinguish between author and “Creature” in the course of this dissertation. This is especially relevant in a discussion of the “Creature” as a rhetorical construction by the author.

Despite their apparent differences in lifestyle, and regardless of how much of either woman’s text is evidence of a creative imagination, Margery and Julian do cross paths—literally—within the pages of the Book. In Chapter 18, Margery writes of her Creature, “& þan sche was bodyn be owyr Lord for to gon to an ankres in þe same cyte whych hyte Dame Ielyan. & so sche dede...” (42.7-9). Margery describes her meeting with Julian and, in the process, ensures that Julian’s words form part of the fabric of her Book. Whether the meeting actually happened and, if so, how much of the experience Margery remembered and recorded verbatim cannot be known; however, at the very least, this passage names Julian

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²³For one specific example, see Wolfgang Riehle where he refers to Margery as “the author of the first great autobiography in English” (30).
as an influence in the "Creature's" life and as a character in Margery's Book and, thereby, marks the crossing point between the lives and the texts of these two mystical writers.

In a discussion of Julian of Norwich and a continental mystic (Mechthild of Magdeburg), Oliver Davies suggests that "the origin of their writings lies in an excessus, which is to say a transformational state located between ordinary and extraordinary perception" (39). Perhaps a similar excessus—that is, a space between two apparent opposites—exists between Julian and Margery, between the outside world and the anchorhold, between the text of a pilgrim and the text of an anchoress, between the active and the contemplative life, at the window where an exchange of their words took place. If so, we no longer need to see these two mystics only in opposition to one another; they can be seen as complements in the whole of women's mystical experience and, in particular, in the Middle English textual representation of this experience.

As will become evident in the course of this dissertation, crossing points are integral to the visionary experience and rhetorical representation of that experience in both the Book and the Showings. Margery and Julian's meeting can be understood as yet another of these integral crossing points where apparent opposites converge and a space
for communication begins. The space or chasm created as a result of the exchange between opposites will be discussed at length in relation to rhetorical techniques throughout the chapters on Margery Kempe. For now, let me emphasize the various formats in which oppositional relationships are discussed in post-modern scholarship.\(^{24}\) Karma Lochrie, for example, continually uses the words "fissure" and "between" to point to the place (or space) in which the mystical experience occurs. She submits that the mystical text "is always fissured at the juncture between its oral and written texts" and that the mystic "returns again and again to this location between silence and utterance, doubt and presumption" (Translations 69, 71). Likewise, along with their theories of paradox and the "creative tension" therein, Gillespie and Ross speak of the mystics' longing to become the word of God which, in turn, "becomes the bridge between voice and silence" (55). David Thomson in "Deconstruction and Meaning in Medieval Mysticism" discusses techniques of affirmation and negation in mysticism and concludes that "meaning is situated neither in the aggregate of assertions nor in the void consequent to deletion but in the dialectical exchange which involves each" (114). Although Thomson bases his argument on theories of deconstruction, similar ideas can

\(^{24}\)One such example has already been quoted in the outline of Michael Sells' "Principles of Apophatic Language": "The meanifunless of the apophatic moment of discourse is unstable, residing in the momentary tension between two propositions" (14).
be found in Rorem’s commentary on the pseudo-Dionysius’ The Mystical Theology where he argues that “affirmation and negation are not separate enterprises applied to separate lists of characterizations, but the two complementary facets of the same interpretive process” (203). I offer these quotations as a starting point for the analysis of mystical texts and, in particular, for the texts of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Do Julian and Margery recreate this exchange between opposites and, if so, how and where? Do either of them attempt to enter the space or chasm created by the exchange? Do either of them, in addition, attempt to represent that which is beyond both affirmation and negation? Do they succeed at entering what Gillespie and Ross have called “apophatic consciousness”? These are the questions from which my dissertation evolved.

During my discussion of Margery Kempe, I analyze Margery’s use of paradoxical language in the re-creation of her Creature’s experiences. I put forth the possibility of Margery’s belief in a chasm between the human and the divine as the place in which the ineffable, mystical experience occurs and then examine the ways in which Margery’s Creature inhabits this chasm. In doing so, I posit two sets of conceptual categories of opposition. In one of these categories I include the literal, physical, or bodily world and experience; in the other I include the figurative,
spiritual, or ghostly realm and understanding of this experience. For example, I look at Margery’s use of both the literal, physical hair cloth on her body, and the figurative, spiritual haircloth in her heart. Margery can distinguish the two categories in this case; however, she is perfectly willing to substitute the latter for the former. In distinguishing between the categories, I am not suggesting that something described as “physical” can never simultaneously be described as “spiritual.” Indeed, my entire argument revolves around the exchange and confusion between the two conceptual categories. Margery’s Creature exists in a space where the literal and the figurative, the bodily and the ghostly, the human and the divine often become indistinguishable.

This being the case, establishing oppositional categories may seem irrelevant; however, in order to argue that this space of confusion exists as a result of the opposition, I must first establish the oppositional categories. I do not do this without recourse to precedent. Oliver Davies in his discussion of Julian’s use of the terms “bodily sight” and “ghostly sight” offers a possible origin for their distinction:

These two phrases parallel the two most fundamental terms of medieval scriptural exegesis, which is to say the “literal meaning” (sometimes known as the sensus corporalis) and the “figurative meaning” (often known as the
sensus spiritualis)....[T]his dual system which is in particular linked with the name of St Augustine set the parameters for understanding Scripture throughout the Middle Ages. (44)

Although Davies here refers to Julian's terminology in particular, his argument nonetheless links the "bodily" with the "literal" and the "ghostly" with the "figurative" in terms of general medieval understanding. Davies moves on to discuss literal and figurative interpretations of the bible, but I quote only this fragment of his argument in order to provide some rationale for my own division of conceptual categories.

In my discussion of Margery Kempe, I proceed to outline several examples of the Creature's confusion within the chasm between opposites. In doing so, I examine Margery's rhetorical strategy for representing this chasm and argue that she builds rhetorical icons to point toward the ineffable realm within (and beyond) this chasm. I deal both with rhetorical figures, such as adynaton and contentio, and with broader structural techniques, such as the portrayal of the Creature as both the eater and the eaten in her relationship to the Sacrament. I also incorporate Gillespie and Ross's theories of the suspended self-consciousness and illustrate examples of such suspension within the Creature's experience. These examples include moments of forgetting, lapses in time, and incidents of near-death that place the Creature at the threshold of the apophatic. Amidst this
textual analysis, and in an effort to outline Margery's conscious play with language in reporting the mystical experience, I look at the Creature's interaction with "tokens" or signs of the divinity as well as at reports in the Book of miracles involving language. Finally, I outline several theories on the rhetorical figure chiasmus and proceed to analyze its function in Margery's Book. Taken together, my analysis of various textual strategies forms the basis for the argument that Margery Kempe consciously structures her Book on paradox and, in doing so, builds rhetorical icons that point toward the apophatic realm or ineffable encounter.

Although I reach the same general conclusion in my analysis of Julian of Norwich's Showings, I examine how Julian uses a number of techniques that differ from those used by Margery. Of course, like Margery, Julian uses language of paradox and identical rhetorical figures already discussed in the context of Margery's Book. However, Julian does not confuse the literal and the figurative to the same extent as Margery's Creature; that is, she does not continually enter a chasm wherein she can no longer distinguish opposition.\textsuperscript{25} This is not to say that Julian

\textsuperscript{25}I use the term "confuse" (here and in the chapters to follow) in relation to the Creature's state of mind as she crosses between opposites. "Confuse" incorporates the idea of the fusion (or coincidence) of opposites with the idea that the Creature cannot always distinguish one state (for example, the bodily) from its opposite (for example, the ghostly). In this context, the meaning is close to that of its Latin etymology: confundere, to pour together, mix, confound.
ignores the possibility of a chasm between opposites altogether. She simply uses different methods to gesture toward the ineffable realm.

In discussing the Showings, I look at Julian's distinction between bodily and ghostly sights and at her insistence that she can only recount part of the ghostly experience. I outline the numerous references that she makes to a "hidden" God, most of which are additions to the long text, and suggest that she has come to a better understanding of the principles of negative theology in the time between writing the short and long versions of her Showings. As with Margery, I examine moments of suspended self-consciousness in terms of memory lapses and near-death experience. I investigate Julian's use of non-referential signifiers and her ability to see the world as nothing/nought. References to "nought" abound in the Showings and form an integral part of my analysis of Julian's apophatic language.

In the second part of my discussion on the Showings, I explore how the coincidence of opposites works as a structural element in Julian's text. To this concept, I link Julian's numerous references to "sudden change" or exchange between opposites. The bulk of this chapter, however, deals with Julian's use of the word "point" in its various contexts. Not only does Julian refer to God as being "in a point," but she also indicates the potential for others to
enter that point. Julian’s "point," therefore, can be understood as a point of crossing between opposites, similar to the chasm discussed in relation to Margery Kempe. As with Margery, I end my analysis of Julian by examining the function of *chiasmus* in the *Showings* as a figure of mutual exchange and then illustrate how the structure of the figure mimics Julian’s theology of reciprocity between God and humanity.

In the process of examining both Margery’s *Book* and Julian’s *Showings*, I emphasize (either directly or indirectly) how and when their respective descriptions of the mystical experience illustrate Sells’ principles of apophatic language. This emphasis includes the last principle listed in this Introduction (and in Sells’ complete list of principles) which, in part, emphasizes “the fusion of self and other within mystical union” (Sells 209). I discuss this fusion, coincidence, or mystical union in terms of the confusion of opposites in the world of Margery’s Creature and in terms of Julian’s desire to be joined or “oonyd” with God. Such a union, whether theoretically possible or not, is the goal of mystical experience. Rorem, in his analysis of the pseudo-Dionysian influence on the Middle Ages, explains that the “Dionysian ascent to union with god was overwhelmingly cognitive, including the technique of negation, until later writers such as Bonaventure and the author of *The Cloud read*
into it not only the cardinal Christian concepts of grace, faith, and especially love, but also Christ himself" (239-40). Although Julian and Margery can neither see that which remains hidden nor speak that which remains ineffable, they nonetheless maintain faith in Christ's love and His ability to make all things well. Thus, this dissertation explores the Middle English textual construction of medieval women's mystical experience and their understanding of the divine love associated with this experience.
Chapter 1: The Figure In Deed

"'I am an hyd God'" (30.26-7) Christ explains to Margery Kempe. The statement is paradoxical: Christ must become un-hidden in order to reveal Himself as hidden. Simultaneously, two states, which are usually in opposition to one another, coincide. Mysticism, at least as it appears to us in its written form, is built on such a paradox; the mystics at the same time that they attempt to reveal their mystical experiences, acknowledge that they can never fully reveal what they have seen and heard. Indeed, within the first few pages of The Book of Margery Kempe, the narrator explains that Margery "cowd neuyr telle ße grace ßat sche felt, it was so heuenly, so hy a-bouen hyr reson & hyr bodyly wyttys, and hyr body so febly in tym of ße presens of grace ßat sche myth neuyr expressyn it wyth her word lych as sche felt it in hyr sowle" (3.3-8). She claims for herself knowledge above reason and outside the body as

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1All quotations from Margery's Book are taken from Meech, Sanford Brown and Hope Emily Allen, The Book of Margery Kempe. Page and line numbers will be placed in parentheses after the text.
2See also "'I am as an hyd God in ßi sowle'" (205.4).
3As discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, I use the terms "coincide" and "coincidence" to refer to the point at which opposites cross or unite (yet, simultaneously, remain distinct). In addition to E.H. Cousin's' use of coincidence in reference to Bonaventure's work, David Thomson uses the term when he calls Christ "the perfect coincidence of sign and signified" (107; emphasis added).
if she is capable of transcending human form and consciousness. Conscious memory of something outside of consciousness is an impossibility. Margery Kempe cannot remember or record experiences that were "a-bouen hyr reson & hyr bodyly wyttys"; however, as a rhetorical construction, Margery's "Creature" can become an iconographical representation that continually gestures toward such theoretical impossibilities.

For the reader, the mystic's written interpretation concurrently reveals and conceals the mystical experience. As outlined in my Introduction, Kevin Hart explains that human "language is a medium that reveals mystical experience while simultaneously hiding it from inspection" (180). Yet, the written interpretation is only one obstacle to understanding a so-called divine encounter. The encounter itself is also a theoretical impossibility. David Thomson, in his article "Deconstruction and Meaning in Medieval Mysticism," argues that the idea that written language cannot capture the divinity is more readily accepted than the idea that we cannot capture the divinity at all. He thereby reiterates the pseudo-Dionysian approach, as outlined by Paul Rorem, that "theology is not only wordless but even thoughtless" (189). Thomson explains that the so-called divine encounter has no more authority than the written interpretation thereof:
The temptation confronting the mystic is to cling to the authority of an originary "oral" or "divine" encounter, to contrast it with its debasement in writing. It is easy to see that writing is not God; far more insidious is the encounter of presence, yet this too is not God and cannot therefore be presence. This is an astounding claim to those of us nurtured by traditional Western affirmative theology. Everything must go, even the encounter with presence. (116)

In other words, to take Margery as an example, she can no more think about an encounter with the divinity than she can write about it. Indeed, she can never consciously encounter the divinity; at the precise moment she becomes conscious of a seemingly divine encounter, the encounter itself becomes just that: conscious, human thought. It is no longer (and never has been) divine; therefore, it is no longer (and never has been) ineffable. According to Thomson, "the ineffable moment does not appear in the fallen prose of the mystics" (112). Indeed, there is "no such moment at all, which is to say that it is entirely of faith" (112).

When following this logic, one need not question—as one so often does when reading a mystical text—whether or not the experience actually happened. What remains is simply a matter of faith: what does the mystic believe and how does she translate that belief into words? According to Gillespie and Ross, "[God] can only be loved, not thought" (55); that is, a person can love the God in whom s/he has
faith without fully comprehending Him. More radically, to Thomson, "God does not exist, for people, save as interpretation" (110). Consequently, the entire Book of Margery Kempe can be read as an interpretation of her faith in Christ and Christianity. The loving words of Christ, as represented in her Book, are no less the product of her imagination than are the angry words of her tormentors. It matters neither that she waited over twenty years before recording the experiences nor that "sche had for-getyn be tyme & be ordyr whan thyngys befellyn" (5.16). At the time of writing, the word of God recorded for the reader is under her (and her scribe's) authorial control; it is no more a representation of divine presence than any work of fiction.

One may have wondered, even if only for a brief instant upon reading the previous sentence, whether a work of fiction can be a representation of the divinity. Or the reader may have stopped momentarily to contemplate the issues raised thus far. Such stimulus to contemplation is, I believe, the function of Margery's Book. I contend that Margery Kempe was a far greater rhetorician than some people would have us believe.  

4 As noted in my Introduction, the idea of reaching God through love was integrated into the understanding of negative theology in the Middle Ages. See especially Paul Rorem pages 216-222. For instance, Rorem outlines the influence of Hugh of Saint Victor's ideas on love and his belief that "Where knowledge stops on the threshold of ignorance (unknowing), love can still advance and approach" (217).

5 I am thinking, for instance, of Robert K. Stone who describes Margery's prose as emotional narrative (28).
reconstructed her life, as a play with paradox, with contradiction and opposition, thereby emphasizing both the absolute chasm between the human and the divine and her faith in coincidence. Whether we think she is a hysterical fool or an admirable saint, we nonetheless engage with her faith when we read her Book. Although she waits until the penultimate chapter of Book One, Margery does make her belief in the importance of contemplation clear in Christ’s words:

I haue oftyn seyd on-to be bat wheþyr þu preyist wyth þi mowth er thynkist wyth thyn hert, wheþyr þu redist er herist redyng, I will be plesyd wyth þe. & set, dowtyr, I tell þe, ye þu woldist leuyn me, bat thynkyng is þe best for þe & most xal incresyn thy lofe to me. (218.5-10)

Whether for Margery or for the reader, thinking about Christ is best. Thought stimulates faith in the love of Christ, the power of God, and the teleological concept that “it xal ben ryth wel at þe last” (155.15-16). The method by which one contemplates is not as important as the process itself.

One must bear in mind that this process of thinking neither involves direct contact with the divinity nor establishes anything certain about the divinity. It merely uses human terms to point toward the divinity which lies beyond human terms. Accordingly, Christ’s description of the bliss Margery’s Creature can expect in heaven is such that “non eye may se, ne eur heryn, ne tunge telle, ne non
hert thynkyn” (53.4-5). Human sensory perception cannot
describe that which is beyond perception. Margery,
therefore, must again resort to adynaton—that is, she must
“admit that [her] message is beyond the power of words to
convey” (Sonnino 248). Similarly, when Margery’s Creature
believes she hears a heavenly melody, she describes it as
“so swete bat it passyd all be melody bat euyr myght be herd
in bys world wyth-owtyn ony comparson” (11.17-19). Once
again, Margery has rhetorically structured this sentence on
adynaton and paradox: if the sound is too sweet to be
perceived in this world, how does she perceive it in the
first place in order later to state that it is beyond
comparison?

As part of an answer to this question, I put forth
the possibility of a human/divine continuum—that is, a
space or chasm of confusion which is neither fully divine
nor fully human—as the paradoxical space where Margery
believes the mystical experience can occur and where,
therefore, she continually places her Creature. I am not
saying that Margery thereby captures the divinity in her
Book; certainly, as Thomson explains, “It is not as if there
is some connection, albeit a limited one [between human
words and God]. The rift is absolute” (113). What I am
suggesting is the possibility of Margery’s faith in, and
subsequent rhetorical representation of, a neutral zone
between the human and the divine—the paradoxical point of crossing or coincidence in the chasm between two apparent opposites.

Thomson asserts that "[m]ystical writing is situated not in the full presence of an incarnational encounter, nor in the spiritual emptiness of writing, but in a dynamic exchange between the two" (Thomson, 111). I suggest that the entire mystical experience is situated in this exchange. Moreover, it is here, in this chasm of exchange, that Margery Kempe places her Creature—in a place where nothing is absolute, where the literal and the figurative are indistinguishable. The representation of the experience of crossing through this chasm—whether or not the experience is built solely from Margery's imagination—re-creates the dynamic paradox of her faith and forms the underlying rhetorical structure of her text. Through this rhetorical re-creation of paradox, Margery builds a figurative iconography that points toward the ineffable moment of coincidence.

As part of the foundation for her play with paradox, Margery uses contentio as a rhetorical structure throughout her Book. Given that, as Robert Glendinning argues, the

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6 By the "paradox of [the Christian] faith," I refer to Christ who, according to David Thomson, is "the perfect coincidence of sign and signified" (107). That is, Christ is the Word of God. He is, moreover, "both God and man, joined through the hypostatic union" (Cousins, 181).

7 Contentio is defined by Sonnino as "Contrary and contrasting words or sentences placed together" (251).
paradoxes of the Christian religion (including, and perhaps primarily, the Incarnation itself) led in the Middle Ages to an "increasing preoccupation with antithesis" (905), it is not surprising that Margery adopts antithetical rhetoric so enthusiastically. Indeed, from the beginning of the Book, opposition and reversals act as catalysts for Margery's Creature, eventually propelling her into her mystical and transformational experiences.

On the first page of the proem to Book One, the narrator (scribe) explains that the Creature was unstable, always turning back to temptation "lech vn-to be reed-spyr whech boweth wyth evey wynd" (1.20-1). This first description of the "synful caytyf" comes in the form of a simile and, therefore, casts our interpretation of the Creature immediately into the figurative realm (1.15). Such an initial interpretation is appropriate since, as will be seen throughout this dissertation, Margery's Creature continually moves between the literal and figurative worlds. Margery's rhetorical construction of herself as the Creature

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8At this point in his article, Glendinning is discussing the conceptualization of the oxymoron in rhetorical theory in the Middle Ages. The article begins, as quoted below, with a focus on Christian paradox and then progresses to a discussion of specific rhetorical figures (namely oxymoron and the chiastic oxymoron): "When Christianity brought its radical inversion of values to the ancient world, the oxymoron came into its own as a natural, one might say ideal, form of expression for the apparent paradoxes of the new religion" (892). He explains, moreover, that oxymoron "is found in irreducible form in St. Paul's cryptic "When I am weak I am strong" (2 Cor. 12.10), and in more potent and provocative form in such formulations as "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life...will find it" (Matt. 10.39)" (892).
becomes doubly figurative when the narrator compares her to a plant. The reed-stalk, a natural object, figuratively represents a human state of unstableness which lasts

vn-to þe tyme þat ower mercyfulle Lord Crist Ihesu hauynge péty & compassyon of hys handwerke & hys creatur turnyd helth in-to sekenesse, prosperity in-to aduersyte, worshep in-to repref, & love in-to hatered. Thus alle þis thynghs turnyng vp-so-down, þis creatur whych many þerys had gon wyl & euyr ben vnstable was parfythly drawen & steryd to entren þe wey of hy perfeccyon. (1.22-2.2; emphasis added)

Ironically, these seemingly negative reversals lead to what Margery terms a "wondyrful chawngyng" (2.16-17). Her Creature must suffer through reversals which, amongst other conditions, result in sickness and poverty before she can accept the love of Christ.

Granted, such extremes are not rare in Christian prescriptions for attaining perpetual bliss in the afterlife; as Margery must have known, "a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:23). Here, however, Margery is describing not an entrance into heaven, but her Creature's transformation into another earthly state. I use "earthly" hesitantly because I would like to suggest that Margery's use of concepts normally applied to those who wish to enter a realm beyond the earth indicate her strong belief that her Creature has done just that. Everything in the Creature's life has turned "vp-so-down";
hence, life on earth—at least as she once knew it—no longer exists. Indeed, she will eventually reach a point at which she will claim to have “forsetyn alle erdly thyngys & only ententyd to gostly thyngys” (174.27-8).

This “turnynge vp-so-down” marks the initial point of crossing whereby Margery’s Creature enters the chasm between opposites. Rhetorically, the literal act of turning can be associated with the figure of apostrophe which “has remained close to its Greek etymology, apostrepein, to turn away” (Budick, “Tradition” 314). Although Margery does not use the actual figure as such, the theory behind its structural function can nonetheless be applied here. As Sanford Budick explains, “in apostrophe all preceding time and place are for an instant totally interrupted. Instead a no-time and no-place is momentarily inserted into the speaker’s, and our, quondam world” (314). Hence, Margery’s Creature, through the process of reversal and turning, creates tension between opposite states and, thereby, opens a space for slippage into the apophatic.⁹ Though literally she has remained upright in time, figuratively she has turned upside down into the chasm of no-time.

The process of “turnynge,” emphasized as it is through adnominatio on the first page of Margery’s Book, is also

⁹As quoted in the Introduction of this dissertation, Gillespie and Ross discuss how the “creative tension” of paradox allows “its conflicting significations to generate a precious stillness, a chink in the defensive wall of reason that allows slippage into apophatic consciousness” (56).
notable in its subsequent appearances.\textsuperscript{10} Knowing its powerful effect and enjoying (though suffering through) the resultant transformation, Margery’s Creature acknowledges that for her advisors, their “most dred was βat sche xuld turnyn & not kepyn hir perfeccyon” (43.26-7). Certainly, the process which opened the space for slippage originally can, as with everything else, work in the reverse. Yet ironically—and again paradoxically—this is not something to fear. Indeed, Margery’s moment of “turnyng” is the nearest she can come to perfection. The direction in which she turns makes no difference since it is the process of turning that matters, not the end result. Once she has stopped turning the space for slippage is closed.

At the moment that anyone, including the Creature herself, believes she is either perfect or not perfect, she is no longer situated in the chasm of the apophatic. Only when the two opposite states exist simultaneously, as at the imperceptible point of crossing/turning between the two, does the apophatic moment occur. Perhaps this is why Margery’s Creature, when fulfilled by Christ’s love, notes that “as a drunkyn man sche turnyd hir fyrst on βe o syde & sithyn on βe oër wyth gret wepyng & gret sobbyng, un-mythy to kepyn hir-selfe in stabilnes for βe unqwenchablyfyer of

\textsuperscript{10} Adnomina\textsuperscript{i}a is defined by Sonnino as “Repetition of the stem of a word with a different case or tense ending” (261). Here, Margery uses “turned” (1.19), “turnyd” (1.24), and “turnyng” (1.27).
lofe whech brent ful sor in hir sowle" (98.29-33). At each turning between the two states, she crosses momentarily through the chasm, into a space where the bodily and ghostly worlds coincide. On a conscious level, Margery could not remember such an apophatic moment; nevertheless, her Creature can be an iconographical representation gesturing toward that moment of coincidence through the continual act of turning.

Margery’s Creature, who wants others to share in her experience, prays that “as many men mote be turnyd be my crying & my wepyng as me han scornyd þerfor” (249.22-4). Likewise, in regard to a certain priest, she asks that “as many mist be turnyd by hys voys” as by Christ’s voice itself (149.26). She believes that a human being’s physical actions can hold or represent spiritual potential. However, within a few sentences of the latter quotation, Margery’s Creature notes that “meche pepil turnyd a-ȝen hir” (149.35-150.1). Whereas the Creature wants all other people to experience a spiritual turning toward Christ, these people remain in the physical world, literally turning away from the her and her message.

The people who torment Margery’s Creature are those who see and think only in the literal world, without the capability of simultaneously perceiving, for example, the figurative or spiritual meaning inherent in the Creature’s
physical characteristics. One person in particular outrightly refuses to accept the Creature’s crying as a gift from God; instead, he decides only to show her compassion if her crying is proven to be caused by a heart condition (151.8-13). Although this person is a priest and, therefore, believes in God, in this case he does not accept the possibility that a human action can be a sign of divine will. Margery, on the other hand, readily embraces this possibility. For her, a physical trait can imply a spiritual meaning.

Margery’s use of contentio throughout her Book continually points toward the paradoxical state of her Creature’s existence. Accordingly, “it was to her a manner of solas & comfort whan sche sufferyd any dysese for be lofe of God” (2.27-8). She embraces paradox as a necessary part of the journey toward eternal bliss and, as a constant reminder of this, repeatedly acknowledges Christ’s promise that “’al [her] wepyng & [her] sorwe xal turnyn in-to joy & blysse’” (82.7-8). Indeed, she even incorporates these concepts into her prayers when she asks for continued pain and sorrow in order that she may behold God’s face (249.10-12). For Margery’s Creature, sorrow is joy; the two cannot be separated, but instead exist simultaneously in the sense that one automatically implies the other. As Caroline Bynum

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11 For further examples of this paradox, see 131.23, 175.21-3, 185.30-3, 196.32-4, 249.10-12.
explains, such a coincidence of suffering and comfort is associated with the Crucifixion: "Not only do illness and self-mortification fuse with each other as each fuses with the experience of the cross; suffering and ecstasy also fuse" (133). With the fervor of the truly devoted, Margery’s Creature aspires to imitate the Christian paradox of joyful sorrow or ecstatic suffering.

Margery makes further use of contentio as a means to convey her belief in divine omnipotence. To the Creature’s understanding, Christ is as mighty “in þe see as on þe londe,” “in þe felde as in þe strengest chirche in alle þis worlde,” and “in a litly schip as in a gret schip” (230.12, 101.29-30, 102.11-12). Certainly, I am not suggesting that the idea of an all-knowing, always-present God is unique to Margery Kempe. What I am attempting to establish is Margery’s ability to recognize and represent opposition in its relationship with the divinity. From God’s perspective—or, at least, from Margery’s interpretation of God’s perspective—there is no difference between land and sea, little and big. It is this ability to reconcile opposition that allows Margery’s Creature to enter a place where she can say, “‘Helle xuld not noyin me, but it xulde be a maner of Heuyn’” (215.37-8). The Creature has the capability to enter a place where fundamental opposites within the Christian religion coincide. Through her faith in Christ’s
love, Margery's Creature turns a literal hell into a figurative heaven.

Examples of contentio abound in Margery's Book. I maintain that, as in the relatively few examples quoted above, Margery uses this rhetorical figure as a means of representing or, at the very least, suggesting the necessity of paradox. In terms of the chasm mentioned briefly above, paradox is an essential aspect of its (theoretical) existence. As Maggie Ross explains, paradox can open a way toward the apophatic:

The ancient saying, 'God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere' provides the metaphorical framework for the model [of abstractions]. In a classic example of an apophatic image, the circle is introduced and immediately effaced by its geometric paradoxes. The mind is brought to stillness, caught between the familiar and the fathomless. (340)

As with Budick's "no-place, no-time," the quondam world, or perhaps, in this case, the quondam consciousness, ceases to function within its hitherto known rational framework. It is this chasm "between the familiar and the fathomless" that Margery's Creature enters and, eventually, emulates.

Before continuing along the various tracts raised thus far, I would like first to return to my premise that Margery Kempe is a skilled rhetorician--one who could consciously manipulate the rhetorical structure of her text in order to re-present her faith. I am not aiming to prove
that Margery had or even needed to have had training in classical rhetoric. I am, however, suggesting that her text is structured in a less haphazard manner than she would have us believe. One such claim to a haphazard technique appears in the proem to Book One where, with apparent sincerity, the narrator tells us, "Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thyng aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn" (5.12-15). Such statements contribute to fostering the attitude that Margery "pays little heed to the linear demands of written narrative" (Lochrie, Translations 123).

Karma Lochrie, Elizabeth Petroff, and Robert Stone all argue for the possibility of oral composition in the texts of female mystics. Though the arguments behind their theories are strong, these critics do little, if anything, to engage the possibility of complex rhetorical structures within an individual's oral composition. Petroff classifies medieval women's writing with the generalization that it is "emotional...repetitive, proverbial, [and] nonanalytical" (23). I maintain, as I have already begun to suggest, that despite the lack of a chronological order to the textual events and regardless of whether or not the work is "emotional," Margery's Book nonetheless adheres to an analytical and rhetorical schematic based on paradox. The

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12 See Lochrie 123, Petroff 28-9, and Stone 88-89.
possibility that Margery gained knowledge of rhetorical techniques through other mystical texts (whether she read them or they were read to her) must remain open. After all, Margery does make reference to several other mystics and their works. In Chapter 62 alone she mentions "Maria de Oegines," "Be Prykke of Lofe," "Bone-audentur," "Richard Hampol, hermyte," "Incendio Amoris," and "Elizabeth of Hungry" (153.1, 153.38, 154.1, 154.11-13). Clearly, Margery had access to other mystical works and ideas and, therefore, had access to examples of rhetorical technique.13

Petroff also notes that these women often assert their complete ignorance of rhetoric and that "they have not read any of their ideas in books" (27). Granted, Margery's Creature does not claim learned authority from books; for her, the primary authority is God and her own experiences. Such practice is reasonable considering the pressure she is

13 Richard Rolle ("Richard Hampol, hermyte"), for example, is known for his highly stylized rhetoric. As Rita Copeland notes in "Richard Rolle and the Rhetorical Theory of the Lovels of Style," "Rolle has attracted modern critical attention as much for his remarkable literary style as for his mysticism" (54). See Copeland's footnote 1 for a list of "critical appraisals of Rolle's figurative language" (76). A detailed comparison of the rhetorical technique used by Kempe and Rolle still remains to be done; however, Margery is thought to have incorporated some of Rolle's ideas into her Book. For example, Wolfgang Riehle notes that they both use the image of the "dovecote" in relation to Christ's wounds (16); and the glossary entry to "Hampol, Richard" in the Meech and Allen edition of Margery's Book states that a marginal note in the manuscript "calls attention to the similarity between Margery Kempe's description of the fire of love and Rolle's" (403). As will also be discussed in relation to Julian of Norwich (Chapters 4 & 5 of this dissertation), Bonaventure uses the coincidence of opposites as a framework for his thoughts. This coincidence in which "opposites genuinely coincide while at the same time continuing to exist as opposites" is similar to what the Creature experiences in the chasm of confusion (Cousins 180).
under to follow socially prescribed roles rather than wander from town to town weeping and wailing in the name of God. Take, for example, advice offered by people whom the Creature encounters on her journey: “‘Damsel, forsake þis lyfe þat þu hast, & go spynne & carde as oþer women don, & suffyr not so meche schame & so meche wo’” (129.34-7); others believe she “‘hath a deuyl wyth-inne hir, for sche spekyth of þe Gospel’” (126.14-15). These comments, in addition to all of the questioning to which the Creature is subjected, suggest a reluctance on the part of her contemporaries to see the Creature as having any authority whatsoever; Margery must claim God’s authority to validate her Book.

As Lochrie explains, “Without the recourse to institutional authority, the mystical text must continually renew its claim in divine utterance” (Translations 83). Accordingly, when Margery’s Creature speaks, it is with “many good wordys as God wold hem puttyn in hir mende” (26.2-3). By stating outrightly that she writes the text only in compliance to divine will, Margery depicts a Creature who, at the same time as she submits to a higher male authority (that is, God, the Father or Christ, the Son) and, therefore, remains “in keeping with the female ideal of obedience” (Barratt 9), she simultaneously claims for
herself (through God) more authority than the most learned clerks.

As mentioned briefly above, ample evidence exists in the Book to suggest that Margery also had access to the authority of theological and mystical books. In addition to citing those texts read by the priest who later writes her book, Margery makes the occasional passing reference to having heard mystical and scholarly works read to her. In the following quotation, Margery compares what she has learned from her mystical experiences about God’s love with what she has learned in books: “sumtyme alle thre Personys in Trinyte...dalyid to hir sowle...so excellently þat sche herd neyr boke, neyðyr Hyltons boke, ne Bridis boke, ne Stimulus Amoris, ne Incendium Amoris, ne non oþer þat euyr sche herd redyn þat spak so hyly of lofe of God” (39.23-6). Secondly, she has thorough knowledge of Scripture “whech sche lernyd in sermownys & be comownyng wyth clerkys” (29.31-2). And thirdly, with regard to the clerks and priests who continually put her knowledge of Christian faith to the test, she readily answers “wel & trewly þat þei myth have non occasyon in hir wordys for to disesyn hir” (122.27-9). Indeed, Margery—although she considers herself “not

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14See above (page 49) for references to other mystics and/or texts cited on pages 153-4 of Margery’s Book.
15Note here that Margery still prioritizes her own learning (from her mystical experiences) above her book learning. See also 143.25-9 for another list of mystics and/or texts.
lettryd"--is so well-read and verbally skilled that she depicts herself as a Creature who is a match in wit and wisdom for all the learned clerks she meets (128.26-31).

Yet equally, if not more, important than all of the preceding evidence of rhetorical skill is the fact that Margery Kempe (through her Creature) is an excellent storyteller. On one occasion, the Creature stands "lokyn gowt at a wyndown, tellyng many good talys to hem bat wolde hereyn hir, in so meche bat women wept sor" (130.34-7).

Although in this particular instance the reader is not privileged to hear these tales, Margery's Creature does recite one story-within-a-story for all to hear: that of the priest and the bear. When one of the doctors questioning her exclaims, "'Syr, sche telde me be werst talys of prestys bat euyr I herde,'" the Bishop commands her to tell it again (126.22-3). Her skill at storytelling has the positive effect of winning the Bishop, who "likyd wel be tale & comendyd it," over to her side; indeed, "his tale smytth hym to be hert" (127.34-8). Its affective power aside, what is most interesting about this tale--at least for our purposes--is its allegorical structure. Within the tale itself, Margery's Creature gives both a literal rendition (involving the flowers and the bear's feces) and a figurative meaning (involving the priest and his hypocritical misconduct).
The 'unlettered' Creature uses this same process of interpretation to expound on the meaning of Scripture. Although interpreting Scripture allegorically is certainly not unique, it is essential (for purposes of developing my argument) to establish that Margery herself possesses this rhetorical skill. Accordingly, when a clerk asks her how the words "Crescite & multiplicamini" should be understood, the Creature responds,

"Ser, þes wordys ben not vndirstondyn only of begetyn of chylde of bodily, but also be purchasyng of wætætu, whiche is frute gostly, as be heryn of þe wordys of God, be good examypyl þeuyng...." (121.3-7; emphasis added)

Aside from indicating that Margery, despite her denials, does understand some Latin, this passage also indicates her ability to understand both the "bodily" and the "gostly" (or the literal and the figurative) within the writings of the Christian faith.

Although the concepts of "bodily" and "gostly" can be distinguished as opposites, they nonetheless exist together, as one, within the original passages—that is, within the words of the tale or Scripture. As indicated by some of the people Margery's Creature encounters, not everyone can see this whole; instead, they perceive only the concrete, literal meaning. Margery's Creature, however, has the ability to create (as in the case of the tale) and understand (as in the case of Scripture), the whole meaning
because she can create and understand both the literal and the figurative meanings. I maintain that if Margery, through the persona of the Creature, is learned enough to interpret the literal and the figurative in Scripture, and skilled enough to blend the two in her story-within-a-story, she is equally capable of creating such a double-layered structure for her larger story—that is, for *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

This relationship between the literal and the figurative takes on several forms in Margery's *Book*. One such form, which has been briefly mentioned above, involves Christ's ordinance that thinking is best. On several occasions, Margery's Creature expresses her concern that she is not physically doing enough to please Christ. In response, Christ repeatedly insists that the Creature's thoughts about individual acts are as worthy as the acts themselves. Accordingly, when the Creature and Christ discuss her contemplations, Christ insists,

" Dowtyr, bow xalt han as gret mede & as gret reward wyth me in Heuyn for bi good seruyse & be good dedys bat bu hast don in bi mynde & meditacyon as yf bu haddyst don bo same dedys wyth thy bodily wittys wyth-owtyn-forth."
(203.11-15)

Conscious thoughts, according to Margery's Christ, are as valid as physical deeds; or, to put it another way, figurative representation is as valid as the literal act.
Thus, as shall be examined later, Margery can wear a figurative "hayr in [her] hert" rather than a literal haircloth on her body (17.7-8).

Indeed, Christ repeats this sentiment to Margery's Creature on numerous occasions, and thereby stresses that He considers "euery good wyld as for dede" (212.21-2). Given that the majority of these quotations occur within close proximity near the end of Book One (see footnote #16), it appears that Margery wished to emphasize this concept before bringing the book to a close. By doing so, Margery succeeds in allaying suspicion (on the part of the reader) that she imagined all of the preceding events and that they are, therefore, not to be taken seriously. In other words, if thought holds equal value to deed, then whether Margery imagined or invented the events in her Book makes no difference; the reader can nonetheless contemplate the faith represented therein.

Margery also confuses the literal and the figurative within her Creature's daily life; indeed, more often than not, this confusion is what transports the Creature from the physical world into her visionary state. Frequently, she will see an object in the physical world which prompts her to recall a similar object in the ghostly world. This

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16 For further examples, see 75.24-9, 136.18-21, 204.1-3, 216.12-13, 217.22-3.
17 See footnote 25 of the Introduction to this dissertation.
particular process will be dealt with in detail further on in this dissertation; but, for now, it is essential merely to establish that Margery's Creature continually sees things as if they were something else. In one form of this practice, the Creature makes a distinction between her visionary imagination and the physical reality. Accordingly, when she follows a group of friars, along with the cross they are holding, around to various sites in Jerusalem, she "wept & sobbyd so plentyvowsly as bow sche had seyn owyr Lord wyth hir bodyly ey sufferyng his Passyon at bat tyme" (68.8-10); and later, when she contemplates Christ in her soul, she feels "as yf Crist had hangyn befor hir bodily eye in hys manhode" (70.6-7). Repeatedly, throughout her journey and the text, "Sche had many an holy thowt of owr Lordys Passyon & beheld hym in hir gostly syght as verily as he had ben a-forn hir in hir bodily syght" (184.34-185.3).

Margery's use of the terms "as bow" and "as yf" indicates her realization that Christ is not actually in front of her Creature. Otherwise, she would simply state, "Christ appeared before her" and forego the simile. Since direct contact with Christ is a theoretical impossibility (as discussed above), pointing toward Him figuratively is Margery's sole option. In doing so, she simultaneously presents the reader with a figurative image while creating
the lack of an actual image. That is, she describes only what her vision is like rather than what it actually is. Gillespie and Ross discuss this practice in terms of Julian of Norwich and her image of the "quantitie of an haselnott...as rounde as a balle" (299.10-300.1)\(^\text{18}\):

Simultaneously we are being offered an image which does not exist. What Julian sees is not a hazelnut but an unspecified thing, about the size of a hazelnut if it were in the palm of her hand (which it is not), and as round as a ball. The 'littill thing' is described by gesture towards material objects but its true properties, as perceived by Julian are not its materiality or referentiality but rather aspects of God's relationship to it. (57)

Although Gillespie and Ross here describe a completely different scenario from the Creature's vision of Christ, their theory can nonetheless be applied. Both Julian and Margery must use language that is non-referential—that is, a rhetorical structure that never settles onto specifics, but instead continuously points away from the literal object (or person) toward something (someone) else. Margery's use of bodily/worldly similes in her effort to describe the divinity clearly indicates her failure to move beyond earthly description. However, because Margery writes of her Creature seeing something as if it were something else, she thereby avoids speaking of the actual thing.

\(^{18}\)All quotations from Julian's Showings are taken from Colledge and Walsh, A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich. Page and line numbers will be placed in parentheses after the text.
The only period (after her transformation) during which Margery’s Creature cannot see both the physical and the spiritual qualities of something occurs when she refuses to believe people can be damned. At this point, Christ “suffyrd hir to haue as many eyyl thowtys as sche had beform of good thowtys” (144.29-30). Whereas before she had visions of “þe manhod of owr Lord,” she now has visions of “mennys membrys” (145.6, 145.9-10). During this period of punishment, Margery’s Creature reverts completely to seeing the physical for the physical rather than seeing the spiritual figuratively represented in a physical form. Suddenly, the Creature is no better off than those people, mentioned above, who cannot see beyond the literal meaning of something. Moreover, when it comes to choosing which “membrys” she likes best, the Creature admits that “þes horrybyl syghtys & cursyd mendys wer delectablyl to hir a-geyn hir wille” (145.22-3). Apparently, while under the influence of God’s will, Margery’s Creature displays the ability to turn between the bodily and the ghostly; however, left to her own human will, her mind remains focused on the grotesquely physical.

Since the turmoil is attributed to the Devil and its cessation to God, the scene itself is another example of contentio. The Creature must decided “wheþyr it is bettyr þat God speke to [hir] er þe Deuyl” (146.16-17). Even
during a period where the Creature only sees the physical, Margery rhetorically constructs a situation where opposites collide and places her Creature therein. Eventually, the "euyl thowtys" are replaced with "holy thowtys" and the Creature continues her conversation with/contemplation of Christ. Although within the rhetorical structure the Creature never leaves a place of opposition, she nonetheless re-turns to a place where she regains the ability to confuse the physical and the spiritual.

The coincidence of the physical and the spiritual is not without precedent in Margery's iconographic repertoire. Indeed, as the Creature explains during questioning, the Sacrament of the Altar is Christ's "very flesch & hys blood & no material bred ne neyr may be vneyd be it onys seyd" (115.16-18). As a central tenet of Christian faith, the Eucharist brings together apparent opposites--that is, the physical bread and its transformed spiritual state. As Michael Camille attests,

the Host can be described as the single most important image to Christians from the middle of the thirteenth century onward, perhaps even overtaking the veneration of the cross. Unlike the latter, which was only a sign, the Host was a material substance that in countless places and at different times was capable of transforming into God's flesh. (215)

For many Christians, the Eucharist is never merely figurative; that is, the Eucharist does not merely represent
Christ but actually is the flesh and blood of Christ; the literal bread becomes something equally literal through divine transformation. In this understanding of the Eucharist, the physical and the spiritual are brought together in such a way that the one can no longer be distinguished from the other. Furthermore, as Bynum explains, during the Middle Ages, pars was necessarily accepted pro toto; she points in particular to the monk Guibert of Nogent for whom wholeness was so crucial to salvation “that he used rhetorical theory to argue that synecdoche, pars pro toto, must be literally true” (12). She speaks of saints’ lives where “synecdoche is more than a figure of speech” and “metonymy becomes a miracle” (285). In other words, there existed a fundamental belief that a part or a thing associated with the whole was not simply a representation of that whole, but was in itself the whole. For the faithful, the Sacrament is not merely associated with Christ; it is Christ. Moreover, it embodies the possibility of a physical object being transformed into something of spiritual significance. For Margery, the Sacrament embodies coincidence—the place where opposites coincide, where something clearly of human construction becomes clearly divine.

With regard to my previous comments on the theoretical implications of apostrophe, Margery once again
uses the word "turnyng" in the context of receiving the Sacrament. Margery describes a day in church when, about to be "howsel'd" (that is, given the Eucharist) the Creature is visited by so much grace that she cannot take the Sacrament from the priest's hands. Consequently,

> be preyst turnyng hym a-geyn to be awter wyth be preciows Sacrament, til hir crying was ceysd. And pan he, turnyng a-geyn to hir, xulde minystyr hir as hym awte to do. And bus it happyd many a tyme when sche xulde ben howselyd. (139.26-30; emphasis added)

Although the word "turnyng" here literally refers to the physical action of the priest, I suggest that on a rhetorical level, its repetition brings to mind its previous uses (where, for example, everything turned upside down) and, thereby, simultaneously points beyond the literal meaning.

That is, Margery uses the word "turnyn" numerous times throughout the text. The glossary of the Meach and Allen edition list the following additional occasions: turn, 43.27; turne 16.1; turne 182.30; turnyth 173.23; turnyng 1.27; turnedist 182.33; turnyd 1.24; [turnyd] 98.30; turnyd 154.16; turnyd 27.14; turned 1.19. Respectively, these forms of "turnyn" are used in the contexts of 1) turning from perfection; 2) turning toward sin; 3) turning the "earth of their hearts" upside down; 4) turning into goodness; 5) turning everything upside down; 6) turning
toward Christ; 7) turning from health to sickness; 8) turning from one side to the other; 9) turning after repentance; 10) turning from sin; and 11) turning toward temptation. Every one of these examples connects the word “turnyng,” in one way or another, with Margery’s spiritual process (some of which are discussed earlier in this Chapter). The only one that involves a physical turning is #8 where Margery is physically turning from side to side as if she is drunk; however, even this physical turning is connected with her spiritual process since it is caused by the “dalyawns of owr Lorde” (98.28-9). It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that the example of the priest’s “turnyng” (139.26-30) has a meaning for Margery beyond that of a mere physical turning.

In this passage (139.26-30), Margery’s Creature observes the priest turning with the Sacrament in his hands.19 If we understand Margery’s rhetorical moments of turning in their apostrophic sense, then we can readily see the link between the act of turning, which potentially opens a space to the apophatic, and the receiving of the Sacrament which, at least by faith, embodies paradox. The priest is

19Earlier in the Book, Margery discusses a time when the Creature observes the Sacrament moving (without the aid of the priest turning): “On a day as þis creatur was herynge hir Messe, a þong man and a good prest holdyng up þe Sacrament in hys handys ouyr hys hed, þe Sacrament schok þ a flekeryd to þe feste as a dowe flekeryth wyth hir wengys” (47.15-18). She does not use the word “turnyng” here; however, the Sacrament does move “to þe feste”; thus, the passage is worth noting in comparison with 139.26-30.
engaged in the act of figuratively turning into the apophatic while literally holding and turning with an icon of the ineffable paradox in his hands. The consumption of the Sacrament is an act of faith which, precisely because of that faith, gestures toward the possibility of turning into the apophatic. For medieval women, the Eucharist was “a moment at which they were released into ecstatic union” (Bynum 134); for Margery, it represents the moment at which her Creature can participate in another act of coincidence between opposites and, thereby, can point to the possibility of bridging the chasm between the human and the divine.

Marion Glasscoe refers to the Sacrament as “the bridge over the gap between earth and heaven” (Games 276); likewise, Camille claims that the Mass (which would include the Sacrament) was “the means by which the late-medieval beholder could bridge the gap between ‘earthly and heavenly’” (215). This figurative bridge over the chasm is built out of two opposing materials which, upon joining, form a means of crossing between the human and the divine. Arguably, this figurative bridge is built of faith—faith in the possibility that the physical bread and wine can become the body and blood of Christ and, in that sense, become sacred. As I will illustrate, Margery takes this faith one step further and comes to believe that the figurative can
become a substitute for the literal and that the spiritual can become a substitute for the earthly or physical.

Hence, with regard to the haircloth that Margery's Creature wears, Christ commands, "'I wyl ðu do it a-way, & I schal giue þe an hayr in þin hert'" (17.7-8); furthermore, He advises, "'And in-stede of þat flesch þow schalt etyn my flesch & my blod, þat is þe very body of Crist in þe Sacrament of þe Awter'" (17.11-13). For the Creature, who places herself in the chasm where the literal and the figurative coincide, transformation involving the bodily and the ghostly occurs in both directions. She must have as much faith in the function of the figurative haircloth as she did in the literal one. From her viewpoint, the physical can become the spiritual (when the bread becomes God)\(^{20}\); and the spiritual can substitute for the physical (when the Host substitutes for her daily meat). Although, as quoted above, the Creature believes that the broad/Host "nemyr may be vnseyd be it onys seyd" (115.17-18), she evidently also believes in the possibility of a continual transference between the literal and the figurative, the physical and the spiritual.

\(^{20}\) As discussed earlier, for some Christians, the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ; the physical bread becomes something equally physical through divine transformation. However, in the sense that the Sacrament is sacred, it embodies a spiritual quality and meaning beyond the literal, physical bread. In this sense, I contrast the physical and the spiritual.
Christ's decree that Margery's Creature eat His flesh rather than meat from the secular world is an early example of the Creature's relationship with spiritual food. Although He eventually tells her that she can eat meat again (161.33-4), the Creature fosters the belief that she could survive solely on non-literal substance if given the opportunity. Hence, she writes of a time when she smells something sweeter "an euyr was ony swet erdly thyng bat sche smellyd be-forn, ne sche myth neuyr tellyn how swet it wern, for hir thowt sche myth a leuyd berby gyf they wolde a lestyd" (87.32-5). Likewise, upon visiting a particular church, "sche felt a wondyr swet sauowr & an heuynly bat hir thowt sche myth a leuyd berby wyth-owtyn mete or drynke gyf it wolde a contynuyd" (171.13-15). Presumably, the sounds and savours end and the Creature must nourish herself with secular food; nonetheless, she indicates in these passages her belief that "gostly comfortys" are capable of sustaining bodily form.\(^{21}\)

Margery writes that her Creature "hungryd ryth sor aftyr Goddys word" and that her soul "is evyr a-lych hungry" (142.15, .20-1). Here Margery combines a type of conformatio,\(^{22}\) in respect to the hungry soul, with a type of

\(^{21}\)I have taken the term "gostly comfortys" from Margery's reference to having felt "many gret comfortys, bothe gostly comfortys & bodily comfortys" (87.29-30).
\(^{22}\)Conformatio is defined by Sonnine as "Personification, the attribution of speech and sense to things normally without them" (252).
transmutatio,\textsuperscript{23} in respect to hungering for God’s word. To put this another way, God’s word is metonymical in the sense that it is only a substitute of God Himself; moreover, in an additional figurative sense, God’s word is being substituted for the literal food which would satisfy the Creature’s hunger. At the same time that Margery gives a physical characteristic to the soul, she suggests (here and in the quotations regarding sounds and savours) that her physical body can be nourished by spiritual means. Throughout the text, the reader witnesses a continual fluctuation between the physical and the spiritual and between the literal and the figurative.

In relationship to the Sacrament and to both physical and spiritual food, Margery’s Creature has thus far been presented as the eater. Yet along with portraying a Creature who is “fed and comfortyed wyth holy medytacyons” (39.3-4), Margery also presents her Creature as the food to be eaten. Given her relationship with paradox, the idea of the eater becoming the eaten is certainly not out of character. The result is a type of attributio,\textsuperscript{24} by which the qualities readily associated with the Sacrament and with literal food become characteristics of the Creature herself.

\textsuperscript{23}Transmutatio is defined by Sonnino as “Metonymy. The substitution of one name for another, the cause of a thing for the thing itself, the container for the thing contained, etc.” (263).

\textsuperscript{24}Attributio is defined by Sonnino as “The attribution of qualities of things or persons to other things or persons” (259).
One such example occurs directly before she hungers after God’s word, where she says to Christ, “‘I wolde for bi lofe & for magnyfying of bi name ben hewyn as smal as flesch to be potte’” (142.11-13). In a rhetorical gesture, which seemingly reciprocates Christ’s cf. yr to feed her with His flesh, Margery’s Creature offers to cut herself into a type of food.

The same expression is used earlier in the text by a man who leads the Creature into temptation. When she finally consents to his advances, he refuses her and says, he would rather “‘ben hewyn as smal as flesch to be pott’” (15.28). Hence, the identical metaphor used first in conjunction with contemplating physical lust is used later in conjunction with contemplating divine love. Ironically, in the latter case, one could argue that the Creature is not speaking figuratively at all, but would literally cut herself up for God’s love. Margery has reclaimed a figurative expression for its literal meaning and, in doing so, enables her Creature to offer a physical sacrifice for spiritual fulfillment.

Shortly after Christ tells the Creature that she should eat His flesh rather than meat, He says to her, “‘bow xalt ben etyn & knawyn of be pepul of be world as any raton knawyth be stokfysch’” (17.16-17). Hence, Margery’s Creature can expect to be eaten by others as part of her
spiritual journey toward Christ. Like Christ, she must, at least figuratively, offer her flesh to the others. This iconographical connection between the Creature and Christ will be explored further over the next two chapters; however, suffice it to say here that as with the flesh in the pot/hunger for God's word example (at 142.13 and 142.15), Margery here again connects the eater and the eaten by rhetorically placing them in close proximity (at 17.13 and 17.16). It appears, therefore, that Margery recognizes, as she has in other contexts previously discussed, the necessity of two opposite states existing together. To enter apophatic consciousness, Margery's Creature must, simultaneously, be the consumer and the consumed. Rhetorically, she offers her own physical flesh figuratively and eats Christ's divine flesh in its physical form (as Sacrament).

In addition to being figuratively eaten like a stockfish, the Creature's physical self is also associated with a type of ambrosia. Christ explains, "'ēu xalt be ryto welcome to my Fadyr & to my Modyr: to alle my seyntys in Hevyn, for ū hast gouyn hem drynkyn ful many tymes wyth teerys of thyn eyne'" (52.2-5). Subsequently, she is also told, "'ēi terys arn awngelys drynk, & it arn very pyment to hem'" (161.1-2). Hence, the Creature's physical tears turn, figuratively, into angelic wine. Margery rhetorically
represents her Creature both as flesh to the pot and to her tormentors and as a type of liquid nourishment for the spiritual realm. Perhaps Margery wanted to present her Creature as both food and drink to parallel Christ’s offer of flesh and blood.

In this sense, the Creature’s body, like Christ’s, can be seen as a place where the human and the divine coincide. Bynum explains in extensive detail how, in medieval iconography, “Christ’s body, like woman’s, is depicted as food” (103). Margery, seemingly in an act of rhetorical reversal, takes her traditional role as a food-bearing woman and transforms it into a figurative, spiritual role that bears iconographical resemblance to Christ’s. Consequently, throughout her Book, Margery places her Creature in a perpetual state of turning between the literal and the figurative and between the human and the divine.

Lochrie maintains that Margery inhabits “the paradoxical position of being a worldly mystic, a chaste wife, and a woman worth listening to and reading” (Translations 152). Moreover, and again according to Lochrie, the “way of high perfection for Kempe as a holy fool is the via paradoxica, or as she might have called it, the ‘up-so-down’ way, and it is fraught with suffering, along with laughter and good game” (157). I contend, furthermore, that Margery not only inhabits this paradoxical
position through her actions, but actually strives to represent her Creature as an icon of paradox and coincidence within her Book. Margery's Creature moves through the chasm between opposites, represented figuratively through contentio; she ceases to distinguish between thought and deed, the literal and the figurative; and, eventually, represents herself as an embodiment of the Sacrament, a point where the physical and the spiritual coincide. Susan Dickman claims that Margery exhibits "relative aloofness from Eucharistic devotion" and, furthermore, that "no one would want to argue that the Eucharist was the centre of her mysticism" ("Continental Tradition" 165). I, however, disagree with the former statement and am, essentially, arguing to support the latter. Not only does Margery's faith in the Eucharist provide her with a literal representation of paradox and coincidence, it also supplies a figurative representation of her own relationship to her world.
Chapter 2 : Crossing the Chasm

As indicated at the end of the preceding chapter, Karma Lochrie describes Margery Kempe’s character as one who, through her behaviour, inhabits the via paradoxica. Lochrie also associates Margery, and the women mystics in general, with a type of physical chasm which she refers to as the “fissure”:

If woman is identified with the flesh, and specifically, fissured flesh, then the woman writer potentially occupies the site of rupture, where excess and unbridled affections threaten the masculine idea of integrity of the body. A woman writer such as Kempe brings this fissure into language--into the text--thereby destabilizing it and at the same time offering a place for access to the sacred.

(Translations 6)

Lochrie’s concept of the fissure is based on various historical, and often misogynistic, beliefs concerning women’s flesh; her argument focuses on how Margery breaks away from tradition and uses her “fissured flesh” as a means of disruption. Although I intend neither to expand nor disprove Lochrie’s premise of a bodily fissure, I do plan to complement her argument by examining the sites of rhetorical fissure built into Margery’s Book.
Here I do not mean "rhetorical" simply in terms of rhetorical figures—although, as seen in the preceding chapter, such specific use of the word has been (and will again be) implemented; instead I refer to the manner in which Margery constructs her Creature and the events in her Creature's life not only to point toward or re-present the chasm between the physical and spiritual worlds, but actually to become an icon of a bridge over that chasm—an icon of the point of crossing. Hence, this chapter will expand upon the concepts raised in Chapter One by further theorizing the chasm, the liminal thresholds within it and, finally, the bridge over that chasm to examine how Margery's Creature represents what Lochrie has termed "a place for access to the sacred."

In Margery's Book, the Creature's voyages into the chasm between the human and the divine can be compared metaphorically with her voyages across the sea between two lands. As a necessary part of her pilgrimages, the Creature crosses the sea on several occasions. Such journeys across the sea can be perilous; moreover, once the vastness has been entered, all familiar territory is left behind, replaced by what I referred to in Chapter One as a "neutral zone" between two opposites. Plagued by winds and tempests, fearing for her life, Margery's Creature is tossed about in the sea until she seizes faith in God's power and He answers
her prayers for a safe journey. She endures this necessary part of her pilgrimages in order that she may reach and return from the holy lands. Similarly, she endures the weeping, crying, and suffering sent by God in order that she may enter and return from the figurative sea. Just as she might stagger on a ship tossed about by "swech stormys & tempestys bat bei wendyn alle to a ben perischyd" (229.16-17), Margery staggers "as a drunkyn man" when the Lord speaks in her soul, and goes "waueryng on ech syde as it had ben a dronkyn woman...so sor bat vn-ethe sche myth stondyn on hir feet for be fervower of lofe" during contemplation of Christ (98.29, 196.15-18). ¹ Given that she readily confuses the literal and the figurative, Margery's literal journey across the sea can also have a figurative meaning associated with a "waueryng" state of turning between opposites.

Christ, at the end of a long speech to the Creature, mentions that He has shown her things on both sides of the sea: "'Dowtyr, for alle bes cawsys & many ofer cawsys & benefetys whch I haue schewyd for be on his half be see & on jon half be ssee, bu hast gret cawse to louyn me'"

(161.20-3). Christ may be speaking of the literal sea here;

¹See also passage (quoted in my Introduction) where Margery describes the Creature in a similar manner: "as a drunkyn man sche turnyd hir fyrst on be o syde & sithyn on be ofer wyth gret wepyng & gret sobbyng, un-mythy to kepyn hir-s'life in stabilnes for be unquwenschabl fyer of lofe whch brent ful sor in hir sowle" (98.26-33).
however, the reference could also be figurative and, in that sense, refer to the realm in which the Creature experiences her visions. Although Wolfgang Riehle notes that metaphors comparing God with the sea were relatively rare in English writings, he explains that, in continental writings, they were quite “popular in the mysticism of the High Middle Ages” and notes that some of these continental writings were available in Middle English translation (83). He then quotes examples of “sea” metaphors from various translations of continental works and, later, refers to the continental concept of union within “the sea of God” and the “sea of divine love” (140). Although the texts mentioned by Riehle are not those specifically mentioned by Margery as works with which she is familiar,² the possibility still exists that she encountered, understood, and made use of the “sea” in a figurative sense to refer to the divinity or, more specifically in her Book, to the chasm between the human and the divine realms.

One condition for departure into the chasm is, of course, the ability to leave the world behind. Margery’s Creature must forsake “be worshipys of be world” and “yeuy. a-vey al hit good & makyn hit bar” for Christ’s love (11.8-9, 92.14-15). On several occasions she makes claims to have done just that: she maintains, “be be worship of be worldly

²As discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, these works include those listed by Margery on pages 39 and 153-4 of her Book.
I sett ryth nowt” (138.7-8); she prays, “make my sowle ded to alle be joyis of bis world” (253.20-2); she even mentions a time when she “had fully left be world” (208.32). Clearly, Margery’s Creature desires to leave the world; just as clearly, Margery herself never literally accomplished this feat. If she had, she would neither still be praying for it (in the persona of her Creature) nor writing her Book at all. Moreover, as has been touched on in Chapter One of this dissertation and will be covered in more detail in subsequent chapters, Margery continually uses worldly items to point toward the divinity.

Margery may, however, aspire to leave the world in a figurative sense. That is, Margery could use references to leaving the literal world as metaphors for a journey into the spiritual realm. Yet even the figurative act of leaving the world (that is, in an act associated with the mind rather than with the physical body) would require Margery and her Creature to forget completely the world on a conscious level. Such a concept of suspending the self-conscious is discussed by Ross in the context of apophatic prayer. Ross acknowledges “the complete silence of suspended self-consciousness” as being “the one reality that language cannot construct” (Ross 333). By “complete silence” Ross does not refer to “mere anti-noise,” but to the absolute unknowing beyond consciousness (333). Ross
does refer to this elusive process as a "reality"; hence, as when contemplating the divinity, one must have faith that a suspension of self-consciousness is possible even though "[t]his silence...cannot be achieved in any sense or grasped by any means" (334). At the point of writing her Book, Margery could not have had conscious memory of ever having literally or figuratively "fully left Be wor'" (208.32). Margery's only recourse was to speak figuratively of something her Creature desires or believes to be literally true.

In order to expound further upon the concept of suspended self-consciousness as it is represented in Margery's Book, I must first quote Ross at length. Ross, incidentally, believes that "deconstructionist notions of God are notoriously unsophisticated" (333). I take this to mean that whereas a deconstructionist (like Thomson, quoted in Chapter One) may contend that God does not exist, Ross would contend that God does exist—"reality"—but resides in a dimension to which human beings do not have conscious access. That is, she proposes the possibility of entering a state of absolute silence beyond what we consciously recognize in this dimension.

Ross maintains, moreover, that this "silence" can be represented within texts:

   [C]ertain kinds of text subtly evacuate the mind into essential silence through various
literary devices, some of which are apophatic images that bestow, however fleetingly, minute tastes of its fulness; that is to say, these texts are capable of delivering the reader or listener for a nano-second to the threshold of absolute and refulgent silence. (335-36)

As discussed in Chapter One, Margery's text is rhetorically structured on paradox, a literary device capable of representing the apophatic moment. Hence, her Book holds within its rhetorical iconography the potential of delivering its reader to the threshold of silence. What remains to be examined, however, are the places in the text where Margery suggests, through a type of verbal iconography, her Creature's encounters with silence. Given what we have examined with regard to silence and the suspension of self-consciousness thus far, a direct reference to silence may point toward its possibility, but it cannot re-present the state nor re-create an apophatic threshold. Margery's use of the word "sylens" when she writes, "be creatur kept sylens in hir sowle," or "bou xuldist not plesyn me so wel as bou dost whan bou art in silens," does not effectively describe anything more than what Ross would call "mere anti-noise" (86.19, 89.23-4; Ross 333).

In her argument against the possibility of self-consciously describing the suspension of self-consciousness, Maggie Ross explains:
The complete suspension of self-consciousness can be described only in terms of what the restoration of self-consciousness feels like, and since many theologians are unused to thinking theologically in terms of feeling, they appear to forget that some statements that appear theological may in fact be describing what the restoration of self-consciousness feels like qua the body. (338)

According to this theory, even the Creature’s confusion of the literal and the figurative would nonetheless be moments of self-consciousness—at least, this is true for the moments within the chasm that she remembers and/or attempts to put into language. But what of those moments that she cannot remember? Is it possible that a suspension of self-consciousness would result in a realization that something is missing—that is, in a lack of feeling.

I realize that even the concept of a lack is a construction of human intellect and, as with all words used in an effort to point to the ineffable, must be written under erasure. Using terminology suggestive of a negative state of being holds the same risk as using terminology suggestive of a positive state of being. Neither can represent the absolute truth. As Thomson explains in relation to God, “All of one’s conceptions of God must be systematically deleted; nevertheless, affirmation must continually take place to offset the danger of thinking that even one’s deleted version of God is a correct one. Discourse is thereby perpetuated” (111). With this in mind,
I suggest that, along with her figurative use of literal, positive images for the Creature's experiences (such as her claim to have left the world), Margery describes her Creature's negative experiences—that is, experiences beyond her consciousness.

Whether such experiences are possible or not, Margery's Creature nonetheless has encountered situations where her conscious perceptions have failed. Specifically, these instances involve memory lapses and time distortions. Margery describes her Creature's experience of contemplation in a manner reminiscent of someone explaining a dream:

3yf on of hir confessowrys come to hir whan sche roys vp newly fro hir contemplacyon er ellys fro hir meditacyon, sche cowde a telde hym meche thynge of þe dalyawnc þat owr Lord dalyid to hir sowle, & in a short tyme aftyr sche had forgetyn þe most party þerof & ny [nearly] everydeel. (201.39-202.5)

By her own admission, the Creature's visions are elusive; upon return to her conscious, waking state, almost all of the details fade. If this were the case, this quotation forces one to wonder how Margery (if indeed the events are autobiographical) could remember anything after waiting twenty years before writing it down; it thereby lends support to my argument in Chapter One that Margery has virtually invented her entire Book. Yet the quotation also suggests that the experience of contemplation, at least on some occasions, occurs in a dimension separated from regular
consciousness—one which rapidly results in a mental lacuna upon waking. Afterward, the Creature remembers part of her experience and is consciously aware that something else happened, but she remembers nothing about that something else.

Moreover, Margery’s Creature experiences time distortions that create a similar effect. These distortions are of two types: in one, she confuses time; in the other, she loses it. In response to a man who (in an effort to stop her from crying) reminds Margery that Christ died long ago, she responds, “Sir, hys deth is as fresch to me as he had deyd bis same day, & so me thynkyth it awt to be to gow & to alle Cristen pepil” (146.13-15). For Margery’s Creature, past and present coincide to form a single, eternal moment focused on the Crucifixion. As with the confusion between the literal and the figurative, the simultaneity of past and present occurs as the apophatic moment.

Margery’s Creature is also prone to the phenomenon of time going “a-vey sche wist not how” (215.27-8). She explains how she “supposyd sumtyme of v owrye or vj owrye it had not ben pe space of an owr” (215.23-5). Certainly, many people who would not call themselves mystics have experienced instances of both forgetfulness and this type of time distortion. However, within Margery’s so-called
mystical text, the presence of memory and time distortions is significant; through them, she represents the possibility of a gap or chasm outside the accepted realm of conscious experience. Ross refers to these sorts of distortion as “time dropping out of mind” and relates them directly to “the complete suspension of self-consciousness” (337). Margery, by suggesting that her Creature forgets memories and escapes time, creates further paradoxes and again points rhetorically toward the apophatic.

As quoted above, Ross refers to the ability of some texts to deliver the reader “for a nano-second to the threshold of absolute and refulgent silence” (336). The concept of being on the threshold is an integral part of mysticism and mystical writing. Presumably, the threshold represents the liminal point after which, once one enters suspended self-consciousness, nothing can be consciously known. Gillespie theorizes delivery to the threshold as the purpose of mystical writing:

Mystical language seeks to deliver us to the threshold of ineffability. Mystical imagery seeks to deliver us to the brink of the apophatic. Together they constitute a repertoire of liminal signifiers which gesture beyond themselves into the realm of unmediated wisdom and the paradise of the Transcendental Signified from which we have been excluded by the fall. Mystical writing can only ever be about thresholds: the thresholds of language, the thresholds of perception, the thresholds of interpretation. (“Postcards” 140-1)
Before further investigation into the potential effect of the language and imagery of Margery's text on the reader, I would like to examine a type of threshold that Margery's Creature repeatedly nears. Certainly, the coincidences and chasms discussed thus far can be considered in terms of thresholds; however, I am here referring specifically to the Creature's severe sicknesses and near encounters with death.

Prior to the Creature's transformation out of her life of sin, she was "touched be the h. of owyr Lord wyth grett bodily sekenesse, wher-thorw sche lost reson & her wyttes a long tym tyl ower Lord be grace restoryd her a-gelyn" (2.6-9). Furthermore, during this period she was in such agony that she "wold a fordon hir-self many a tym" (8.1). Not only does Margery's Creature lose her normal state of conscious reasoning, but also she is on the brink of attempting suicide. From the outset of her Book, Margery places the Creature on a threshold from which, once completely crossed, she can never return. From this threshold Margery's Creature can gesture toward a state of Being after death—a state of which she has no conscious recognition.3

3Elizabeth Petroff in her study *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* illustrates that illness is one of "two central images for women's bodies" in devotional texts; the other is virginity (37). Petroff also discusses what she calls "mystical death" with reference to Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, and Julian of Norwich (amongst others) (40). Although she does not discuss these ideas in relation to the threshold of the apophatic, she nonetheless illustrates their frequency in mystical writing. A detailed comparison of the rhetorical construction of illness and mystical death in the writing of all mystical texts still
Such near-death thresholds reappear throughout the text. Early on in the Book, when the Creature is hit on the head by a falling beam and stone, "sche ferd as sche had be deed a lytyl whyle" (21.29-30). Much later, upon returning from a pilgrimage, "God ponyschyd hir wyth many gret & diuers sekenes. Sche had be flyx a long tyme tyl sche was anoyntyd, wenyng tc a be deed" (137.12-13).\(^4\) Margery's Creature believes here and elsewhere that she is literally about to die. Indeed, in the first example, she feared she had died. As in moments of time loss, in these near-death experiences Margery's Creature could simply be aware of a temporary absence from consciousness. She could not possibly believe herself to be dead (if she really were dead) since in the very act of believing she would be consciously alive. Yet, in suggesting the possibility of her Creature's conscious recognition of death, Margery creates still another paradox.

Along with references to the literal state of death, Margery uses the concept of death rhetorically; the Creature often cries, "I dey, I dey" for figurative emphasis during rapturous contemplations (107.35).\(^5\) During meditation on the Crucifixion, the Creature falls to the ground "wondyrfully turnyng & wrestyng hir body on euer y syde,

\(^{\text{need to be done. This outline of Margery's technique is merely a starting point.}}\)

\(^{\text{\textsuperscript{4}See also 104.29-31.}}\)

\(^{\text{\textsuperscript{5}See also 40.5-6.}}\)
spredyng hir armys a-brode as 3yf sche xulde a deyd” (70.18-20). Significantly, in terms of the discussion from Chapter One, in this quotation Margery rhetorically connects the word “turnyng” with death. As with the apostrophic effect of turning, death would cause all preceding time and place to be totally interrupted; indeed, time and space as we know it would permanently cease to exist. Although Margery’s Creature cannot be said to have literally died, Margery nonetheless appears to view near-death, both literally and figuratively, as a liminal state reached during times of extreme physical or emotional turmoil. For rhetorical purposes, she uses the concept of death to represent a threshold of suspended self-consciousness.

Since the Creature does not literally die, she can claim a type of miraculous recovery. Hence, after eating a meal alone (and presumably being poisoned), “owyr Lord mad hir so seke bat sche wend to a be ded, & sythyn sodeynly he mad hir hool a-3en” (66.12-13). Elsewhere she explains, “sche was many tyme seke whyl bis tretys was in writyng, and as sone as sche wolde gon a-bowte be writyng of bis tretys, sche was heil & hoole sodeynly” (219.13-15). 6 Like Julian

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6Elizabeth Petroff also discussed “Illness as the Manifestation of a Conflict Related to Writing” in the Introduction to her work on visionary literature (42-44). Although she mentions Margery, she does not quote from the Book. Instead, she illustrates her argument with the works of Gertrude the Great and Marguerite d'Gingl. In the case of the latter, Marguerite recovers (like Margery) from near death once she begins to write her book. In Margery’s text, this feature acts as one of several examples of sudden exchange between sickness and health.
of Norwich’s oscillation between well and woe during her visions, Margery (both as the writer and the Creature) remains in a state of flux between near-death and sudden recovery throughout the course of her *Book*. Consequently, death and life (or sickness and recovery) can be viewed in terms of the structural *contentio* described in Chapter One of this dissertation.

In summary, both the Creature’s literal and rhetorical brushes with death can be read figuratively in terms of representing, within the text, the threshold of the apophatic. Both bodily sickness and ghostly contemplation transport Margery’s Creature into this state. Moreover, she repeatedly experiences sudden recoveries to her original state—usually attributed to divine intervention. Through the Creature’s fluctuating states, Margery extends a gesture toward an imitation of Christ. Like Christ, the Creature returns to life after having been “deed a lytyl whyle” (21.30). Furthermore, again like Christ, she is willing to suffer the “most schamful deth bat euyr myth any man suffyr in weorde” and, thereafter, in regard to the even-Christians who condemned her, “han her sowlys sauwd fro euyr-leustyng

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7 Julian will be discussed in detail in Chapters 4 & 5 of this dissertation.  
8 See especially the beginning of Chapter 56 where Margery recounts a series of illnesses and recoveries: “And anon aftyr sche had a gret seke... in hir heuyd... and sithyn in hir bakke bat sche feryd a lost hir wit... bes-thorw. Altywrarde, when sche was recuryd of alle bes sekenesys, in schort tyme folwyd an-öfer sekenes...” (137.17-20).
dampnacyon" (142.1-3). In this sense, Margery depicts a Creature who points toward two paradoxes of her faith—the hypostatic union of God and man and the simultaneity of death and rebirth. In Thomson's words, "as the verbum Dei, Christ is the perfect coincidence of sign and signified" (107). Undoubtedly, Margery is not another Christ; nonetheless, she creates a Creature who becomes yet another icon pointing toward Him.

From the beginning of her Book, Margery associates her Creature with iconography reminiscent of Christ's Passion. As a permanent reminder of her desire to kill herself, Margery's Creature "buth her owen hand so voyantly bat it was seen al hir lyfe afyrt. And also sche roof hir skyn on hir body a-zen hir her wyth hir nayles spotowsly" (8.3-5). Through her own actions, the Creature has marked herself with a visible wound; moreover, although she literally refers to finger-nails, the word "nayles" is rhetorically suggestive of the nails used to wound Christ."

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9 Margery does refer to the literal nails used to wound Christ in her description of the Crucifixion: "A a-nen attyr ahe behal: how the cruel Ieyde leydyng his precyous body to the Crosse & sityn tokyn a long nayle, a raw & a boistowes [rough & violent], & sey to hys on hand & with gret violens & cruic: a thei dreyyn it thorw hys hunde" (152.4-15; emphasis added). "Nails" (with its variant spellings) is defined in the Middle English Dictionary both as fingernails and as the nails used in the Crucifixion of Christ. Examples are given from numerous and varied medieval sources which include oaths (such as "bi goddes dore naile") and figurative uses in proverbial expressions. As an example of the latter, the MED cites Margery Kempe, "I xal so stympyn the nayl on the hed" (152.28). See Margery's uses of "naylyd" at 51.34 and 51.31, both of which refer to Christ being nailed to the Cross.
Hence, Margery's Creature suffers prior to her transformation in a manner iconographically reminiscent of Christ's suffering before death.

The icon of the wound, in addition to its direct association with Christ, can readily be connected with the theoretical iconography of the gap (a chasm, or absence), here located within the flesh. Lochrie, again in terms of her argument about women occupying the site of rupture, claims, "[f]rom the fissured flesh comes the female mystic's language of suffering, words derived from wounds of the soul" (47). Margery's Creature is doubly fissured in that she is not only naturally ruptured in her women's flesh, but she purposely ruptures herself anew. She who would readily suffer for Christ, begins her spiritual journey through an act which, at least rhetorically, parallels the iconography of Christ's suffering. Only after inflicting the wound during suffering can the Creature herself begin to feel healed by Christ's love.

Glasscoe explains that "[t]he familiar iconography of Christ's wounded side in both art and literature was understood sacramentally as an icon of the means by which man is returned to the love of God" (Games 238). Riehle notes, moreover, that "[t]he wound of Christ...was interpreted as the gateway to his heart and as a precondition for the union with God" (46); this wound, was
understood as "an opening through which it is possible for the mystical lover to enter into his beloved and thus become completely one with him" (46). Within Margery's Book only a few lines of text separate the Creature's action of self-inflicted wounding from Christ's first appearance to her. Through her wound, the Creature opens a space for Christ and His love to enter her, just as His wound is open to her. In other words, if Christ's wounds in art and literature are an iconographic means for the Creature to attain God's love, her own wound could be yet another iconographic representation of that means upon her own body (and a rhetorical representation of it in her text).¹⁰

Later, Christ tells the Creature, "pou art wraeyn in myn handys & my fete" (30.12-13); she is, in other words, written into His wounds. Lochrie theorizes the idea of mutual exchange in terms of the mystic's text being inscribed in Christ's body and vice versa. She suggests, with reference to Margery being written in Christ's hands and feet, that "[Christ's] body is a virtual text of his recollection of [Margery]" and that "her Book likewise becomes written into his wounds, so that readers of it are returned to the Christic body as the primary text"

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¹⁰With regard to openings suggestive of the wound, I note, in passing, the image in medieval Christian art of the mandorla—which is the almond shaped aureole which "surrounds the body of the person depicted" (Ferguson 268). This image frequently surrounds Christ and visually suggests an opening through which Christ moves between the human and divine worlds.
(Translations 176). Although I agree with Lochrie's argument of mutual exchange, my argument takes a different turn in that I speak of Margery's self-inflicted wound. I suggest that she purposely creates an iconographical space on her own body, parallel in its symbolic associations to Christ's wounds, through which this mutual exchange can occur. Rhetorically, as in her literal and figurative relationship with the Sacrament as both eater and eaten, Margery portrays her Creature as one who not only observes and becomes written into Christ's wounds (indeed, as a sinner, has a part in His wounding), but also becomes the wounded.

Margery ventures to create for her Creature a role which, if not in imitation of the divinity, is certainly above and beyond that of the average human. Indeed, with regard to Margery's Creature, the Archbishop proclaims, "'I leue Ær was neuyr woman in Inglond so ferd wyth-Áel as sche is & hath ben'" (134.17-18). She acts differently than anyone else and, for daring to express this individuality, she is persecuted; yet through this persecution on earth, the Creature believes she gains special rewards in heaven. Indeed, as I will outline, Margery places herself both literally and figuratively within the divine family. On a metaphorical level, Margery assigns for her Creature various familial roles in relation to Christ. Christ proclaims, "'I
proeve bat bow art a very dowtyr to me & a modyr also, a syster, a wyfe, and a spowse, wyntessyng be Gospel wher owyr Lord seyth to hys dysciples, "He bat doth be wyl of my Fadyr in Heuyn he is bothyn modyr, brodyr, & syster vn-to me" (31.22-6). In this example, as elsewhere in the Book, the familial relationships are used in a figurative manner to metaphorically represent how Margery's Creature should act (or has acted) toward Christ. Margery merely appropriates biblical language and metaphorical concepts for her own purposes.

However, Margery's Creature also takes part in a literal marriage to God; although this marriage is ghostly, it does not appear to be a mere figurative representation of appropriate behaviour. Outrightly, God says to Margery, "'Dowtyr, I wil han be weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn be my preuyteys & my cownselys, for bu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende'" (86.16-19). In response, "be creatur kept sylens in hir sowle & asweryd not" (86.19). This marriage proposal, complete with the entire ceremony presented thereafter, is certainly a rhetorical (and therefore figurative) construction within the text; however, as such, it represents the apophatic ideal of complete union with God. Appropriately, Margery's immediate response is silence and, therefore, can also be read as another icon.

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11 See also 81.30-33, 90.22, 91.10-11, 213.10-11, 213.20-1.
pointing toward the ineffable concept of suspended self-consciousness discussed earlier.

Thus Margery uses language associated with earthly relationships to represent both literally and figuratively her relationship with God and Christ. Margery uses the literal (that is, earthly relationships) figuratively to suggest how the Creature should behave toward Christ and the figurative (that is, the rhetorically constructed marriage to God) to point to the ineffable, apophatic moment of union. Margery’s Creature, moreover, has virtually given up her literal marriage (to her earthly husband) in order to wed God. In this sense, Margery constructs yet another paradox: one must give up marriage in order to attain it. Or, as Petroff explains in relation to mysticism and virginity, mystical writers “suggest the paradox that virginity in this world is rewarded by marriage to the divine” (34). Although Margery’s Creature is certainly not a virgin, she knows that Christ loves wives as well as maidens (49.1-8); moreover, she readily foregoes sexual relations with her earthly husband in order to obey this bidding from Christ: “& erfor most I nedys by homly wyth be & lyn in bi bed wyth be.... & erfor bu maystboldly take me in be armys of bi sowle & kyssen my mouth” (90.17-25).

Margery, through the representation of the Creature’s human and divine marriages, once again combines the physical
and the spiritual in one person. The Creature explains to her husband, “I may not deny gow my body, but be lofe of myn hert & myn affeccioun is drawyn from alle erdly creaturys & sett only in God” (12.4-6). Margery aims for a separation between the spiritual and the physical and, in doing so, depicts a Creature who simultaneously represents both. Nevertheless, Margery as author remains aware that a complete “oneness,” which can only take place within the apophatic moment, will only truly be hers after death. During meditation on the crucifix the Creature states that her mind is “al holy takyn owt of al erdly thyngys & set al in gostly thyngys, preying & desyryng bat sche myth at be last han be ful syght of hym in Heuyn whch is boþin God & man in oo persone” (187.15-19). In this quotation, at the same time that Margery rhetorically gestures toward an impossible feat through contentio, she admits that complete sight of Christ will remain impossible until the last.

In a dualistic move of rhetorical ingenuity similar to those discussed thus far, Margery portrays her Creature as one who both enters the spiritual world physically and contains a spiritual world within her physical body. When Margery’s Creature enters the world of her contemplations, she often does so as a participant rather than as a mere observer. Hence, in her meditation on Mary, she actually becomes her servant, procuring lodging, clothing, and food
for Mary and the Christ child (19.10-23). During another meditation on Christ and Mary, she weeps and cries so much that the "apostelys comawndyd hir to cesyn & be stille" (175.9). The Creature's behaviour, so often reprimanded in the literal world, is carried over into the realm of contemplation. Moreover, she presumes to explain to the apostles why she is crying, thereby suggesting that her actions are worthy—perhaps even worthier than theirs! On yet another occasion, the Creature comforts Mary before the Crucifixion and tells her to rise up and follow her blessed Son. Throughout her meditations, the Creature actively participates in biblical events. Margery places her Creature into a figurative situation—that is, into an imaginative re-creation of biblical events.

Yet Margery also uses aspects of the literal world as figurative representations of a spiritual world within her Creature. For instance, the Creature witnesses the Crucifixion in "ße cite of hir sowle" (68.16). Likewise, Christ, while tabulating the Creature's prayers and contemplations, says she prays to holy virgins

"ßei xulde arayn ße chawmbre of ßi sowle wyth many fayr flowerys & wyth many swete spicys ßat I myth restynßerin. ßerßermor ßu thynkist sumtyme, dowtyr, as ßow ßu haddyst a cuschyn of gold, an-ßer of red veluet, ße thryd of white sylke in thy sowle." (210.30-5)
Each of these cushions represents one part of the Trinity. Within herself, Margery's Creature has a chamber wherein Christ--indeed, the entire Trinity--can reside. Christ even thanks the Creature, as He says, "'for as many tymys as þú hast bathyd me in þi sowle at hom in þi chambre as þow I had be þer present in my Manhod'" (214.1-3). Within the Creature lies a bath, cushions, a chamber, even an entire city, in which she can observe and interact with the divinity. Margery takes what she knows from the world her body is literally in and relocates it, figuratively, inside of her Creature.

The Creature actually becomes a bridge between the human and the divine in that she represents a body through which the divinity can enter into the literal world, albeit a world figuratively created. Hence, at one and the same time that Margery enters the spiritual world (of contemplation) as an active participant, the spiritual world enters her chamber and city. The act is mutual (or, as will be discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation, chiastic): she goes to Christ and He comes to her. Through this rhetorical construction Margery re-presents the eternal union which she faithfully believes awaits her "at þe last."

In yet another such construction, Margery's Creature is given a parallel role to Christ's. Christ, who has the
power to turn everything upside down in her life,\textsuperscript{12} tells the Creature, "I haue ordeyned he to be a merowr a-mongys hem" (186.13–14).\textsuperscript{13} Whereas Christ can reverse the course of events by turning them upside down, Margery's Creature is told that she too—at least figuratively, as a mirror—has the power to reverse things by reflecting them "ack upon themselves. Specifically, Christ refers to Margery's ability to save people's souls from damnation, even people who will not "heryn of sorwe ne of contricyon" and who "lyn in poyn of deth" (186.17, 186.23). She therefore is given the ability to imitate Christ's actions of reversal. Lochrie explains this power in terms of Margery's disruption of order through excessive tears and laughter:

She is thus an inverted mirror—a holy fool—whose mystical project is the world's salvation through dis-ease, even laughter. She endeavors to do to others what Christ did to her own life, to de-stabilize them so that they may find the way to high perfection through their own dis-ease. (157)

In this sense, Margery's Creature, like the Word of God, is again an iconographical bridge leading people from a worldly life of sin into "high perfection." She is not only the one reversed, but the one capable of instigating reversal.

\textsuperscript{12}See 1.27 and 182.30–31.
\textsuperscript{13}According to the Middle English Dictionary, "mirror" (with its variant spellings) has a figurative definition (listed as 1.f) referring to "God, Christ, or the divine goodness, power or glory." The MED also lists Margery's use (as quoted above) under definition 3.a: "A model of good or virtuous conduct."
With regard to Margery's Creature and other chosen souls, Christ tells her, "'I turne Æ erthe of her hertys vp-so-down'" (182.30-1). Figuratively, the Creature has the entire world inside herself; once again she is both physically living in the literal world and has the figurative world living within her physical body. With her numerous twists and turns of metaphor, Margery succeeds (in all of the preceding examples) at confusing the literal and the figurative within her Creature. The Creature is not simply an icon of a body wavering between two opposite states, as discussed in Chapter One; instead, and in addition, she is an icon of the very place of meeting--an iconographical bridge over the chasm. She represents the space where one can die and yet live, be in the world and yet be the world, be the changed and the changer.

Gillespie and Ross claim, "The aspiration of mystical longing is to become the word uttered by God, the prayer prayed by God through us. The Word becomes the bridge between voice and silence, the means of passing over from earthly signification to unmediated truth" (55). Although it is impossible for Margery herself to become such an apophatic space, she can nonetheless depict her Creature as a figurative representation of the Word or a rhetorically constructed icon of the point where humanity and divinity meet. Throughout the Book, Margery Kempe's Creature can be
seen in three ways: as one who exists completely in the bodily form, as one who fluctuates between the bodily and the ghostly, and as one who iconographically represents the apophatic point of crossing between the two.
Chapter 3: Sign Language and Rhetorical Iconography

Women's spirituality in the Middle Ages was "very evidently rooted in the affective piety stimulated by the visual iconography of the Incarnation" (Glasscoe, Games 49). Medieval iconography, in other words, potentially had a direct influence on the mystics, their visions and, presumably, their mystical writing. I have argued in the preceding chapters that Margery Kempe constructs herself, in the persona of her Creature, as an icon gesturing toward the divine. I would like in this chapter to examine the function of other forms of iconography in Margery's Book, including the presence of traditional Christian imagery, the Creature's use of what may be termed sign language, and Margery's use of chiasmus as a complex rhetorical icon.

In addition to creating a Creature who, throughout the course of the Book, becomes a icon herself, Margery often places the traditional Christian icons of wounds and blood in the foreground of a scene; likewise, in the tradition of other mystics including Richard Rolle, she repeatedly refers to her Creature's mystical rapture as the fire of love. Often such traditional images are joined together within a single passage:
Sche had so very contemplacyon in þe sygth of hir sowle as yf Crist had hangyn befor hir bodily eye in hys manhode. & whan...it was grawntyd þis creatyr to beholdyn so verily hys precyows tendyr body...mor ful of woundys þan euyr was duffehows of holys, hangyng vp-on þe cros wyth þe corwn of thorn up-on hys heuyd...þe reuerys of blood flowyng owt plentevowsly of euerie membre...þan sche fel down & cryed wyth lowde voys, wondyrfully turnyng & wrestyng...þese bodily mevyngys for þe fyer of lofe þat brent so ferently in hir sowle. (70.5-22)

The images set out in this re-vision of the Passion scene are not necessarily divinely inspired. Indeed, most people of Margery’s day would have access to Passion imagery in one form or another whether through listening to sermons, contemplating church art, or viewing devotional theatre. Elizabeth Petroff discusses the advanced spiritual exercise of the “mental pilgrimage” and suggests that most of the visual imagery for these meditations “was provided by the pictorial cycles in the churches or by privately commissioned panel paintings” (6).

In other words, the Passion scene in Margery’s Book is yet another re-visioned artistic impression of material gleaned from traditional sources; its purpose, within the same tradition, would be to incite the reader to contemplate Christ through a type of verbal-visual stimuli. With regard to Margery’s detailed description in such scenes, Denise
Despres notes, "Whether Margery learned imaginative meditation from Nicholas Love's Myrrous of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ or oral gospel narratives is immaterial—like other laypeople, she was taught that imaginative visualization and extemporaneous creation of sacred scenes led her to the threshold of a more immediate spiritual realm than hitherto permitted to laypeople" (15). The intention of these scenes, then, is to stimulate the reader's love of Christ in order that s/he may someday experience a level of devotion (or fire of love) comparable to the writer's.

Marion Glasscoe also argues that Margery Kempe "[invests] familiar iconographical territory with personal significance" (Games 279). Glasscoe specifically refers here to Margery's tendency to see human suffering as "an icon of Christ's Passion" (Games 279). As previously discussed, during the process in which she witnesses human suffering and thereafter feels as if she is witnessing Christ's bodily suffering, Margery's Creature confuses the bodily and the ghostly; moreover, through her various iconographical associations with Christ and suffering, she herself becomes a central icon of the Book. Potentially, through contemplation on the Creature as a point of confusion and/or as an iconographical bridge to the apophatic, the reader, albeit momentarily, can also gain access to the threshold of suspended self-consciousness. As
Gillespie and Ross suggest, "representational images can become springboards into the apophatic. Intense, unwavering attention to an image can cause it to lose its primary figural significance" (57). Moreover, in the sense that the Creature, as an icon, never settles into one particular figural significance, she too can be seen as such a springboard into the apophatic. The iconography in the Book of Margery Kempe functions for the reader both to stimulate the love of Christ and to gesture toward the apophatic.

Aside from being an icon for the reader, Margery's Creature also demonstrates how icons can be used as springboards; often a traditional icon will transport her into a visionary state or, at the very least, serve to further stimulate her love for Christ. When she has a ghostly sight of Christ's "woundys bledyng as fresch as bow he had ben scorgyd be-forn hir," she is immediately stimulated to increase her love for Him (207.17-19); as she puts it, "hir loue was more encresyd to-owr-Lord-ward" (207.22-3). The stimulation of love for Christ upon contemplation of His wounds cannot be considered in itself apophatic since her act of loving is still a conscious process; however, Margery does use the term "as bow" once again and, as previously discussed, thereby acknowledges that what she sees is not Christ while simultaneously escaping direct referentiality between what the Creature
figuratively sees and the literal act of Christ's scourging. Given that the wounds in this instance are not something the Creature sees bodily or literally (as she would, for example, if she were looking at a painting), but instead are seen in her ghostly eye and, moreover, are described figuratively, it becomes clear that Margery views iconography as something that is not limited to one state or the other. For Margery, icons are present in both the bodily and the ghostly worlds.

Indeed, the Creature's accounts of her ghostly visions abound in references to traditional iconography of the Christian faith including Christ's wounds, His blood, and the crucifix. Jeffrey Hamburger suggests that for medieval authors "[i]magery served a didactic or mnemonic function" (162). In this sense, the Creature's ghostly visions, focused as they are on traditional Christian iconography, may in turn act as memory triggers, stimulating through that familiar iconography a continued devotion to her knowledge of the Christian faith once she re-turns to her bodily state. Each vision, on the other hand, may be a consciously constructed "mental pilgrimage" (of the type Elizabeth Petroff discusses), stimulated beforehand by the memory of Christian iconography. In the confused world of Margery's Creature, determining whether the bodily influences the content of the ghostly or whether the ghostly
influences interpretation of the bodily eventually becomes an impossible task. All the Creature's so-called visions are bodily, since they are consciously remembered (and written down); however, in her mind they are distinguished through some subtle means and represent two distinct ways of seeing the world. For her, the only consistency between the bodily state and the ghostly state is the iconography of her faith. In this sense, the icons come to represent not only an aspect of the faith, but a means through which she may enter contemplation and, thereby, be transported between the bodily and the ghostly.

In addition to such ghostly or visionary representations of Christian iconography, Margery's Creature also comments on a bodily sight of a literal, wooden relic of the Christ child. She describes a scene that she observes involving a woman with the relic:

[S]che toke owt be ymage owt of hir chist & sett it in worshepful wyfys lappys. & bee wold puttyn schirty s berup-on & kyssyn it as berup-on & kyssyn it as bee it had ben God hym-selve. & whan bee creatur sey bee worshep & bee reuerens pat bee dedyn to bee ymage, sche was takyn wyth swet deucoyon & sweet meditacyons pat sche wept wyth gret sobbyng & lowde crying. (77.31-78.1)

The Creature's fits of weeping are not caused by the relic itself, but by the faith she sees in the other women toward the relic. On this particular occasion, unlike the numerous times she sees a real child and is thrown into a visionary
state in which she feels as if the child were the Christ child Himself, the Creature does not confuse the bodily and the ghostly. She does not, moreover, worship this "ymage" as Christ. These distinctions in Margery's behaviour are important in light of contemporary debates on image making.¹ During the Middle Ages, the line between image and idol was thin enough to be debated. As Michael Camille explains,

[The] fundamental distinction between the image and its prototype was crucial to Christian theories of art and was constantly reiterated by writers on doctrine who stressed that images, without being God, may signify God. It was this which separated true from false representation and image from idol. (203)

Even when transported to a ghostly state where images are seen as if they are real, the Creature continues to claim access only to signification through the metaphorical language, not to a literal God. With regard to the wooden Christ, the Creature recognizes that this particular literal image is merely that--an image--and does not suggest that it looks as if it were the literal Christ.

Instead of thanking God for the relic, "sche thankyd God for-as-mech as sche saw þes creaturyr han so gret feyth in þat sche sey wyth hir bodily eye lych as sche had be-forn wyth hir gostly eye" (78.3-6). In other words, what becomes increasingly obvious is the Creature's (and, in the process,

¹See, for example, Margaret Aston's chapter on "Lollards and Images" in England's Iconoclasts: Laws Against Images.
Margery's belief that the faith itself is what is important, not the particular form taken by the instigator of that faith. Whether the springboard--to use Gillespie and Ross's term--is bodily or ghostly makes no difference as long as it incites faith in the observer--faith that the physical/literal icon is merely a figurative representation of an apophatic God. Viewed in this way, the traditional iconography re-presented in Margery's Book, though completely and obviously mere rhetorical construction, can nonetheless stimulate faith. Perhaps, to alter Gillespie and Ross's concept, it is the unwavering faith (along with unwavering attention to a particular image) that Margery believes acts as a springboard to the apophatic. After all, unwavering attention can only take one to a threshold, whereas unwavering faith can take one wherever one believes s/he goes. Paradoxically, even faith itself would have to be given up (or, at least, momentarily forgotten along with all other conscious properties) for an individual fully to enter a state of suspended self-consciousness. Although as Maggie Ross believes, "the icon is a catalyst for the suspension of self-consciousness," it and the faith its associations stimulate must disappear at the point of crossing (333). To act as a catalyst to the apophatic, the icon must simultaneously appear and disappear.
In reference to iconography in medieval art, Camille explains,

The concept of the figura, close to the modern Saussurian distinction between signifier and signified, meant that images were fine as long as they were only channels that diverted attention away from the materiality of the signifier and pointed the viewer to its transcendental meaning. (204)

Pointing is all an icon has the capability to do since it is not, in itself, transcendental. Moreover, although such medieval iconography appeared in art and churches to "divert attention" toward God, it also diverted attention (in another sense) toward the human body. Camille explains this link while commenting on the scene in Margery's Book about the woman and the wooden Christ child:

In the Middle Ages life and art could so interact that the distinction could disappear—both served in the imitatio Christi as people twisted their bodies into similitudes of suffering, empathizing so much with the joys and sorrows of God's Mother, as did Margery Kempe herself, that they became living representations of the prototype. (237)

Although, as I stated earlier, I do not believe that in this particular scene Margery's Creature confuses life and art, I nonetheless think Camille's observation is essential in understanding the Creature in general. Camille's latter statement (in which he claims that life and art interact) does not contradict the former (in which he explains the necessity of separating the materiality of the figura from
its higher meaning) if life itself is taken to be yet another figura. In other words, life, just as readily as a wooden image of the Christ child, can point to a transcendental meaning beyond itself. Margery’s life, represented iconographically in terms of her Creature, continually gestures toward a meaning beyond itself; the Creature is no less an image than any other image in the Book. Distinction between her life and her art disappears; everything becomes merely a sign (or, as shall be discussed, a “tokyn”) of something else, thereby never permanently corresponding to a primary figural significance.

For Margery’s Creature, communication from the divine often comes in the form of tokens. When the Creature sees “white thyngys flying al a-bowte hir on every syde as thykke in a maner as motys in the sunne,” she believes they “be-tokyn” angels (88.7-9, 88.21). Moreover, “Thys creatur had divers tokenys in hir bodily heryng. On was a maner of sownde as it had ben a peyr of belwys blowyn in hir ere” (90.34-36); to the Creature, this sound indicates the presence of the Holy Ghost. Even the storms and tempests are believed to be “tokenys” indicating divine decree (95.34).2 Other people believe that the stone that falls on the Creature is “a tokyn of wreth & veniawns” rather than

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2The word “tokyn” (“tokenys”) comes from the verb “betokenyth” (“be-tokyn” as quoted above) which is also used by Margery at 47.29: “Ban seyd bis creatur in hir throwt, ‘Lord, what betokenyth bis?’”
"any token of mercy er quemfulnes" (22.23-5). Everything, from natural events and bodily objects to ghostly sights and sounds, is taken as a "tokyn". In other words, the entire world of the Creature (and perhaps of Margery herself) points away from itself toward something other-than-itself. Even where the words "as if" are not used by Margery, they are nevertheless implied; the Creature's world denies permanent referentiality.

In two of the examples quoted above, Margery does use a type of simile when she writes of things in the manner of other things. She writes of seeing white things "in a maner as motys in the sunne" and of hearing something that "was a maner of sownde." The 'white things' are not motes in the sun and the sounds are not bellows blowing; they are merely a manner of those things. The tokens in these two examples, which all indicate some type of divine presence to the Creature, have no specific referential signifiers; that is, they signify the divinity without presenting a specific signifier in the first place. As with Julian's "hazelnut" example (discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation), here in Margery's rhetorical structure, "'[s]imultaneously we are being offered an image which does not exist" (Gillespie and Ross 67). Appropriately, this lack of an image represents something which cannot be spoken. Not only does the token point away from itself, but it points away from
one unknown (its own literal image) into another unknown (divine presence)—it is, therefore, doubly un-referential. In this sense, Margery has rhetorically accomplished what was considered (above) to be a paradoxical feat: she presents an image as a representation of (or catalyst into) an encounter with the divine, at the same time as she does not present one.

Margery's Creature also occasionally uses tokens to replace verbal language. One day, the Creature meets a woman named Margarete Florentyn who cannot speak English and with whom, therefore, the Creature cannot immediately communicate. Instead of conversing in English, they communicate "be syngnys er tokenys & in few comown wordys" (93.24-5). The Creature thereby demonstrates her own ability to communicate through a means other than her vernacular language. As Christ communicates to the Creature through tokens, the Creature uses such methods to communicate to others. At first one might be tempted to read the Creature's sign-language as a type of symbology in which, as Gillespie and Ross have said, symbols are "[f]reed from earthly systems and signs...[and] uttered without the help of lips" (57). However, in theory, this premise is incorrect. Even Gillespie eventually retracts his former statement when he again discusses images and symbols:

Syntax operates in thought and imagery as well as in language. Images, for example, work
within iconographical systems that attribute conventional valencies and excite easily codifiable responses. Even symbols and metaphors develop a decorum of procedure, a rhetorical framework, a circumference of accepted and convenient structure which serves to limit the play of their signification. While offering the possibility of limited escape from simple referentiality, figural and analogical tropes soon fossilize into programmatic and conventional triggers for stock responses. ("Postcards" 148)

Thus, even when using the language of tokens, Margery's Creature is not free from mediated expression; she never completely can be, but can only gesture toward an unmediated space as she does (or, more precisely, as Margery does) through the repetitive use of simile and shifting referentials.3

Nevertheless, the Creature's continual communication through tokens indicates her ability to transcend verbal language and replace it with more abstract means of expression. Furthermore, the Creature in yet another sense can be said to fluctuate between different (linguistic) realms, thereby confusing the literal (vernacular language) and the figurative (abstract language). For Margery, it appears that language is neither fixed nor stable. It is not surprising, therefore, that she claims a type of miracle

3I note, in passing, that early on in the Book, Margery's Creature is told by the Lord that she has "an earnest-peny of Heuyn" (18.3). An "earnest-peny" (according to the Meech & Allen glossary) is "a penny received as a pledge or security" (397). Thus, the Creature has been given, figuratively, a specific kind of token that signifies her connection with the divine realm.
involving language as pertinent to the writing of her Book. Margery's second scribe has completely given up on trying to read the original scribe's work until, because of a guilty conscience, he agrees to try once more while Margery prays for grace:

\[\text{Be preste, trustyng in hire prayers, be-gan to}\\ \text{redyn his booke, & it was mych mor esay, as hym}\\ \text{thouwt, ban it was be-forn-tym. & so he red it}\\ \text{ouyr be-forn his creatur every word, sche sum-}\\ \text{tym helpyng where any difficulte was. (5.8-12)}\]

Afterward, when the scribe's eyesight fails, that too is cured by prayers and the transcription continues. Margery presents her Book as a product of a divine inspiration which enabled the scribe to see and interpret otherwise illegible written words.

Another language miracle involves a German priest who acts as the Creature's confessor. Apparently this man cannot understand English; the Creature, however, decides to pray "\text{bat he myth han grace to vndirstondyn hir langage &}\\ \text{hir speche" (82.23-4). Miraculously, after only thirteen}\\ \text{days, "he vndirstod what sche seyd in Englysch to hym & sche}\\ \text{vndirstod what bat he seyd. & get he vndirstod not English}\\ \text{bat oþer men spokyn; bow bei spokyn be same wordys bat sche}\\ \text{spake, get he vndirstod hem not les ban sche spak hir-selffe"}\\ \text{(83.3-7). Later, the two of them prove they possess this}\]

\[\text{4I refer to "Margery" directly here rather than to "her Creature" because I am speaking of the writing of the Book rather than the characterization of the Creature.}\]
ability in front of others at a dinner party. In relation to the priest, Margery’s Creature is given the ability (and is seen by others) to speak and understand beyond the normal confines of human language.

Margery’s Creature also experiences the failure of verbal language, both in the sense that she cannot understand it and in the sense that she cannot find enough words to describe something. With regard to St. Bridget’s maiden, “sche cowd not vndirstondyn what sche seyd” and thus resorted to a translator (95.11-12). Apparently, the Creature cannot communicate “divinely” with everyone. On another occasion, upon seeing a male child with its mother as though she saw Christ and Mary, the Creature “had so many holy thowtys þat sche myth neuyr tellyn þe haluendel” (94.16-17). Likewise, at another time, the Creature has so many holy thoughts “þat sche cowde neuyr rehersyn but few of hem; it wer so holy & so hy þat sche was abaschyd to tellyn hem to any creatur” (201.33-5). In addition to the times (discussed in Chapter One) when the Creature cannot speak because her visions are simply unspeakable, these examples suggest another and slightly different problem. Here, the words may be available, but the Creature has neither the time, energy, nor frame of mind to describe them all. Not only does the Creature transcend verbal language in various ways, but verbal language also fails her on a number of
occasions. Paradoxically, all of this downplay of verbal language takes place within the vernacular language of the Book—at the same time as she transcends verbal language, she remains within it; at the same time as verbal language fails her, it succeeds in verbally describing that failure.

The continual play with language throughout the Book can be seen as yet another aspect of the text which points toward the apophatic. Through the Creature’s ability to use tokens, through the scribe’s miraculous ability to read illegible words, through the priest’s ability to communicate with the Creature in a language he does not understand on a conscious level, and through the Creature’s various admissions that verbal language fails her, Margery’s Book illustrates creative play with language. It matters not whether she writes in the vernacular or Latin if language itself (of any type) can—indeed, must—be transcended and transformed to re-present that which is beyond language.

Gillespie and Ross claim, “The desire to escape from the prison-house of language, and from the flickering play of signification is fundamental to apophatic theology” (54). Margery cannot literally escape language in the process of writing a book in the vernacular, but she can certainly attempt rhetorically to create a world for her Creature where, through divine intervention, one can note the limitations of language and, at times, escape its confines.
In this way, Margery gestures toward the possibility of such a feat and, in the process, depicts a character who, in occasionally not using verbal or legible or vernacular language, creates yet another icon of lack (within a verbal, legible, vernacular text) and, therefore, gestures toward the apophatic moment.

Margery's Creature is told by Christ that she will be written into His hands and feet (30.12-13). Moreover, she sees her name "at Æ Trinute foot wretyn" in the Book of Life (207.2). One wonders, ironically, if Margery's Creature, being unlettered, would even be able to read her own name. Regardless, the name is written in the wounds and in the Book, and she knows it is there. The image of the Creature's written name ensures that the writer (Margery writing in the persona of her Creature) also becomes and is seen as the written. In one sense, the writer (Margery) is always the written (Margery's Creature) and, therefore, continually creates herself as both writer and written. She is her own creator and, therefore, takes on yet another divine role. In addition, the concept of the writer and the written can be expanded to include the reader and the read in relation to Christ's iconic body and Margery's iconic Book.

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5 This concept is discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation in terms of the wound; here it is being used in terms of the writer and written.
6 Again, this subject was mentioned in Chapter Two, but in a different context than it will be discussed here.
Karma Lochrie explains how people in the Middle Ages read Christ's body as if it were a book instructing its reader on the Passion:

The instruction of his body exists in anagramic form. Words emerge from wounds only if the mystic is able to piece together the eviscerated vowels and consonants into the morphemes and syntax of Christ's Passion. Without the conventional medieval configurations of the book that enable reading, including margins, rubrication, and glosses, the text of Christ's body is a cryptogram requiring the mystic's decoding. (Trans. 167-8)

In other words, the meaning of the book or images therein is not necessarily immediately obvious; it is up to the mystic/reader to learn to interpret the symbolic language of the text's iconography. Margery, like other women who dedicated their lives to Christ, would be skilled in this method of interpretation. She may not be able to read scholarly Latin texts, but she can read Christ's body/book.7

As discussed earlier, Lochrie theorizes that because Margery is written into Christ's wounds, the readers of her

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7Vincent Gillespie discusses such lectio domini in his article, "Lukynge in haly bukes: Lectio in Some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies." Gillespie discusses meditation on Christ's Passion using, amongst others, the texts of Monk-Solitary of Farne and Richard Rolle. When the focus of meditation is on "the suffering of Christ" rather than "the more traditional meditative exercise derived from reflection and ruminating on a text," "Christ's body becomes the book...In this 'reading' process, the five chief wounds are the vowels and the other wounds form the consonants" (10). Gillespie quotes Rolle's Meditations on the Passion where Rolle compares Christ's body to a book written with red ink (English Writings of Richard Rolle, ed. H.E. Allen [Oxford, 1931] 36). Through such illustrations, Gillespie outlines a "shift from reading texts to reading imagery" in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.
Book "are returned to the Christic body as the primary text" (Translations 176). I would like to suggest, moreover, that the process of reading between the Creature and Christ is mutual since she reads His wounds (in their iconic significance) and He reads Margery's name written into the wounds. There is, however, another variant on this theme: given that Margery is accustomed to reading Christ's body as a series of icons needing interpretation, her representation of Christ and His Passion in the Book may call for the same interpretation. In other words, the process could be habitual, especially when writing about the subject of Christ. All of the literal versus figurative imagery, all of the plays with paradox, all of the chasms pointing toward the ineffable, and all of the parallels between the Creature and Christ discussed thus far could require decoding in manner similar to the way in which Margery decodes Christ's wounds. In this sense, the Book itself becomes another means of transport to the threshold of the apophatic. Contemplation on its iconography is tantamount in its effect to meditating on the iconography of the body of Christ.

All of the iconography in Margery's Book is necessarily rhetorical in the sense that it is all constructed out of written words. One could argue, therefore, that what I have been referring to as iconography in Margery's text is nothing more than a series of verbal
echoes gesturing toward icons which, in turn, gesture toward the apophatic. Although this may be true (and would not affect my argument further than a change of terminology), there are certain rhetorical figures that are constructed in such a manner that they physically re-present an image on the page. In his discussion of the “word” (as a left brain phenomenon) and the “image” (as a right brain phenomenon), Max Nannya claims that chiasmus is one such rhetorical figure: “Now chiasmus as a pattern of words or textual elements partakes of these two dimensions: it can be experienced only verbally in time but its chiastic arrangement must be seen as a simultaneous, quasi-spatial pattern” (51).

Chiasmus in its most basic definition “is derived from the Greek letter X (chi) whose shape, if the two halves of the construction are rendered in separate verses, it resembles” (Lanham 22). Written linearly, the pattern of repetition in chiasmus can be charted as “A-B-B-A". Notably, the Christian symbol of the cross shares similar roots to the rhetorical figure chiasmus:

The Primary Symbol for Christianity is, without question, the cross. Yet the cross referred to in the New Testament was not the model for the cross we know today. The form of the cross first used as a symbol for Christianity was derived from the first letter of Christ’s name in Greek--the chi, an X-shaped letter. This instantly recognizable symbol was used by early
Christians to 'sign' everything—food, cups, plates, furniture, clothing. (West 87)

I raise this connection between chiasmus and the cross because I plan to examine how the figure of chiasmus can iconographically represent the cross and its inherent meaning within a rhetorically constructed text. Margery, each time she uses chiasmus, effectively signs her Book with an icon of the cross and its significance. Before continuing to discuss the complexities of chiasmus as it works iconographically both in general and in Margery's Book, I would like to discuss briefly the Creature's relationship with the cross.

For Margery's Creature, the crucifix is yet another icon that transports her from the bodily to the ghostly realm:

Whan þei wer comyn in-to þe cherch & sche beheld þe preystys knelyng be-forn þe Crucixixe, and, as þei songyn, þe preyste whech executyd þe seruyse þat ðay drow up a cloth be-for þe Crucefixe thre tynys, every tymhe heyar þan oþer, þat þe pepil xulde se þe Crucixixe, þan was hir mende al holy takyn owt of al erdly thynys & set al in gostly thynys preying & desyryng þat sche myth at þe last han þe full syght of hym in Heuyyn whech is boþin God & man in oo persone. (187.10-19)

Afterward, for the duration of the Mass, the Creature carries on weeping and crying, believing she sees Christ on the cross in her ghostly eye. Significantly, the sight of
the cross brings to the Creature's mind its iconic meaning of the paradoxical union between God and man. Moreover, it calls up the image of the tormented yet glorified Christ. As Caroline Bynum notes, of the common themes found in women's spirituality, "[m]ost prominent...was the Christ of the cross. No religious woman failed to experience Christ as wounded, bleeding and dying" (131). However, the cross does not only represent suffering; it also represents ecstasy through suffering, or "life achieved through death" (Bynum 171). In brief, the cross, as a central symbol of the Christian faith, is an icon of reversal and paradox; it is the "image upon which manhood and godhead are joined," and represents the point of crossing where opposites coincide (Gibson 13).

The rhetorical figure of chiasmus is also associated with reversal. As Nanny explains:

As a temporal or dynamic sequence, the chiastic series abba may be construed as reversing its movement or inverting its development. Hence, chiasmus may be used as an 'emblem' or icon of reversal or inversion generally. But the return to the initial element a at the end of the chiastic sequence may also suggest circularity and, ultimately, a form of closure or non-progressive stasis. Furthermore, abba may be seen as an emblem of two contrary movements, either towards each other, or away from each other. (53)

Thus, chiasmus can represent both inversion and circularity, opposition and wholeness. Furthermore, although the
circular structure of *chiasmus* can represent closure, as Nannya states, it can also represent infinity in the sense that a return to "A" would necessitate a return to "B," then eventually a return to "A" and again a return to "B," ad infinitum. Clearly, the importance of *chiasmus* is not merely in its literal representation on the page, but in its figural representation of movement—in the continual turning and re-turning between opposites. Thomas Mermall claims that the structure of *chiasmus* is "symbolic of the fusion of opposites" (251). The figure is one in which opposites merge, where beginnings and endings become indistinguishable within a continuum. Hence, *chiasmus*, as it has been outlined thus far, is a figure of paradox.

In order to outline further integral features associated with *chiasmus*, I must pull together a number of quotations from various theorists. Nannya reaches the conclusion that *chiasmus*, in its iconic sense, is "an important structural device which fuses word and image" (58). John Welch believes that *chiasmus* holds the ability to order thoughts and argues that "the form itself merges with the message and meaning of the passage. Indeed what is said is often no more than how it is said" (11). Rodolphe Gasché describes *chiasmus* as "a decisive ordering principle employed on all levels of complexity, that is, with respect not only to sounds but to thoughts as well" (xvi). Indeed,
Gasché goes as far as to say that chiasmus is "an originary form of thought" which "as the form of thought...is what allows oppositions to be bound into unity in the first place. It is a form that makes it possible to determine differences with respect to an underlying totality" (xvii).

The concepts which begin to emerge from these theories on chiasmus are strikingly similar to those associated with the verbum Dei. As the Word is "the perfect coincidence of sign and signified," the figure of chiasmus is the perfect fusion of "word and image" (Thomson 107, Nannya 58). Both are thought of as originary—a original state of totality to which one aims to return. I am not suggesting that chiasmus is the Word; however, the figure can act as an icon gesturing toward the Word. The figure is paradoxical in its nature and perhaps, like all paradoxes, cannot be completely understood except at the apophatic moment of crossing (and here, not to be remembered consciously) where the opposites coincide.

The concept of this apophatic moment of crossing (within the chasm) is indeed part of the theory of chiasmus. Ralf Norrman acknowledges that between any two bilaterally symmetrical halves "is also a dividing-element which the chiasticist perceives as constituting a third entity" (21).\^\footnote{Norrman uses the term "chiasticist" to refer to someone who relies on chiasmus and chiastic thought patterns (3).} Sanford Budick, moreover, "emphasize[s] that chiasmus
creates a species of absences between its binary terms” ("Chiasmus" 964). This notion of an absence or gap in chiasmus is crucial to the fig¬re’s ability to function; as Gasché explains,

At the core of the chiasm one sees either an absence of contact between infinitely distant terms or terms contaminated by each other to such an extent that all attempt to distinguish between them corresponds to an arbitrary decision or an act of violence. This excessive gap or excessive opacity allows the chiasmic reversals of interpretation to take place, insofar as they provide the space for interpretative (mis)reading. (xxvi)

As may be ascertained from these few quotations, post-modern theories of chiasmus are (and perhaps unnecessarily so for our purposes) extremely complex. However, I feel it is necessary at least to acknowledge these theories in order to examine the possibility of the 'chasm in the chiasm' which they put forth.9 It is, after all, the possibility of a "chasm" between opposites which has played such an integral role in the discussion of Margery Kempe’s Book thus far.

Obviously, Margery Kempe would not have been thinking of chiasmus in the terms of Gasché. However, she may very well have been thinking about it in terms of a representation of the crossing point between opposites. At the very least, Margery would have had exposure to the

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9The term “chasm in the chiasm” is used by Gasché in reference to Warminski’s work (xxv). I have adopted the term to refer to the apophatic space where opposites merge—the moment of suspended self-consciousness.
figure as it is used in the bible. Modern research into the rhetorical structure of the bible has yielded numerous articles on the prevalence and importance of chiasmus in its structure. Yehuda T. Radday claims that chiasmus in biblical narrative is a "key to meaning" and that "not paying sufficient attention to it may result in failure to grasp the true theme" (51). John Welch refers to chiasmus as "a basic aspect of the literary structure of the texts of the New Testament" (211). Furthermore, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, in his Poetria Nova (a text on rhetoric, written in the early thirteenth century and used throughout the Middle Ages to teach rhetoric) illustrates chiasmus in his section on "Easy Ornament" where "a mode of expression both easy and adorned is desired" (56.1094-95). This section, a virtual sermon on sin and redemption, "succinctly summarizes the whole of Christian doctrine" (Shook 8); the specific example of chiasmus involves Christ: "O how holy the grace of Christ! How gracious the holiness!" (58.1174-75).

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10 Margery quotes and paraphrases the bible on numerous occasions throughout her text. Clearly, she has had access to biblical material through sermons and, if the Book is any indication, conversations with priests. Note, for example, Margery’s reference to the Creature "comownyng in Scripturn whech sche lernyd in sermownys" (29.30-1).

11 There is neither time nor space to go into detail regarding the use of chiasmus in the bible. For more information, see John Welch, Yehuda Radday, Wilfred Watson, and Antti Laato in the bibliography.

12 See James Murphy, Rhetoric in the Middle Ages, especially Chapter IV: "Ars poetriae: Preceptive Grammar, or the Rhetoric of Verse Writing."

13 In Poetria Nova, chiasmus is referred to as commutatio (the Latin term referring to the same rhetorical pattern). I have used the term "chiasmus" rather than "commutatio" throughout this dissertation simply
Margery would not have needed formal training in rhetoric to have heard *chiasmus* used in sermons as a means of "easy ornament."¹⁴

Significantly, in Margery's *Book*, the first words Christ says to the Creature are in the form of a chiasm:

"Dowtyr, why hast bow forsakyn me, and I forsoke neyr be?" (8.20-1). Immediately after those words, "be eyr openyd as bryght as ony levyn," only to close again as Christ passes through the opening (8.22-3). The Creature's first encounter with Christ is framed in opposition both by the chiasm and by the contentio of the opening and closing air. This event, marked as it is by rhetorical reversals, therefore appropriately marks the moment of the Creature's return to her wits from a period of insanity. She is about to begin a period of her life when, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, she will enter a space in which she continually turns between opposites and eventually becomes an icon of their coincidence. Here, the icon of the chiasm in Christ's words is joined with the icon of the chasm through which Christ leaves. Margery's presentation of the initial appearance of Christ contains within its rhetorical

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¹⁴Examples of chiasmus in the bible include: Matt. 10.39: "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it"; 1 Cor. 7.22: "For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant"; and 2 Cor. 8.9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."
structure the framework by which she will re-present herself as the Creature throughout the entire Book.

Margery uses *chiasmus* on over forty occasions in her *Book*. Some examples are simple and straightforward; some are more complex; some are less rhetorically precise than others. The subject matter varies extensively; however, there are multiple examples where the chiasm involves the subjects of love and mutual indwelling. Approximately half the chiasms are used in Christ's direct words to the Creature; approximately one-quarter are used in the Creature's direct words (usually) to Christ; the rest are divided amongst the narrator's commentary and the direct words of other characters. Since the majority of the chiasms are used in dialogue between Margery's Creature and Christ when they speak of love and mutual indwelling, it is conceivable that the characteristics of the chiasm (as they are discussed above) re-present the characteristics of relationship between the Creature and Christ.

*Chiasmus*, in its ability to unite opposites, can be seen as a figure of mutual reciprocity. When Christ tells the Creature, "I am in you, and you in me," He acknowledges a

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15 8.20-1, 13.36-14.1, 23.3, 29.20, 49.12-13, 50.10-11, 50.27, 52.8-9, 67.11-13, 72.31-35, 81.21-24, 85.26-8, 85.28-32, 88.19-20, 89.11-14, 93.1-3, 98.45, 107.23-4, 109.30-1, 112.11-13, 157.23-4, 157.28-9, 158.4-5, 161.3-6, 168.36, 170.17, 180.30-3, 182.10-11, 183.30-1, 188.37, 189.6-9, 191.27-8, 196.7-8, 210.6-6, 213.4-6, 219.25-7, 218.34-5, 236.3-5, 249.27-8, 249.34-250.1, 250.11-12, 253.6-7.

16 By the narrator, I refer to times when "Margery" describes events, et cetera, rather than recounting the direct speech/words of the Creature.
mutual relationship (23.3). The identical sentiment of mutual indwelling (again written as a chiasm) is repeated on two subsequent occasions\(^ {17} \) and then varied slightly, appearing later in the Book as "\( \beta u \) are myn & I am thyn" (182.10-11). The first quotation occurs during a passage in which Christ explains the parallel status that the Creature shares with Him: ""For \( \beta e i \) \( \beta a t \) worship \( \beta e i \) \( \beta e i \) worship me; \( \beta e i \) \( \beta a t \) despysyn \( \beta e i \) \( \beta e i \) despysen me, & I schal chastysen hem \( \beta e r f o r \). I am in \( \beta e \), and \( \beta o w \) in me. And \( \beta e i \) \( \beta a t \) heryn \( \beta e i \) \( \beta e i \) heryn \( \beta e \) voys of God"" (23.1-4). The parallel structure and chiasmus used in this passage rhetorically mark the Creature as an icon of Christ; that is, in addition to the methods of iconographical imitation of Christ discussed in Chapter Two, Margery here uses the rhetorical structure to suggest, on yet another level, that the Creature is, like Christ, a point where opposites coincide. She not only honours Christ, but is honoured as Christ; she not only hears the voice of God, but is heard as the voice of God. She is joined with Christ through a rhetorical figure that represents the Oneness believed to occur "at \( \beta e \) last" (187.17). The chiasm marks the relationship as one which, while acknowledging a chasm between Christ and the Creature, simultaneously gestures toward a harmonious whole which cannot be separated into two opposing parts.

\(^ {17} \) 85.27-8, 88.19-20.
In another of Christ’s speeches dealing with the reconciliation of opposites, Margery again employs chiasmus. This is the section in which Christ tells the Creature that He loves wives as well as maidens and, moreover, tells her, “of vnworthy I make worthy, & of synful I make rytful” (49.25-6). In the midst of this speech, Christ says, “Ber is no ȝyft so holy as is þe ȝyft of lofe, ne no þing to be so mech desyred as lofe, for lofe may purchasyn what it can desyren” (49.11-13). Iconographically, the chiasm marks this passage through its rhetorical enactment of the very paradox Christ claims He will perform. That is, Christ claims He can change something into its opposite form and, furthermore, gives equal value to seemingly opposite states: the figure of chiasmus rhetorically demonstrates this process. Significantly, this chiasm is built on the concept of (desiring) love, the greatest gift the Creature could receive. Love, according to Christ “qwenchith al synne” and, it thereby appears, is the gift that will eventually turn the “synful” to the “rytful” (49.10, 49.26). Love is the only solution for reconciling opposites; in other words, all the Creature can do is love Christ and have faith that, through love, the human and the divine will coincide ‘at þe last’. She can only desire and never actually experience

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18 Emphasis added to illustrate the words used in the chiasm.
19 The chiasms are also built on love at 13.36-41, 29.20, 157.23-4, 157.28-9, 218.25-7, and 249.27-8.
what the icon of the chiasm gestures toward since, as explained in Chapter One, "[God] can only be loved, not thought" (Gillespie and Ross 55).

Faith in an eventual and eternal union with the divine is regularly emphasized in the vicinity of a chiasm. When the Creature tells Christ, "I haue ronnyn a-wey fro be, & bow hast ronnyn aftyre me," Christ responds by asking her how many times He has told her, "we ben onyd to-gedyr wyth-owtyn ende" (50.27-8, 50.31-2). When speaking about God to the Creature Christ says, "by xalt se hym face to face, wonyng wyth hym wyth-owtyn ende....He xal joyen in be & bu in hym wyth-owtyn ende" (52.1-9). On another occasion, Christ explains to the Creature, "by sowle xal partyn fro thy body but God xal neuyr partyn fro by sowle, for bei ben onyd to-gedyr wyth-owtyn ende" (89.12-14). In each case, the chiasm acts as an icon of eternity, rhetorically representing the promise of the cross. As re-presented by the two halves of the chiasm, the Creature will one day be "face to face" with God, "onyd" in union. For now, Margery can only ever point toward this possibility.

The figure of the chiasm, as it is used throughout the Book, can be seen as a rhetorical icon re-presenting the core of the Creature's faith. Like the Creature (as she is discussed in Chapter One) chiasmus is structured on paradox,

20Although this example leaves out the repetition of the word "joyen," it nonetheless implies it and, therefore, can be considered chiastic.
it confuses opposites, and it continually turns and re-turns upside down. Like the Creature (as she is discussed in Chapter Two), chiasmus re-presents the chasm between opposites and simultaneously gestures toward the possibility of coincidence at the point of crossing. And finally, like the Creature (as she is discussed in this chapter), chiasmus communicates through sign language—through its iconographical (and linguistic) connection to Christ and the cross and, thereby, to the paradox of the Incarnation. It is this paradox of the Christian faith that is re-presented within the rhetorical iconography of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Perhaps chiasmus, as a rhetorical icon, is one of the "literary devices" which Ross believes enables a text to "subtly evacuate the mind into essential silence" (335).
Chapter 4 : The Nought of Unknowing

One might argue that Julian of Norwich’s mystical experience, as it is recorded in her Showings, is cataphatic rather than apophatic since, among other positive representations of the divinity, she reports Christ’s definition of Himself. Indeed, any description or definition of the divinity would necessarily be cataphatic. Cataphatic theology or the via positiva “proceeds by way of affirmation and describes God in terms of human attributes, raising them, of course, to an infinite power” (Wolters, “Intro” 16). When Julian’s Christ confirms, “I it am that is hyghest. I it am that thou lovyst....I it am that is alle” (402.7-10), Julian cataphatically suggests a Christ of infinite power. The reader, however, is simultaneously left to question the highest what and all of what. This positive description of Christ can also be considered negative in the sense that the specific objects of comparison remain unnamed.

However, near the end of her Showings, Julian describes the three properties of God as life, love, and light and explains that these properties can be seen in the earlier “I it am” passages (722.5-723.2). They are,
moreover, seen "in oone goodnesse, in to whych goodnesse [her] reson wolde be oonyd" (723.8-9). On the one hand, Julian sets up a series of non-referential signifiers: Christ claims he is "highest," but he does not specify an object of comparison. On the other hand, Julian interprets Christ's words in terms of the highest life, love, and light. Together this trinity represents one goodness, to which Julian desires to be joined or "oonyd" into wholeness. What is the difference, then, between the original lack of signification in Christ's words and the later addition of that which is signified?

The difference, in this example, lies between the negative description of the vision and the positive interpretation of that vision. Interpretation can never be anything but cataphatic since, as discussed in the previous chapters, thoughts about the divine are necessarily produced through human language. Keep in mind, however, that Julian never says she sees or even understands God in his entirety. She merely lists three "propertees" that have become apparent to her through the course of interpreting her visions. Indeed, as mentioned above, the life/love/light explanation occurs near the end of the Showings (in Chapter 83 of 85). Anything Julian says as interpretation must be understood in the context of the apophatic theology evident throughout the long text. As will be illustrated in this
chapter, Julian knows that she only sees what God wills her
to see and understands only what he gives her grace to
understand. God's face and his secrets will necessarily
remain hidden from her and all humanity.¹

In terms of her vision of Christ during the "I it am"
section, the most Julian can do to represent the vision is
to claim, paradoxically through words, that Christ is beyond
words. At the end of the first "I it am" passage, Julian
states:

The nomber of the words passyth my wyttes and
my understandyng and alle my myghtes, for they
were in be hyghest, as to my syght, for ther in
is comprehendyd I can nott telle what; but the
joy that I saw in the shewync of them passyth
alle that hert can thynk or soule may desyre.
And therfore theyse wordes be nott declaryd
here; but evrym man, after the grace that god
gevyth hym in vnder standyng and lovynng,
receyve them in our lordes menyng. (403.11-18;
emphasis added)

Julian declares in written words that words surpass her
understanding and what her heart can think. She thereby
recreates the paradox of the mystical text—the paradox,
that is, that one can speak or write at all about the
ineffable experience—by resorting, like Margery Kempe, to
adynaton. A positive understanding of God's intention—of

¹Julian's statement on human inability to see God's face is recorded in
Chapter 72 (661.19-662.31). Julian does, however, see Christ's face in
her visions (see, for example, 324.6 and 357.4). The contrast between
Christ's face and God's face will be discussed further on in this
chapter.
that which is signified—only comes later as a result of God's grace and, moreover, is left to the interpretation of each individual. The experience itself, at least in part, remains ineffable. In effect, Julian ensures that the "I am" statements are counteracted, so to speak, with the adynaton statements throughout the Showings. Julian's practice brings to mind Sells' principle that "No statement about X can rest as a valid statement but must be corrected by a further statement, which itself must be corrected in a discourse without closure" (207).²

Elsewhere in the Showings, Julian distinguishes between that which she can reveal in words and that which she cannot. Indeed, on several occasions, Julian explains that although she can tell part of her experience, she cannot reveal its entirety. In terms of the spiritual or "goostely syght", Julian "can nott ne may shew it as openly ne as fully as [she] would" (323.31-2). Although she can describe both "bodely syght" and "worde formyd in [her] vnderstodnyng," she insists at the same time that she "may nevyr fulle telle" the "gostely syghte" (666.2-7).³

²Quoted as #3 in my Introduction.
³As is evident in the 323.31-2 and 666.2-7 quotations, Julian uses both "can" (not) and "may" (never) to express her inability to discuss part of her mystical experience. I do not know how or if she precisely distinguishes "can" and "may." Twice on 323 (once as quoted from 323.31-2, the other at 323.34) she uses both "can" and "may" together and thus stresses her inability (can not) and, possibly, her unwillingness (may not) to describe the experience. However, in 323.31-2 she claims, "I can nott ne may shew as fully as I would" (emphasis added), thereby indicating that she would like to describe the visions, but cannot. Thus, in these examples, I take Julian's use of both "can"
like Margery, separates the bodily (or physical) from the
ghostly (or spiritual); however, unlike Margery, this
separation does not result in a confusion between the
physical and spiritual realms. Both the "bodyly" and
"goostely" sights are aspects of her mystical or spiritual
showings, and are not confused with aspects of (or people
in) her everyday life. The physical and the spiritual
realms remain distinct even though, as shall be discussed
further on in this chapter, Julian has her own rhetorical
method for the joining of opposites.

Aside from Oliver Davies' comments on the sensus
corporalis and the sensus spiritualis, Julian's persistent
distinction between bodily and ghostly methods of the Lord's
showings also brings to mind the debates over iconography
with regard to the separation of the body and the spirit.
In Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea, Moshe Barasch
discusses the iconoclastic debates of the late eighth and
early ninth centuries. In brief, he explains that the
debates centered on the doctrine of Christ's two separate
natures, the divine and the human. Those who supported the
portrayal of Christ in icons believed that "since Christ
became a man, he [could] be portrayed as any other man"
(262-3); the iconoclasts, focusing on the ineffable, divine

and "may" as a rhetorical strategy to indicate an all encompassing lack
of ability to describe her experiences. See also "alle is to lytylle
that I can sey, for it may nott be tolde" where Julian again uses both
"can" and "may" (364.48-9; emphasis added).

4As quoted in my Introduction, pages 27-8.
nature of Christ (which they believed could never be separated from His human nature), contended that since divine nature can never be reproduced "a true portrait of Christ is altogether impossible, and...all icons are therefore deceptive" (263). Although specifics of these debates changed over the centuries,⁵ such discussions were still prominent in Julian's time; indeed, after continual Lollard attack on the worship of religious icons, "[b]y the end of the fourteenth century, imagery had become a leading point of controversy" (Aston, 155).

Although Julian does not discuss this controversy directly, she is nonetheless a mystical writer attempting to describe the divinity and is, therefore, necessarily immersed in the dilemma on some level. In other words, she must question how to represent the divinity through words and rhetorical structure. Her separation of the bodily and the ghostly can be read as a temporary solution to the impossibility of portraying the divinity in human terms. That is, in the bodily sight, Julian describes "as [she] sawe," and in the ghostly sight, she tells only "some dele" (666.4-7). Julian does not attempt to portray the divinity as such, only the physical manifestation of events which she believes to be divinely inspired, but which necessarily

⁵Margaret Aston discusses the "fresh focus" of the debates in the Middle Ages with regard to "their emphasis on the commandment text" (155). (See Exodus 20:4, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above.")
remains hidden in their entirety. As previously discussed in relation to Margery Kempe, what Julian believes to be a bodily sight of the divine is not necessarily divine at all, but merely a product of human faith and understanding. Faith allows her to interpret the visions as products of divine revelation. She describes what she sees and simultaneously acknowledges that which is hidden. Julian never loses sight of the two aspects of the divine vision—only one of which can be described in words. For the other, she must rely on the paradox of apophatic description to illustrate her theology of an ineffable, hidden God.

References to "hidden" aspects of the divinity abound in Julian's Showings. When Christ tells her that "alle maner of thyng shalle be wele" (407.34), Julian explains: "And in theyse same wordes I saw an hygh meravelous prevyte hyd in god, whych pryuyte he shalle opynly make and shalle be knownen to vs in hevyn" (407.39-41). Paradoxically, Julian claims that she saw the secret hidden in God and, thereby, creates a similar paradox to Margery's "I am an hyd God" passage, discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation (30.26-7). Both God (in Margery's case) and the secret (in Julian's) must simultaneously be hidden and revealed. Julian's interpretation of Christ's words as being hidden in God is not in the short text and, therefore, represents a conscious addition to her understanding of the words and
visions. Although Colledge and Walsh suggest a potential biblical allusion to “an hygh mervelous prevyte hyd in god,”⁶ a penchant for biblical allusion alone cannot explain the abundance of additional references Julian makes to “hidden” throughout the long text.⁷ Indeed, the new emphasis (relative, that is, to the short text) suggests a strategic move on Julian’s part from a cataphatic exposition of her experiences in the short text to an apophatic representation of them in the long.

The result of this movement can be effectively illustrated through a close reading of the end of Chapter 33 and the beginning of Chapter 34 (of the long text). In the final paragraph of Chapter 33, Julian advises that we pay “grete regarde” to all the deeds that God has performed. This advice is almost identical in the short text. However, in the long text she then warns us to “leue the beholdynge, what the dede shalle be” (429.30-1). In other words, there are certain deeds that we can contemplate and certain deeds that we should avoid contemplating. She adds, moreover, that we will then be satisfied “both with hydying and

⁶See Colledge & Walsh, footnote 39, page 407: “Ecclesiasticus 11.4: For the works of the highest only are wonderful, and his words are glorious and secret and hidden.”
⁷For additional references to “hidden” (or “hyd”) found only in the long text, see as follows: 316.64; 424.34; 429.33; 430.4; 494.46-47; 539.271; 548.28; 560.55; 680.22. In one example, with regard to the “deed the whych the blessydfulle crynyte shalle do in the last day,” Julian explains, “and the myght and the wysdom of hym by the same loue wylye heyle [conceal] it and hyde it fro vs, what it shalle be and how it shalle be done” (423.23-424.29).
shewyng" and maintains, "the more we besy vs to know hys prevytes in that or any other thyng, the farthermore shalle we be from the knowyng" (429.33-35). Here, Julian's advice echoes the words of the Cloud-author when he expounds on aspects of the via negativa: "Be willing to be blind, and give up all longing to know the why and how, for knowing will be more of a hindrance than a help" (101). 8 I do not intend to engage in a detailed comparison between the Cloud of Unknowing and the Showings; however, as I will discuss, Julian's long text revisions do indicate a move toward the negative theology evident in her contemporary's work.

Before exploring this line of thought further, I would like to continue my reading of Chapters 33 and 34. At the beginning of Chapter 34, Julian distinguishes between two types of "prevytes" (secrets or mysteries). Consistent with her explanation of difference in bodily versus ghostly vision, one type of secret is that which God wills to remain hidden, the other type is that which God wills to show openly. The entire paragraph, in which the word "prevytes" is repeated seven times (in addition to "prevyte" and "prevy"), does not appear in the short text (430.1-9). In the revised version of her Showings, Julian stresses the secrets which God "wylle we know thus hyd" (430.3-4) prior to discussing some teachings of the Holy Church in a series

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8Quotations from The Cloud of Unknowing are from the Clifton Wolters translation.
of metaphors. Julian uses these metaphors to define God as he is defined by (and as) Holy Church, and thus reverts to cataphatic description: "He is the grounde, he is the substantice, he is the techynge, he is the techer" (431.17-18). This section is identical in both the short and long texts. In the short text, however, the positive description of the divine is not balanced (or, arguably, outweighed) by the negative concept of a hidden God with hidden secrets. Julian here praises the teaching of the Holy Church. She is not about to risk speaking directly against what the Church has taught her. Instead, she places what she has been taught to believe in the context of what she has come to believe by the time she writes the long text.

The same discrepancy holds true in passages where Julian claims that the divine revelation is beyond words or too much for human intelligence. Take, for example, the passage (already quoted above) which begins, "The number of the words passyth my wyttles" (403.11-12). This negative description—that is, a description in which Julian claims something cannot be described—is an addition to the long text. Similarly, when Christ tells Julian that he would suffer more for her, she contemplates how often He would die and writes, "And truly the nomber passyd my vnsterstanyng and my wittes so ferre that my reson myght nott nor cold nott comprehende it ne take it" (385.29-31). When, moreover,
Julian sees the continual work God does in all things, she claims that this work "is done so godly, so wysely and so myghtely that it ovrpassyth alle oure ymagynynyng and alle that we can mene or thynke" (480.39-41). All of these passages are additions to the long text. Clearly, in the later version of her Showings, Julian emphasizes a negative approach to her descriptions through reliance on adynaton and, thereby, points to the ineffability of the divine. Although such negative statements are not in and of themselves proof that Julian's Showings emphasize an apophatic theology, they do correspond with with Sells' "Principles". Her interpretation is limited to partial understanding of her visions; other aspects of the divinity lie beyond her visions and must necessarily remain unknown.

Julian makes a reference in the long text to "seynt Dyonisi of France" (368.27) and the "awter of the vnknowyn God" (369.37-8). According to the footnotes in Colledge and Walsh, Julian erroneously believes the "martyr-patron of France" (or "Paul's convert" in Acts 17) to be identical with the sixth-century author of The Mystical Theology, the pseudo-Denis (or the pseudo-Dionysius). In the same footnote, Colledge and Walsh cite several possible

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9 See especially, the principle listed as #1 in the Introduction to this dissertation: "X transcends all names and referential delimitation" (207).

10 See Colledge & Walsh, footnote 27, page 368. This, by the way, was a common error in the Middle Ages (and, therefore, not specific to Julian).
vernacular sources for the details concerning "seynt Dyonisi" to which Julian alludes. I cannot prove which of these sources Julian had access to, nor do I intend to examine in point-by-point detail possible influences of the pseudo-Dionysius' Mystical Theology on the Showings. Such a procedure would require another dissertation. However, I would like to suggest the possibility that the negative theology evident in Julian's long text could be attributed to the general and, as noted in my Introduction, rather popular ideas of the pseudo-Dionysius.

In his discussion of iconography and the on-going problems involving "the visible images of the invisible god" (158), Moshe Barasch illustrates Dionysius' profound influence on European thought in the Middle Ages. Indeed, Barasch maintains that "Dionysius was considered an authority second only to the Bible" (158). Given this climate, it is not inconceivable that Julian's work was influenced, at least indirectly, by the negative theology of the pseudo-Dionysius and its popularity. Although the precise dating of Julian's texts is still being debated, it is possible that she encountered pseudo-Dionysian ideas through The Cloud of Unknowing between the composition of

11See Barasch, Chapter 9: "Dionysius Areopagita: 'Poetic' Theology." Barasch explains that Dionysius did not discuss icons per se, but that his theology of absolute transcendence influenced medieval thinking about all portrayals of the divinity. (See especially pages 159-161.)
12Paul Rorem makes a similar comment when he states, "Of all the texts considered to be Christian authorities during the Middle Ages, none but the Bible claimed greater antiquity than the Dionysian writings" (238).
her short and long texts. Indeed, if one accepts Nicholas Watson’s theory of an early fifteenth-century dating for the long text, there could be as many as forty years available between the writing of The Cloud and the writing of Julian’s Showings.

If Julian did have access to The Cloud (either directly or indirectly), she would also have encountered the negative theology of pseudo-Dionysius since, as Clifton Wolters suggests, The Cloud “shows [Dionysius’s] influence on every page” (“Intro” 20). Barasch describes Dionysius’s “point of departure” as “a profound awareness of the abyss separating the two worlds, the celestial and the terrestrial, or the divine and the human” (161). Accordingly, in Dionysian theology, the divine being “cannot be properly experienced or grasped, and therefore it also cannot be expressed” (Barasch 161). As will be illustrated in the course of this dissertation, Julian adopts and displays these basic negative principles in the long text of her Showings. Where at first Julian may appear to be a mystic whose theological thoughts move back and forth between the cataphatic and the apophatic, in fact her

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13See, for example, Nicholas Watson’s “The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Love.” Speculum 68.3 (1993).
14This number is based on a Cloud date of c. 1370 and a Showings (long text) date of c. 1410.
15Michael Sells also outlines this principle (quoted as #1 in my Introduction) when he notes, “X transcends all names and referential delimitation” (207).
writing (especially in the long text) tends toward the apophatic.

In the apophatic mysticism of the Cloud, its author acknowledges the "cloud of unknowing" that exists between each person and God. He suggests to those seeking God, "you must also put a cloud of forgetting beneath you and all creation" (66); indeed, "everything must be hidden under this cloud of forgetting" (67). Although Julian does not directly speak of such a cloud, she does refer to a moment of forgetting prior to receiving her revelations. After Julian describes her initial desire for "thre gyftes by the grace of god," she explains that two of them (the desire for a bodily sight of the Passion and a bodily sickness) "passid from [her] mynd" (285.4-5, 288.45). In this manner, Chapter Two (of the long text) ends with Julian's acknowledgment of having forgotten her desire for bodily sickness; then, apparently in juxtaposition to this, Chapter Three opens with a description of the bodily sickness sent to her by God—the sickness during which she experiences her showings. Julian's desires for sickness and for showings of the Passion are realized only after she has forgotten those very desires.

16 I am not suggesting in this section that Julian necessarily had knowledge of the Cloud; I am suggesting that she describes an apophatic moment similar to the type outlined in the Cloud.
By juxtaposing the desires with the lack thereof (that is, with the forgetting of the desires), Julian opens the possibility for the showings on which her text is based. Gillespie and Ross, whose work is discussed in reference to Margery Kempe in the first three chapters of this dissertation, claim that such a juxtaposition is a necessary part of the apophatic experience: 17

To enter apophatic consciousness, the seeker must simultaneously desire it intensely and give up all desire. This paradox is deliberately subversive....It is a sign of contradiction, allowing the creative tension between its conflicting significations to generate a precious stillness, a chink in the defensive wall of reason that allows slippage into apophatic consciousness. (Gillespie and Ross 56)

Through her forgotten desire Julian opens such an apophatic “chink in the wall” or chasm (to return to the term already used in relation to Margery Kempe) as the moment of origin for her Showings. Julian is, moreover, on the threshold of death during her bodily sickness: “I weened often tymes to haue passed, and so wenyd thei that were with me” (289.5-7). As discussed in terms of Margery’s near-death experiences, “Mystical writing can only ever be about thresholds” (Gillespie, “Postcards” 140); here, in terms of the Showings, the placement of the narrator Julian at the brink

17Again, Sells outlines this principle of apophatic language (quoted as #4 in my Introduction) when he notes, “The meaningfulness of the apophasic moment of discourse is unstable, residing in the momentary tension between two propositions” (207).
of death reinforces the idea that the origin of the text lies at the threshold to the apophatic. Indeed, since Julian’s revelations begin to occur during a near-death experience when her body is “dead from the miedes downward,” the Showings evolve from the chasm between life and death, between physical death and spiritual awakening (290.17-18).

Before examining the manifestation of the desire for sickness and the moment of near-death when Julian’s visions begin to occur, I want briefly to discuss Julian’s third desire. Along with the sight of the Passion and the bodily sickness, Julian lists “a mightie desyre to receive thre woundes” (288.41). She does not refer here to physical wounds—at least, not in the way she refers to her desire for a bodily sickness. Instead, she asks for spiritual wounds: “the wound of verie contricion, the wound of kynd compassion and the wound of willfull longing to god” (288.42-43). However, as Colledge and Walsh point out in a footnote, the “wounding of the soul” is connected to Christ’s physical wounds during the Passion as well as to St. Paul’s “stigmata”. Julian asks for her own figurative wounding (or stigmata) at the same time as she asks for a bodily sight of the Passion (which would, presumably, include sight of Christ’s wounds). Christ’s wounds,

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18 See Colledge & Walsh, footnote 51, page 205.
19 Paul’s “stigmata” are referred to in Gal 6.17: “From henceforth let no man trouble me: For I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”
furthermore (as discussed earlier in this dissertation),\(^{20}\) can readily be connected with the iconography of the chasm. Not only does Julian connect herself to Christ through the desire to see His Passion (and His wounds), but she also desires to mark herself with the wound. Each of Julian’s desires can thereby be seen in the context of the apophatic: the first two (that of the sight of the Passion and a bodily sickness) open the chasm at the moment of forgetting, and the third (that of the wounds) already iconographically represents a chasm in and of itself.

To return to Julian’s desire for sickness and her subsequent moment of near-death, we must note that initially she asks for the sickness to be "so hard as to the death...my selfe weenyng that I should haue died, and that all creatures might suppose he same that saw me" (287.22-25). During the sickness itself, Julian reaches the point where she does believe she has died: "Then went I verily to haue passed" (292.35). The operative word in both these quotations is the verb (in its various tenses) to believe or to expect ("weenyng," "went"). Julian neither says that she wants to die nor that she has died, but that she wants to believe she has died and, later, that she thinks (believes or expects) she has died. She remains aware, from the outset, that the circumstances she appears to be in are not

\(^{20}\)See Chapter Two, pages 86-88.
necessarily a reality but something which she believes to be happening. That is, she does not make a claim for an actual, physical meeting with or manifestation of the divinity after death.

This in no way changes the meaning of the visions as they are later interpreted by Julian. It does, however, further support the idea that Julian’s mysticism tends toward the apophatic. The threshold at which her visions begin, the chasm in which the visions occur, and, as a necessary consequence, the visions themselves are all (and only ever can be) where and what Julian believes she sees and, moreover, believes God wills her to see. Indeed, she explains in the long text (and, again, not in the short) that God’s will is “that we beleue that we see hym continually” (327.28; emphasis added). This is a subtle but important difference. Clearly, she realizes that she can have neither full nor actual sight of God until after death. Appropriately, she explains during the statement of her initial desires, “Other sight nor shewing of god desyred I never none til whan the sowle were deperted from the bodie” (286.16-17). She is satisfied with her belief or, as will be discussed, her faith that all will be well after death.

Immediately following Julian’s statement of believed death, she reports, “sodenly all my paine was taken from me” (292.35-36). She then refers to this moment as a “sodeyn
change" (292.37-38). In Chapter One of this dissertation, I argue that the entire mystical experience is situated in a moment of exchange. Julian's sudden change is such a moment. She moves from a place of intense pain to a place of complete lack of pain and, thereby, locates her body (and her mind) within a state of opposition between pain and relief. Notably, a cross is placed before her eyes immediately prior to this sudden change, at which point she claims, "It waxed as darke aboute me in the chamber as if it had ben nyght, saue in the image of the crosse, wher in held a comon light" (291.28-30). The cross is an icon of reversal and paradox and represents the point of crossing where opposites coincide. Julian's entry into the visionary realm is thereby preceded by yet another image of the apophatic. Arguably, the icon of the cross acts as a catalyst for Julian's subsequent "sudden change" from pain to well-being.

Julian also sets up a rhetorical opposition (in the passage quoted from 291.28-30) with the contentio of dark and light in relation to the cross. Note, moreover, that Julian uses a simile to describe the darkness. She is surrounded by darkness as if it had been night; she does not equate the darkness with the night. She thereby leaves the darkness as an unknown (an unexplained or mysterious)

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21 See page 39.
22 See Chapter Three, pages 118-119, of this dissertation.
element in the experience. The Cloud-author defines his use of the word "darkness" to mean "a lack of knowing" and then associates it with the "cloud of unknowing between you and your God" (66). Again, Julian may not be using darkness in precisely the same way; however, through the use of simile, she does create a lack of direct signification and she thereby suggests no-thing around her.\(^{23}\) This unknown darkness contrasts the light of the cross which Julian later associates with Christ.\(^{24}\) Yet, after noting both the darkness that surrounds her and the light of the cross, Julian can only survey the situation and claim, "I wiste not how" (291.30). The experience, as discussed thus far, is something Julian can neither fully comprehend nor explain. Reconstructing it rhetorically, she can at least suggest a place beyond knowing, a chasm of unknowing.

In combination, the entire opening sequence (Chapters Two and Three in the long text) is a mélange of gestures toward the apophatic realm. From the chasm of forgotten desire and the three wounds, over the threshold of supposed death, through the paradox of the cross and the rhetorical structure of contentio, to the opposition of sudden change, Julian sets up her visions (indeed, her Showings) within a

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\(^{23}\)References to the word "nothing" will be fully examined further on in this dissertation.

\(^{24}\)See, for example, 722.5-723.6 (as discussed earlier in this chapter): "The propertees are theyse: lyfe, loue and lyght." See also references to "the swete gracious lyght of hym selve" (696.2) and "Oure feyth is a lyght, kyndly comyng of oure endlesse day that is oure fader" (723.14-724.15).
framework of apophatic references. This framework, as will be seen in the course of this dissertation, not only structures the entire long text, but becomes integral to understanding Julian's theology of a hidden God.

On one notable occasion, however, Julian does make reference—albeit, indirectly—to having seen God, the Creator. In Chapter Eight, when she discusses the six things that she understood in the vision of Christ's bleeding head, she names the fourth as "all thynge that he hath made" (317.8-9). She goes on to explain that everything made seemed "so lytylle" to her because she "saw it in the presence of hym that is the maker" (317.10-318.11). She then concludes, "For a soul that seth the maker of all thynge, all that is made semyth fulle lytylle" (318.11-13). Has Julian, then, actually seen the Maker of all things? The answer depends on a distinction between the physical eyes and the spiritual sight; after all, Julian's soul, not her eyes, sees the Maker. As shall be discussed shortly, Julian believes that since nothing separates the soul from its Maker, the soul is always in the Maker's presence. This section, moreover, is another illustration of the way in which Julian separates the bodily sights from those in the spiritual understanding. Indeed, directly following the passages just quoted, she notes a progression from bodily to spiritual understanding: "And the bodely
syght styntyd, and the goostely sy3te dwellth in my vnderstandyng" (318.18-19). The six things which she understands from the vision are all a result of spiritual interpretation.

The passage just discussed is found in both the short and the long text. The separation between the bodily and the spiritual is already in place before Julian writes the long version. Elsewhere, however, Julian alters the long text slightly and, thereby, again emphasizes the body/spirit separation in relation to something created by God. The alteration occurs near the beginning of Chapter Five (of the long text) where Julian sees "a little thing, the quantitie of an haselnott" (299.9). Whereas in the short text Julian writes merely that she looked upon it, in the long she writes, "I looked theran with the eye of my vnderstanding" (300.11). She clearly indicates that she does not look upon the object with her bodily eye, but with her spiritual eye. Thus, the entire vision is placed emphatically into the spiritual realm. She does not claim to see something that is beyond human sight with her physical eyes.

This notion needs to be considered in conjunction with Julian's non-referential method of description (in the passage quoted from 299.9). As discussed in relation to Margery Kempe,25 Gillespie and Ross examine Julian's

25 See Chapter One, page 57.
technique: "The 'littil thing' is described by gesture towards material objects but its true properties, as perceived by Julian are not its materiality or referentiality but rather aspects of God's relationship to it" (67). The object is no bigger than a hazelnut, but it is not a hazelnut; it is as round as a ball, but it is not a ball. Indeed, other than its round shape, it has no specific physical indices. In effect, Julian sees (or at least describes) no particular thing at all. Because she sees the unidentified object in her spiritual eye (both in this passage and in the section where everything appears "so lytylle") and because she writes about it without specific referents, Julian never describes the precise physical details of the vision. What she does describe is the possibility that something exists beyond the physical realm and that the connection one can have with it is necessarily limited by God's will.

Although on the one hand, she sees (and describes in vivid detail) "the swete face [of Christ] as it were drye and blodeles with pale dyeng and deede pale" (357.4-5), on the other she believes "as long as we be meddlyyd with any part of synne we shall nevyr see cleerly be blessyd chere of god" (660.10-11). Presumably, Christ's face can be visualized in mystical experience and meditation since He lived and died manifest in a human body. Jeffrey Hamburger
points out, moreover, that "the late thirteenth-century Meditations on the Life of Christ...invite[s] the reader to visualize as he reads" (167); clearly, despite controversy over His representation in iconography, visualizing Christ's Passion (including His face during the Passion) was not out of the ordinary. One cannot, however, fully see the face of God until after leaving the human realm permanently. The experience of seeing God will happen at a moment of union between the human and the divine, not before. Indeed, as Julian explains, God "shall nevyr haue his fulle blesse in vs tylle we haue our full blesse in hym, verely seyng his feyer blessydfulle chere" (661.18-20; emphasis added). Here Julian structures her rhetoric with *chiasmus*\(^{26}\) to illustrate this moment of crossing—the human/divine union associated with the final revelation of God's face.

Until this time, a gap will necessarily exist between the human and the divine. Arguably, this gap is caused by the discrepancy between the created and the uncreated. For example, when Julian notices the object *no bigger than a hazelnut*, she discusses it as something created by an uncreated God. The *something*, in turn, must be thought of as *nothing*:

> This little thing that is made, me thought it might haue fallen to nought for littlenes. Of

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\(^{26}\) Julian's use of *chiasmus* will be discussed further in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. As a point of interest, note that this particular example of *chiasmus* is a long text addition.
this nedeth vs to haue knowledge, that vs 
lyketh nought all thing that is made, for to 
love and haue god that is vnmade.
(300.23–301.26)

In other words, in order to unite with God who is unmade, 
one must first acknowledge that all things made are, 
relative to the Creator, nothing/nought.27 This idea is 
reminiscent of the Cloud–author's dictate, discussed briefly 
already, in which he advises one to "put a cloud of 
forgetting beneath you and all creation" (66). Whether 
forgotten or thought of as nothing, the goal is to bring 
one'self closer to the Creator by distancing oneself from 
creation. Julian stresses this point again when she 
concludes, "no sowle is in reste till it is noughted of all 
things that is made" (301.31–32). She recognizes that true 
rest can only occur at the moment of union between the soul 
and God—the point at which, "I be so fastned to him that 
ther be right nought that is made betweene my god and me" 
(300.21–22). In this description of the hazelnut–like 
object, both Julian's lack of referentiality and her 
acknowledgment that she saw the object in her eye of 
understanding (rather than the physical eye) support the 
concept of spiritual understanding through "nought." That 
is, Julian sees nothing/nought physical or physically and, 
therefore, comes closer (at least in the written

27"All things made" does not include the soul itself; the making of the 
soul will be discussed shortly.
representation of her visions) to the "nought" between the made and the unmade.

The contentio between the created and the uncreated (or made and unmade) occurs several times in the Showings. To Julian, God is "endelesse souereyne loue vnmade" (484.12); man's soul, on the other hand, "is a creature in god whych hath the same propertes made" (484.13-14). This particular definition of God as love unmade is found only in the long text. 28 Shortly following these quotations Julian again uses chiasmus to illustrate a mutual relationship between God and His creatures: "[G]od enjoyeth in the creature and the creature in god" (484.15-16). 29 Thus, in the passages quoted from page 484, Julian's emphasis on the difference between made and unmade occurs in conjunction with a rhetorical emphasis (through chiasmus) on the mutual relationship between apparent opposites. Moreover, as in the passage quoted from 300.23-301.26 (and as will be discussed further), the relationship between the made and the unmade also occurs in conjunction with the concept of nothing or "nought." For Julian, as I shall argue, the bridge between the made and the unmade is "nought" and,

28 As noted earlier, the concept of God as unmade is mentioned elsewhere in the Showings. See, for example, Julian's references to "god that is vnmade" (301.25-6) and "the makor, whych is substanncyall kynde vnmade, fat is god" (559.46-7). Julian understands God (and all that is divine) to be uncreated; that is, God was not created by some other force, but has eternally existed in and of Himself. The earth and all its inhabitants, on the other hand, are created by God.
29 As with 661.18-20, this example of chiasmus is a long text addition.
works in a similar way to Kempe’s neutral zone between the human and the divine.\footnote{See Chapter One, pages 38-9.}

Julian’s use of “nought” will later be examined in and of itself, but first we must examine another passage in which “nought” is connected to the made/unmade duality and the union with God. In Chapter 53 of the long text (and not at all in the short), Julian discusses the making of man’s soul: “And thus I vnderstode that mannes soule is made of nought, that is to sey it is made but of nought that is made” (558.41-2). She then contrasts this with the making of man’s body (out of slime from the earth) and concludes, “But to the makyng of mannys soule he wolde take ryght nought, but made it. And thus is the kynde made ryghtfully onyd to the maker, whych is substanncyall kynde vnmade, bat is god” (559.45-47). Although man’s soul is made, it is made of “nought” and, therefore, able to be oned or united with God, who is unmade. Julian describes God and our relationship with God using negative language; we cannot understand this relationship unless we understand “nought.”

Julian later repeats a similar idea to one that she already brought forth earlier (at 300.21-22, quoted above): “And therfore it is that ther may ne shall be ryght nought betwene god and mannis soule” (559.47-49). She thereby emphasizes her belief that people are already (and always
have been) united to God through or because of this "nought"—or, as she implies shortly thereafter with a play on words, through the "knott," knit without beginning and without end to God.\(^{31}\) Indeed, as she explains later in the long text (and again not in the short), God is "more nere to vs than tonge may telle or harte may thyngke" (662.27-28). Julian expresses the relationship between the human and the divine by describing what it is not (again, through adynaton), that it is a "knott," and that it is "nought" at all.

One must consider, however, that nothing might actually be something, albeit in a negative sense—that is, as a space for transition, a void, or a chasm between opposites. It is not something (that is, it remains nought), but language must again be used under erasure in order to gesture toward such voids. As examined thus far, Julian locates "nought" between her God and herself and between God and man's soul.\(^{32}\) Such ideas continue to surface throughout her work. In Chapter 46, Julian once again contends, "For oure soule is so fulsomly onyd to god of hys owne goodnesse that betwene god and oure soule may be ryght nought" (493.38-39). Moreover, in Chapter 52 when Julian discusses the higher and lower parts of "manny's lyfe," she claims, "Betwene bat one and bat other is ryght

\(^{31}\)See 560.60 and 560.63.
\(^{32}\)See 300.21-22 and 559.47-49.
nought, for it is all one love, whych one blessyd loue hath now in vs doubyll werkyng" (553.88-90). In each instance Julian sets up a dynamic in which she simultaneously locates something and nothing between the two apparent opposites. The very use of the word "betwene" indicates some sort of separation; however, the separation and the unity exist together. That is, at the same time that Julian sets up a space "betwene" two things (by using the word "betwene") she also sets up the lack of such a space (by using the word "nought"). Julian thereby creates a coincidence of opposites within her writing similar to that found in Margery Kempe's Book.\textsuperscript{33}

This union of apparent opposites is reinforced by Julian's concept of the "medelur" or mixture in which people live. She believes life to be "a merovelous medelur both of wele and of woo" (546.9-547.10); indeed, "that medle" is "so merovelous in us βat vnnethis [scarcely] we knowe of oure selfe or of oure evyn crysten in what wey we stonde" (548.21-2). Even the lord (in the lord and servant allegory) has in his look "a semely medelur whych was marvelous to beholde" (524.129-130). The two aspects of the lord's look are, in turn, explained to signify earthly pity and heavenly bliss. Julian thereby places human experience

\textsuperscript{33}See Chapters 1-3 of this dissertation (especially Chapter One). The idea of coincidence of opposites will be examined in Chapter 5.
in a constant state of fluctuation between well-being and woe, between earth and heaven.

I will discuss further examples and aspects of Julian’s play with opposition in the next chapter; however, for now I am merely attempting to establish a resemblance between Julian’s concept of “nought” and her concept of “medelur.” Though she never directly connects the two (that is, they never appear together in the same sentence), I believe the connection is implied. In other words, Julian establishes that humanity lives in a state of apparent opposition (“medleur”) and elsewhere establishes that there is nothing (“nought”) between apparent opposites. At one point, moreover, she does discuss the two concepts within the same context—that is, within the allegory of the lord and the servant. The “medelur” in the lord’s eyes has already been mentioned; shortly thereafter Julian begins to discuss the significance of the clothing worn by the lord and the servant. During this discussion she analyzes the significance of the servant’s white tunic: “The wyth kyrtyll is his fleshe; the singlehede is that there was ryght noght betwen the godhede and the manhede” (535.244–546.245). Whether “singlehede” is translated as “being in one piece” or “scantiness,” makes no difference in terms of the

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34 The former is the glossary translation in Colledge and Walsh’s Middle English version; the latter is the translation in Colledge and Walsh’s Modern English version.
tunic's overall significance of "noght." However, given the option, I would choose "being in one piece" as more appropriate to represent the state of unity which exists (and is repeatedly stressed by Julian) when "nought" separates two apparent opposites.

It appears from the preceding evidence that the ideal position for the human being within Julian's theology would be a lack thereof. In other words, one should strive to be "nought" between opposites. In fact, Julian does (at least rhetorically) place herself in such a position when she says quite early in her text, "For yf I looke syngulery to my selfe I am ryght nought" (322.9). She thereby establishes herself as that which she believes exists between divinity and humanity and, therefore, establishes herself as a bridge or chasm in a similar way to Margery Kempe (who places her Creature on the border between the spiritual and the physical domains). Julian then focuses on unity when, immediately following the quotation about being "nought," she states: "But in generall I am, I hope, in onehede of cheryte with alle my evyn cristen. For in thyss oned stondyth the lyfe of alle mankynd that shalle be savyd" (322.9-11). Such unity is established, according to Julian, because "we be alle one in loue" (321.5). Divine love fuses opposites, establishes the nought/knot between humanity and the divinity, and creates the unity between all of
humankind. As Julian describes it, God showed her “the endleshed and the vnchanneabylte of his loue...that be loue of hym and of oure sowlys shalle nevr be depertyd vnto withouten ende” (703.16-704.19).

Love, according to Julian, ensures a union between the human and the divine, but faith is also necessary. In Chapter 7 of her Showings Julian discusses (among other things) how life is grounded in faith and then moves from this focus on faith and life to the faith involved in the visionary experience: “And whan the shewyng which is yeven for a tyme is passyed and hydde, than fayth kepyth it by grace of the holy goste in to our lyuys ende. And thus by the shewyng it is none other than the feyth, ne lesse ne more” (316.63-66). In light of the points I have raised thus far on Julian’s use of “hidden,” this passage is doubly noteworthy. Julian claims that each vision is “passyed and hydde” and then kept only through faith. She thereby acknowledges the absence of the very material that she is attempting to re-present. Once again, this passage (and its reference to that which is hidden) is an addition to the long text. Julian, here at the beginning of the long text, directly states the role faith plays in the mystical experience and, by extension, in the expression thereof. She can speak and write of her visions only through and because of faith in that which remains hidden.
In summary, the long text of Julian's Showings includes several apophatic descriptions amongst its additions. Quite possibly, Julian was influenced by writers on negative theology, such as the Cloud-author, between the composition of the short and long texts. Julian's negative theology includes the use of non-referential signifiers, the rhetorical figure adynaton, the acknowledgment of her inability to describe certain aspects of the divinity, moments of forgetting or near-death experiences, and sudden change (or exchange) between oppositions during her illness and immediately prior to the onset of her visions. Moreover, throughout the long text, Julian focuses on hidden aspects of God, emphasizes the gap between the created and the uncreated, and repeatedly acknowledges the possibility that this gap is actually "nought" after all. Each of these rhetorical techniques gestures toward an unknown God. In the end, Julian desires to be oned into a wholeness that is both human and divine—into the place where apparent opposites unite.
Chapter 5: The Point of Coincidence

Unlike Margery Kempe, Julian does not enter into a space where she regularly confuses the literal and the figurative. She is not, for example, in the habit of mistaking a real boy or a wooden statue for the Christ child. She does, however, assert that opposites must exist together. This assertion is not always direct; indeed, most references to the union of opposites occur indirectly within her discussions of theological points. Often, in Julian's Showings, the play with opposition is emphasized in her extensive use of contentio.

As will be discussed in this chapter, Julian, in her use of contentio and chiasmus, appears to build her theology on a coincidence of opposites.\(^1\) Theories on the coincidence of opposites were formally put forth in the fifteenth century by Nicholas of Cusa. I am not suggesting that Julian had access to Cusa's work; I am, however, going to suggest that she structures many of her ideas on the premise of coincidence of opposites before it was formally outlined.

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\(^1\)To define coincidence of opposites I refer to Ewert H. Cousins' interpretative models in, "Bonaventure, the Coincidence of Opposites and Nicholas of Cusa." As will be discussed a bit further on in this chapter, Cousins outlines three basic models for the coincidence of opposites: 1) unity, 2) difference, and 3) unity and difference.
by Cusa.\textsuperscript{2} I refer to H. Lawrence Bond's article on Nicholas of Cusa only to illustrate some of the theories behind the concept of opposites—a concept that Julian appears to have understood (whether or not she named it as such) and integrated into her own work.

In his discussion of Nicholas of Cusa's "appeal to Christology, the paradox of Christ's person, as the norm for theological method" (82), Bond paraphrases Cusa's thoughts as follows:

Discourse about God inevitably fails because God is unnameable, indescribable, indefinable, while language is naming, enclosing, defining, that is, giving limitations. This dilemma is solved only by Christ, the divine mediator of opposites. (82)

In other words, Christ is the link between the human and the divine or between human language and the ineffable divinity. As a solution to the "radical gulf between divine wisdom and the finite ways of knowing," Cusa maintains that "[t]he only valid dialectic is the coincidence of opposites" manifest in the "paradox of the Christ-maximum" or the "nexus" that is Christ (Bond 84).\textsuperscript{3} Bond explains, moreover, that the Incarnation provides "the gross metaphor for all

\textsuperscript{2}Julian was no longer alive at the time Nicholas of Cusa was writing (that is, mid 15th century). However, she may have had access to Bonaventure's ideas and, as Ewert Cousin's argues (see preceding footnote), Bonaventure's work is structured on the coincidence of opposites. (Bonaventure's dates are 1217-1274.)

\textsuperscript{3}See also: "Christ is the mediator of knowledge by being simultaneously the limited and absolute Maximum, that is, Creator and creature. He is the nexus both in the coincidence of the Infinite and the finite and in the coincidence of knowledge and ignorance" (Bond 85).
coincidences, including the coincidence of finite language with the ineffable God. And the icon of icons is the incarnate Christ; the hypostatic union of his person is the prime and model coincident” (88).

Julian’s well-known edict that all will be well has as its base her faith in the transformational power of divine love and grace. That is, Julian believes that God has, among other things, the power to turn human suffering into everlasting bliss. When discussing God’s mercy and related qualities, Julian describes our relationship with divine grace as follows:

And this is of be habundannce of loue, for grace werkyth our e dredfull faylyng in to plentuouse and endlesse solace; and grace werkyth our e shamefull fallyng in to hye wurschypsefull rysyng; and grace werkyth our e sorrowfull dyeng in to holy blyssyd lyffe. (503.35-39)

Julian’s perception of God’s grace and its transformative power is not evidence of a theology grounded in coincidence of opposites; that is, although this passage deals with transformation from one state to its opposite, it does not directly address the paradox of the Incarnation. However, both the passage just quoted and the following quotation (the former’s immediate continuation) do illustrate Julian’s use of rhetorical opposition and suggest (at least in the latter) a system of belief that gives priority to opposition
as a necessary component in humanity's relationship with God and God's grace:

For I saw full truly that eyr as oure contraryousnes werkyth to vs here in erth payne, shame and sorow, ryght so on the contrary wyse grace werkyth to vs in hevyn solace, wurschyp and blysse, ovr passyng so ferforth that when we come vppe and receyve that swete reward whych grace hath wrought to vs, there we shall thanke and blysse oure lorde, endlessly enjoyeng that eyr we sufferyd woo; and that shalle be for a properte of blessydy loue that we shalle know in god, whych we myght neyvr haue knownen withouyte wo goyng before. (503.40-504.49; emphasis added)

Aside from illustrating Julian's rhetorical skill, this passage exemplifies her theology of the necessity of opposites existing together. Indeed, she admits that love in God could never be known without woe going before. Like Margery Kempe's statement, "Helie xuld not noyyn me, but it xulde be a maner of Heuyn" (215.37-8), Julian's faith that we will endlessly rejoice "that eyr we sufferyd woo" suggests that she too has the ability to see one thing in terms of its opposite. If earthly suffering is what will bring everlasting bliss, then suffering can be equated with

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4Colledge and Walsh point out that the first part of this particular quotation (up to "wurschyp and blysse") is comprised of a six-membered compar, with internal repetitio, and an elaborate series of oppositiones. That is, the passage contains balanced phrases, repetition, and opposition. Indeed, the passage immediately preceding this one (503.36-9, as quoted above) is structured with the same rhetorical figures. (For precise definitions and more examples of these figures, see Colledge and Walsh's appendix of rhetorical figures in the Showings.)
(attaining) bliss, at least according to Julian's faith in the necessity of opposites and the transformative power of grace.

With regard to the long passage quoted above, Colledge and Walsh note Julian's use of the terms "contraryousnes" and "contrary wyse" and suggest that in doing so she implies the rhetorical figure oppositio contrariorum. Whether or not Julian directly refers to a rhetorical figure here, she nonetheless infers that contrariness or antithesis is an integral part of humanity's relationship with the divinity. Indeed, Julian stresses such opposition elsewhere in the text in terms of her own spiritual growth and understanding. When, for example, Julian recognizes that domination of the flesh caused her to regret the pain she had prayed for, she concludes, "Repentyng and wyulfulle choyse be two contrary:es, whych I felt both at that tyme; and tho be two partes, that oon outward, that other inwarde" (372.24-6). As Julian herself explains, the outward part "is our dedely flessh,

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5 See footnote at 503.40 and its references to 372.25 and 500.11. Colledge and Walsh define oppositio contrariorum in their appendix of rhetorical figures by quoting Arbusew: "Combining a litotes with a corresponding positive affirmation" (744). Colledge and Walsh's definition differs from other sources; Sonnino, for example, defines contrarium (also listed as oppositio) as follows: "A sententia or pithy saying drawn from contraries" (251). My intention here is merely to point out Julian's use of antithetical rhetoric. The antithesis in the quoted passage can therefore fit under the general definition of contentio: "Contrary or contrasting words or sentences placed together" (Sonnino 251).

6 Colledge and Walsh translate "repentyng and wyulfulle choyse" as "reluctance and deliberate choice" (Showings, trans. 212).
which is now in payne and now in woo, and shalle be in this lyfe, where of I felte moch in thys tyme" (372.27-8);
whereas the inward part "is a hygh and a blessydfulle lyfe, which is alle in peece and in loue, and this is more pryvely felte" (372.29-30). What must be noted in 372.24-6 is the simultaneity of the two contraries. She feels both contraries at that time or, as translated in the modern English edition by Colledge and Walsh, "both at the same time" (Showings 212). Thus, at the point in her visions where Julian, through her inward part, "chose Jhesu to [her] hevyn" (372.31-2), she clearly outlines the coincidental opposition between the inward and the outward. Moreover, with regard to this opposition of parts, she declares shortly thereafter that "both shalle be onyd in blysse without ende by the vertue of Christ" (373.38-9). That which she feels simultaneously here and now will be united through Christ later.

The spiritual goal does not appear to be that of ignoring or eliminating one part in lieu of the other, but for both parts to be "onyd" in eternity. In the meantime,

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7 In a footnote to 372.25, Colledge and Walsh explain that the "two partes" allude to what Julian later calls "substance and sensuality" (for example, see 566.23). In general, "substance" refers to the divine quality of the soul, whereas "sensuality" refers to the "body informed by [the] soul" (footnote 566.23).
9 I refer the reader back to Sells' "Principles of Apophatic Language" and, in particular, the concept of the "fusion of self and other within mystical union," quoted as #10 in my Introduction (209).
while Julian is still on earth, the two parts will work
together toward the goal of oneness—a oneness only possible
through the “vertue of Christ,” the perfect coincidence of
opposites. As Ewert Cousins suggests in his article on
Bonaventure and the coincidence of opposites, there are
three classes of coincidence. One involves “unity” which
eliminates the original opposition, one involves
“difference” or an ongoing juxtaposition, and one involves
both unity and difference:

In the third framework, that of unity and
difference, opposites genuinely coincide while
at the same time continuing to exist as
opposites. They join in a real union, but one
that does not obliterate differences; rather it
is precisely the union that intensifies the
difference. (180)

This “third framework” is the type on which Julian appears
to structure her argument. In light of her faith in Christ
and, specifically, in the Incarnation and hypostatic union,
Julian’s “unity and difference” approach is certainly not
unfounded. The structural framework and theological focus
grounded in the coincidence of opposites is, however,
extended to topics beyond those on Christ Himself.

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10 Cousins’ argument focuses briefly on which of the interpretative
models of coincidence of opposites relates to which “great religion”. For
example, he links Hinduism with the “unity” model and Judaism with
the “difference” model. He then asserts, “Christianity is more
difficult to place....While sharing the Semitic affirmation of the
difference between God and the world, its doctrine of the Incarnation
necessarily places it at least partially within the third class: of
unity and difference; for Christ is both God and man, joined through the
hypostatic union” (181).
For example, Julian describes human nature as having two parts in Christ, "the hyer and be lower, whych is but one soule" (569.49-50). She neither negates nor subsumes either part; instead she insists on two distinct parts which, together and simultaneously, form one whole. Likewise, in a discussion of our substantial and sensual nature (again, related to the higher and lowers parts of human existence), Julian insists that God "in his endlesse wysdom woide that we were doubyll" (575.58-9). She then extends her discussion of our double nature into the following chapter and concludes, "oure kynde is in god hoole" and, likewise, "in Crist oure two kyndys be onyd" (577.14, 578.19). Ideas that may at first appear to promote or suggest a theology of difference are then subsumed into an overall theology of unity and difference or a coincidence of opposites. She speaks of two different natures, but these two are united.

As noted in my Introduction, Bond contends that "[t]he theologian can speak of the divine only in the language of paradox, of the reconciliation of opposites,

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11 As with the inward and outward parts (as discussed earlier), Julian distinguishes the higher and lower parts as follows: "The hyer perty was evyr in pees with god in full joy and blysse. The lower perty, whych is sensualyte, sufferyd for the saluacion of mankynd" (569.50-52). Indeed, Julian notes that "theyse two pertyes were seene and felte in the viij shewyng," which includes 372.24-373.39. See also, footnote 7 (above) in reference to substance and sensuality.

12 As Colledge and Walsh note in their footnote to this quotation, "doubyll" implies "substantial and sensual"; that is, Julian here again makes reference to the higher and lower parts of human nature.
which exceeds logical discourse" (94). This precept could undoubtedly be extended to mystics. Julian, as theologian and mystic, consistently uses the language of paradox and rhetorical opposition to re-present iconographically her theology of coincidence. She describes her first revelation—a vision of Christ's blood—as "quyck and lyuely and hidows and dredfulle and swete and louely" (313.30-1). She then expands on these oppositions when she describes Christ as "so reverent and dredfulle" and "so homely and so curteyse" (313.33-4). Colledge and Walsh, in a footnote to these quotations, comment on the rhetorical structure: "It is significant that to convey these paradoxes, [Julian] uses her favourite figure, oppositio" (Book of Showings 313.30). They appear to have based this observation on Julian's frequent use of opposition; whether or not the figure is Julian's favourite is perhaps questionable. Nonetheless, in this first revelation, Julian experiences the paradox that will become central to her visionary experience. The frequent antithetical "feeling of wele and of woœ" that, according to her outline in the first chapter, forms the teaching of her seventh revelation finds its root in Julian's initial reaction to Christ's blood as quoted from the first revelation (282.19).

As discussed with regard to her "sodeyn change" (at 292.37-38) in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, Julian also
rhetorically situates her body between opposites in the seventh revelation when she emphasizes the fluctuation between well-being and woe. At this point, Julian once again emphasizes the movement back and forth between pain and joy: "And than the payne sheweth ayeenn to my felyng, and than the joy and the lykyng, and now that oonn and now that other, dyuerse tymes, I suppose about twenty tymes" (355.15-18). According to Julian's understanding, this showing was meant to teach her that "some tyme to be in comfort, and some tyme for to fayle" is advantageous to the soul (355.22-3). Moreover, it is God's will that people do not focus on the woe "but sodaynly passe ovyr and hold [themselves] in the endlesse lykyng that is god" (356.34-5).

The fluctuation or exchange between opposites actually forms the means by which Julian can "sodaynly passe ovyr" into eternal life with God. The tension itself opens the "chink in the defensive wall of reason" and thereby allows the human being to pass through into the apophatic realm.13

Given the dynamic of exchange just presented, Julian's statement, "Man is channgeabyll," can be seen in a new light (496.16). Man is changeable; that is, mimetic to Julian's rhetorical representation of exchange within the Showings (through contentio), her theological belief insists

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13 Again, I refer here to Gillespie and Ross's theory of creative tension, quoted in my Introduction (pages 11-12), referred to in footnote 9 of Chapter One, and quoted again in Chapter 4, page 144.
that people exist in a perpetual state of change or exchange. However, once union is achieved—that is, once a person has crossed over the point of exchange into eternal oneness with the divinity—God will “make vs vnchaugeable” (509.55). This, as is stressed in Julian’s theology, is only possible because of the “vnchanngeabylte of [God’s] love” (703.16). In other words, Julian sets up another opposition that involves the changeable and the unchangeable. God, in His divine nature, does not change; people, in their humanity, do change in order finally to reach the unchangeable Divine. Julian explains this in terms of contrariness:

And thus I saw whan we be alle in peas and in loue, we fynde no contrarousnes in no manner of lettyng, and that contrarousnes whych is now in vs, oure lorde god of hys goodnes make it to vs fulle profytably. For contrarousnes is cause of alle oure tribulation and alle oure woo; and oure lorde Jhesu takyth them and sendyth them vppe to hevyn, and then they ar made more sweete and delectable than hart may thyngke or tongue can tell. (509.45-51)

Two key points are brought together in this passage. First, Julian emphasizes her belief that opposition is positive or “fulle profytably” (indeed, even necessary) and will eventually lead us into the lack or absence of opposition (change or contrariness) that is God. Second, Julian admits that this transformation is beyond what the heart can think or tongue can tell. She resorts to adynaton at the point
where her theory leaves the realm of exchange and enters the
unknowable, hidden union with the divine.

The "fulle profyteable" opposition is also emphasized
in Julian's discussion of sin. Once again, Colledge and
Walsh note the oppositio that frames the following passage
on sin:

And god shewed that synne shalle be no shame,
but wurshype to man, for ryght as to every
synne is answeryng a Payne by truth, ryght so
for every synne to the same soule is gevyn a
blysse by loue. (445.2-6)

Julian contrasts and balances shame with honour, pain with
bliss. The opposition results in what could again be
described as woe and well. Although, in Chapter 40, Julian
warns against sinning for the purpose of gaining reward, she
also maintains that sin is "behouely" or necessary and that,
nonetheless, all shall be well (405.13). In one sense, sin
can be seen as a point of crossing; that is, sin as a cause
for both pain and bliss can, because of this very paradox,
be a point of access to the apophatic realm.

Moreover, Julian sees "verely that synne is no dede"
and thus places it rhetorically in the realm of the
ineffable (338.22; emphasis added). Sin, in Julian's view,
can only be compared to or defined as itself:

For syn is so vyle and so mekylle for to hate
that it may be lyconnyd to no Payne whych Payne
is not synne. And to me was shewed none harder
helle than synne, for a kynd soule hatyth no
payne but synne; for alle is good but syn, and
nought is yvell but synne. (458.37-41)

According to this passage (or, at least, according to
Julian’s choice of rhetorical structure), sin is once again
posed as ineffable. The first sentence, in a type of
chiastic pattern, moves from sin to pain, then from pain to
sin again. In doing so, sin is rhetorically compared only
to itself and, therefore, is never defined in relation to
anything else. Sin, like certain qualities of Julian’s
visions (see, for example, the hazelnut discussion), is
placed outside direct signification. Indeed, if nought is
evil but sin, Julian explicitly sets up a contrast—perhaps
the most supreme contrast of all—between the nought that is
evil (that is, sin) and the nought that is “mannes soule”
which is “made of nought” (558.41). The opposition of that
which is inherently evil (sin) and that which is inherently
good (the soule)\(^\text{14}\) carries Julian’s preoccupation with the
coincidence of opposites into the spiritual realm—that is,
into a direct opposition between Evil/Devil and Good/God.
One must question whether even this supreme coincidence,
working like all the coincidences already discussed, could

\(^{14}\)As discussed earlier (see page 156 of this dissertation), Julian
believes that the soul, being made of nought, is “onyd to the
maker...Dat is god” (559.46-47) and that “ther may ne shall be ryght
nought betwene god and mannis soule” (559.48-9). Thus, the soul is
connected inherently to God’s goodness. Indeed, Julian makes this
connection explicit when she explains: “Oure soule is onyd to hym,
unchangeable goodness....For oure soule is so fulsomly onyd to god of
hys owne goodnesse that betwene god and cure soule may be ryght nought”
(493.36-9).
open a space for entry into the apophatic. Based on the theoretical possibilities raised thus far, the answer to such a question would be "yes"; however, the prospect of what such a coincidence entails inevitably remains unknown.  

Significantly, this same opposition is at work on the earthly plane as well. In Chapter 47 of her Showings, Julian discusses how people are "changeable" and continually fall into sin (see 496.16, quoted and discussed briefly above). This, she believes, is due to our inability to see God:

And theryfore we faxle oftymes of the syght of hym, and anon we falle in to oure selfe, and than fynde we felyng of ryght nowght but the contraryous that is in oure selfe, and that of the olde rote of oure furst synne with all that folowyth of oure owne contynuance; and in this we be traveyled and temptyd with felyng of synne and of payne in many dyverse maner, gostely and bodely, as it is knowyn to vs in this lyfe. (498.86-499.45; italics added)

This passage brings together a number of the concepts discussed in relation to Julian's theology thus far:

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15 This analysis opens the space for a discussion on possible entry into eternal evil rather than eternal good. Although contrary to what Julian believes will happen to her and her "even Christians," eternal damnation is nonetheless a threatening possibility within the Christian faith. Christ has assured her that all will be well despite her inability to understand how. In asking the question (to which this is a footnote), we are ourselves venturing into the unknown in the attempt to conclude how or even if the opposing forces remain intact beyond the cloud of unknowing. For now, I simply put forth Julian's ineffable concept of sin in contrast to an ineffable God as yet another example of Julian's rhetorical structure of opposition.
"nowght," "contraryous," "synne," and the opposition of "gostely and bodely." The connection between "nowght" and "contraryous" is especially pertinent. If both of these concepts are understood as they have been in other contexts in the Showings (as outlined in this dissertation), they are each an integral component of a whole theology. Indeed, the two concepts could be understood to be linked in the sense that one ("contraryous" or opposition, especially in terms of a coincidence of opposites), because of its inherent tension between opposites, can be the cause of the other ("nowght" or nothing). In this particular passage, however, this process of feeling nothing but opposition takes place within the self rather than outside the self in direct relation to the divinity.

Nonetheless, Julian makes clear within the same passage that the feelings of sin and pain take various forms, spiritually and bodily. The contrariness (or opposition) therefore occurs in two opposing places—that is, both in spirit and body. Moreover, the "nowght" is already in "our self" and, at least in this passage, is not relegated to something reachable only upon the death of the body. This notable shift in perspective lends credence to the idea (as explored in relation to Margery Kempe) that one’s relationship with God—whether based on apophatic theology or not—can be sought (or not/not/nought sought) both
internally and externally.\textsuperscript{16} That is not to say that Julian believes one can see God internally (any more than one can see Him externally); instead, it forces one to forgo placing the chasm (or nought) in one specific space or time. Julian’s insistence on diversity (in this case, specifically the “dyverse maner” in which sin and pain occur) throughout the bodily and the spiritual planes suggests an unwillingness on Julian’s part to place limits on her visionary understanding.

Such a contrast (or, to look at it the other way, such a connection) between the bodily and the spiritual is likewise emphasized with respect to Christ. When Julian describes her vision of Christ’s “drying” body and recalls His words, “I thirst,” she explains that she “sawe in Crist a dowbylie thurst, oon bodely and a nother gostly” (360.3-4). In this passage, Julian’s rhetorical description of Christ (the very embodiment of the coincidence of opposites) reinforces the necessary opposition/connection between the body and the spirit at the point of crossing between death and rebirth. In addition, numerous references to (so-called) apophatic images appear throughout the chapter in which this double thirst passage is located. Certainly, such images can be found throughout the Showings at large;

\textsuperscript{16}As will be explored later in this chapter, Julian (again like Margery) creates an internal dwelling for God. Such references recall Sells’ principle (quoted as #5 in my Introduction) of “radical immanence”: “That which is beyond is within. That which is other, is the non-other” (207).
however, in this particular chapter the "wound" and the
"crown" are repeatedly emphasized during Julian's
explanation of Christ's thirst. Both the wound and the
crown, in their re-presentation of "negative" space, are
icons that can be associated with Julian's apophatic
theology.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, with respect to rhetorical
technique, Julian uses chiasmus to describe "the swet here
clyngyng the drye flessch to the thornys, and the thornys to
the flessch dryeng" and, thereby, inscribes the text with
yet another rhetorical icon of the crossing point (361.13-
15). She then concludes that, in regard to Christ's pain,
"alle is to lytylle that I can sey, for it may nott be
told" (364.48-9; emphasis added).\textsuperscript{18} Christ's "double
thirst" is but one reference in a series to experiences
which, in the end, remain ineffable.

Julian's desire at the beginning of her Showings "to
haue all maner of paynes, bodily and ghostly" can be read as
a desire for a double pain, parallel to the double thirst of

\textsuperscript{17}In their article on "The Apophatic Image," Vincent Gillespie and
Maggie Ross never directly define "apophatic image." However, they do
imply by examples throughout the article that such images are associated
with absence or emptiness. Indeed, they begin their discussion with a
description of "empty spaces" in the bible. One such space is the empty
tomb in the New Testament which they refer to as being "eloquent in its
absence of presence" (53). They later refer to the crown of thorns as
having an "apophatic centre surrounded by the signs of human suffering"
(59). The emptiness of the apophatic image is, in theory, "non-figural"
and, because of this absence of figural significance, can "the mind's
usual interpretative strategies" to be "temporarily suspended" (57).
Thus, through the suspension of such conscious strategies, the mind
moves from "the world of signs to the world of the apophatic" (55).
\textsuperscript{18}See Chapter 4, footnote 3 (of this dissertation).
Christ (287.27-8). In order to enter the ineffable, apophatic realm, Julian's process must itself occur through the apparent opposition of body and spirit. Likewise, in Chapter 60, Julian speaks of both the bodily and the ghostly birth or "forthbryngyng" (599.49-51). The bodily may be on a lesser or lower scale than the ghostly (in terms, that is, of Julian's understanding of our lower and higher natures); however, both parts are essential to the whole of human experience. In the passage on "forthbryngyng", Julian is discussing the Motherhood of Christ, and claims, in the process, that Christ "is our moder in kynde by the werkyng of grace in the lower perty, for loue of the hyer" (599.58-600.59). This recognition of Christ as Mother potentially creates a tension between yet another set of opposites: God the Father and Christ the Mother. Thus, the juxtaposition of the body and spirit once again takes place alongside another set of apparent opposites. Indeed, as is clearly evident, Julian's play with the body/spirit opposition throughout her Showings continually takes place in the context of perpetual and necessary opposition.

Opposition is central to the teaching Julia: receives inwardly and outwardly. She claims to be taught inwardly by the Holy Spirit and outwardly by the Holy Church (414.5-7). Julian does not shun the preaching and teaching of the
Church. Indeed, she maintains, during a discussion of her belief in the Church's teaching, that she wishes "never to receyve ony thyng that myght be contrary ther to" (323.25). Evidently, Julian does not see the inward teaching as contrary to the outward; each method of teaching (although perceived in apparently opposite manners) is merely one part of her whole body of spiritual education. In addition, Julian maintains that these two methods—that of the Church and that of the Holy Spirit—together form one part of human understanding and describes the other part as follows:

That other is hyd and sparryd fro vs, that is to sey alle that is besyde oure salvacion; for that is oure lordes prevy conncelle, and it longyth to the ryalle lordschyppe of god to haue hys pryvy connceyles in pees, and it longyth to his saruanntes for obedyence and reverence nott wylle to know hys connceyles. (415.12-16)

Once again, the knowable is paired with the unknowable. Not only does Julian stress both outward (Church) and inward (Holy Spirit) methods of learning, but she also reiterates her belief in a hidden God. In doing so, Julian justifies that which she cannot explain. When Christ says, "That bat is vnpossible to thee is nott vnpossible to me," Julian (and all her even Christians) must have faith in these words

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19See, for example, "But in all thing I beleue as holy chyrch prechyth and techyth. For the feyth of holy chyrch, which I had before hand vnderstondynge, and as I hope by the grace of god wylle fully kepe it in use and in custome, stode continually in my syghte, wyllyng and meanyng never to receyve ony thyng that myght be contrary ther to" (323.21-25).
rather than attempt to understand how this can be (426.49-50).

For Julian, faith is the bridge between the human and the divine; indeed, faith is the quality that allows for the conception of an unknowable divinity at all. That which can neither be known nor spoken of can, through faith, be believed in. Julian separates our conscious knowledge of our selves from our knowledge of our true selves through faith: "But oure passyng lyvyng fat we haue here in oure sensuailyte knowyth nott what oure selfe is but in our feyth" (490.2-3). However, just as we can never completely know God (no matter how great our faith), we can never completely know our true selves. Faith apparently allows only for the possibility of a higher self; it does not provide direct access to that self. According to Julian, "we may neyvr fulle know oure selfe in to the last poynt, in which poynte thys passyng life and alle manner of wooy and payne shalle haue ane ende" (491.10-12).

Several key concepts can be found in the passages at 490.2-3 and 491.10-12. First, faith acts as a bridge between the human and the divine; that is, it allows for a connection between what the mind consciously knows and what the mind conjectures about the divine. Second, life transitory, passing onward to an end point. Third, once this point is attained, the woeful life as we know it ends
(and, one assumes, perpetual bliss begins). What, then, is this point? Colledge and Walsh translate "poynt(e)" as "moment." Likewise, in the passage where Julian claims, "I saw god in a poynte" (336.3), they translate "poynte" as "an instant of time." In the footnote to the latter quotation, Colledge and Walsh admit that Julian may have "meant that she saw God as the centre of a circle," but maintain that "it seems more probable that she meant 'in an instant of time'" (336.3). Neither one nor the other translation succeeds at interpreting how the term works within Julian's faith.

Gillespie and Ross suggest, "God in a point may be deliberately enigmatic: it is certainly non-figural and non-referential. It is apophatic in that one can imagine what she means without being able to represent it in terms of imagery" (72). However, no one (as far as I know) compares Julian's use of the word "poynte" in the "god in a poynte" quotation to her use of the same word elsewhere. Later in the same chapter, for example, Julian claims that God "is in the myd poynt of all thynges, and all he doth" (338.20-21). Both of these uses must be taken in conjunction with her concept of "the last poynt" (as quoted above). In the case

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20 See their modern English translation, Showings, 258.
21 Compare Middle English, 336.3 with modern English, 197. See also 549.38 vs. 280 and 714.5-6 vs. 337.
22 Colledge and Walsh do not provide much of an explanation for this "probability" in Julian's text. They merely cite a few references to the word as it is used in other medieval texts.
of "the last poynt," Julian suggests a point of transition between life and death. That is, she explains that this "last poynt" is the point in which "thys passyng life and alle manner of woo and payne shalle haue ane ende" (451.11-12). In the case of God being in the "myd poynt" of all things (338.20-21), Julian suggests a space within the created where the Creator resides; likewise, in the case of seeing "god in a poynte," Julian suggests a space in which she, a human being, can locate God, the divinity. In each instance, Julian's "poynt(e)" acts as a point of access to the divine—whether that point be the last point of earthly life (and, thus, the first point of everlasting life with God) or the point in which God Himself resides. As will be emphasized over the next several pages, Julian's "poynt(e)" can be understood as a point of access to the apophatic realm, analogous to the chasm or space of coincidence in Margery Kempe's Book.

Julian's use of "poynt(e)" must also be examined in connection with her use of the expression "in a touch." As

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23 Throughout the Showings Julian makes clear her belief that the end of pain in life marks the beginning of joy in afterlife. For example, Christ explains to her: "Sodeynly thou shalt be taken from all thy payne, from alle thy syckness, from alle thy dysese and fro alle thy woo. And thou shalt come vp abone, and thou shalt haue me to thy mede, and thou shalt be fullylyd of joye and blysse, and thou shalt nevyr more haue no manner of paynne, no manner of sycknes, no manner mysselykyng [displeasure], no wantyng of wyle, but evyr joy and blysse withoute end" (620.14-621.20). As will be discussed shortly, Julian also explains that the sudden transformation between one state and the other "shalle alle be one tyme" (380.15)—that is, instantaneous. Thus, the "last poynt" at which pain ends simultaneously represents the point at which joy begins.
with their translation of "poynt(e)", Colledge and Walsh translate Julian's use of the expression, "in a touch," as "in an instant" or "in a brief moment." 24 Their translation suggests that Julian's use of "in a poynte" is synonymous with her use of "in a touch." However, as I will illustrate, a distinction can be made between the two. Whereas "in a poynte" indicates a space (albeit a liminal and abstract space) beyond which one can only conjecture the ineffable, "in a touch" indicates a rift in temporal knowledge (similar to the time lapses or melding of time experienced by Margery Kempe). 25 When Julian claims to understand Christ's Passion "for the most payn and ovyr passyng" (406.23-4), she immediately notes, "And with alle, thys was shewde in a touch, redely passyd ovyr in to comfort" (406.24-5). The "touch" collapses time in that Julian feels only Christ's pain before it and His comfort after it; she does not indicate an extended period of transition between the pain and the comfort. As opposed to the way Julian uses "in a poynte"—that is, as a nexus between opposites—she uses "in a touch" more distinctly as a temporal shift.

24 Compare, "thys was shewde in a touch" (406.24) to "this was shown to me in an instant" (225). Compare, "and this was shewed in a touch" (527.157-56) to "and this was shown in a brief moment" (272).
25 Julian's use of "poynt(e)" as both a spatial and temporal reference (simultaneously) will be discussed further on in this chapter.
Similarly, during the lord and the servant allegory, Julian explains that the amplitude of the lord’s clothing, “betokenyth bat he hath beclosyd in hym all hevyns and all endlesse joy and blysse; and this was shewed in a touch, wher I saw that my vnderstandyng was led in to the lorde” (527.156-59). Here the “touch” again represents a temporal event after which Julian’s understanding is changed. In both cases the “touch,” like the “poynte,” does act as the nexus between opposites. In the first example of “touch,” pain is juxtaposed to comfort; in the second, the literal clothing is juxtaposed to its figurative meaning. However, the “touch,” in both cases, signifies a shift in Julian’s understanding based on a particular event in time; the “poynte,” on the other hand, signifies a particular apophatic space—whether that space be the nexus between life and death or the space ai/in which God resides. The two terms should be understood (at least in the foregoing quotations) as distinct and, certainly, not translated synonymously as “in an instant.”

This distinction is especially important when considering Julian’s conception of our space and/or time on earth. As will be discussed over the next few paragraphs, Julian’s use of “poynte” later in the text acts to collapse the distinction between space and time. In Chapter 64, Julian discusses the pain of this world and repeats three
times (in close proximity) the Lord’s promise, “Sodeynly thou shalte be taken from all thy payne” (620.14-15). Julian’s repetition of the word “sodeynly” emphasizes the instantaneousness of the transformation (from pain to well-being) and suggests a preoccupation with the time frame in which the transformation will occur. Indeed, the conception of a lack of time begins to surface. This concept is likewise emphasized when Julian contrasts a person’s “pacyence ovyr be tyme of his lyvyng” with the “vnknowyng of hys tyme of passyng” (621.24-622.25). Whereas we have a conscious awareness of life, we have a complete lack of awareness—an unknowing—of the time of death. In other words, Julian again acknowledges an aspect of God’s plan that remains hidden or unknown until the point of crossing.

Establishing the sudden and unknowable nature of the time of death is an essential step in establishing a similar chasm of unknowing within life itself. Immediately following her discussion of patience (over the time of living) and unknowing (over the time of passing), Julian discusses a further relationship between life and death:

26 “Sodeynly thou shalte be taken” is repeated at 621.22 and then varied slightly at 622.29-30 as “we be takyn sodeynly out of payne in to blesse.”
27 See also the following examples from other chapters: “[W] e shuld sodeynly be takyn from all our payne” (284.47), “[S] odenly all my paine was taken from me” (292.35-6), and “[T]hey be sodeynly delyverde of synne and of payne” (451.23-4).
And also god wylle that whyle the soule is in the body, it seeme to it selfe that it evr at be poynete to be takyn. For alle this lyfe and thys longyng that we haue here is but a poyn, and when we be takyn sodeynly out of payne in to blesse, than payn shall be nought. (622.27-30; emphasis added)

Colledge and Walsh translate the first "poynete" simply as "point" and the second "poyn" as "instant of time" (306). However, given Julian's use of "poynete" elsewhere in her Showings, the two examples here do not necessarily refer only to time. The first example--"at be poynete to be takyn"--can imply both time and space. That is, at any time or place a person may be taken; at any time or place, a person may enter the "poynete" between the pain of life and the bliss of the afterlife. Note, however, that the sentence has a qualifier: while the soul is in the body. In other words, the body itself is not "at be poynete"; only the soul will be taken and, therefore, only the soul in its relationship with the body is ever (and always) "at be poynete." Thus, even this example of "poyn" occurs rhetorically amidst the apparent opposites of body and soul.

The second example, in which Julian claims that all life and longing "is but a poyn," also needs a thorough examination. Certainly, "poyn" in this case could mean an "instant in time," but what would that imply? How, moreover, does that relate to Julian's other uses of "poyn(e)?" If, to begin with the last question, a
“poynt(e)” is something situated between two other (and opposite) things, then this “poynt” is situated between pain and bliss (or life and death). Remember, moreover, that Julian speaks of life and longing—meaning, presumably, a longing for God or, more specifically, a reference back to the beginning of the chapter where Julian speaks of the “grete longyng and desyer of goddys gyfte to be deluyerde of this worlde” (619.5-6). The life and longing to be with God is “but a poynt” from which we will be suddenly taken and at which pain will become nought. Thus, the “poynt” is both the crossing point between the life of pain and the nought thereafter.

Much earlier in the text, Julian makes reference to a similar (and perhaps identical) idea while discussing Christ’s appearance on the cross. She emphasizes the change in His appearance (implying that the change is from one of suffering to one of joy) and then continues, “Sodeynly he shalle channg hys chere to vs, and we shall be with hym in hevyn. Betwene that one and that other shalle all be one tyme; and than shall alle be brought in to joy” (380.14-16). Immediately prior to these comments, Julian notes that we will suffer pain with Christ “in to the last poynt” (380.13-14). As in the passage quoted from 622.27-30, Julian here combines a temporal reference (“sodeynly”) with a reference

28 See footnote 23 above.
to "poynt(e)." Once again, we find a reference to the point between life and death (pain and bliss/suffering and joy), followed by a reference to a sudden change which, in turn, results in an apparent melding or deletion of space and/or time. That is, in 622.27-30 the sudden change between pain and bliss results in nought and in 380.14-16 the sudden change between suffering and joy results in "one tyme" (or, potentially, "no tyme"). I suggest a reading of "no tyme" here since, according to the textual notes in Colledge and Walsh's edition, the Sloane manuscripts (as distinct from the Paris manuscript on which the Colledge and Walsh edition is based) record "no tyme" instead of "one tyme." Certainly, "no tyme" would be more consistent with Julian's theology as it has been discussed thus far; that is, "no tyme" posits a chasm of time resulting from (ex)change between opposites. However, "one tyme" is consistent with the idea of coincidence—as the point where suffering and joy coincide.\(^{31}\)

\(^{29}\)Notably, Julian uses the word "poynt(e)" on two other occasions in this section in near identical sentences: "Wer is now any poynt of thy payne or of they anguysse?" and "Wer is now any poynt of thy payne or of thy agreffe?" (379.10 and 380.17; emphasis added). These questions appear, respectively, before and after the passages already quoted from 380.13-16 and, thereby, provide a rhetorical frame for Julian's comments on Christ's sudden change—that is, within the rhetorical structure, reference is made to the "last poynt" between these two other "poynt"s.

\(^{30}\)See footnote 23 above. In this section (380.13-16), the reference to sudden change immediately follows the reference to the last point.

\(^{31}\)I give this alternative reading of "no tyme" merely as a point of interest. Colledge and Walsh defend their choice of the Paris manuscript at length in the introduction to their edition. They criticize the Sloane manuscript(s) for mixing "archaic forms and
A potential meaning of "poynt" as a reference to life itself still remains to be considered. Julian claims, as quoted above, that "lyfe...is but a poynt" (622.28-9); but to understand this, we must take into account an aspect of Julian's theology not directly referred to in these passages. Two chapters prior to her comment that life is "but a poynt," Julian discusses how nature (or "kynd") flows in and out of God:

God is kynd in his being...He is the grounde, he is be substannce, he is the same thyng that is kyndnesse, and he is very fader and very modyr of kydys. And alle kyndes that he hath made to flowe out of hym to werke his wylle, it shulde be restoryd and brought agayne in to hym by saluacion of man throw the werkyng of grace. (611.13-612.18)

The idea that all nature flows out of God and that all shall be restored in Him again suggests that human nature (life, as we know it) exists between the emanation and return. In this sense, Julian's "poynt" could be a reference to the space and time filled by life itself as it exists between a coming from and returning to God. As will be discussed over the next few pages, this space and time appears to be negligible, as if reduced or even deleted when witnessed from the (theoretical) perspective beyond the point of

modernizations" and for being "marred throughout by the persistent omission of words and phrases which the scribe—or his copy—had deemed superfluous to the sense, but which destroys Julian's rhetorical figures, which are integral to her thought" (26).
death. In other words, from a certain point of view, life is merely a “poyn(e).”

Given Julian’s belief in an emanation from and return to God, given her belief in “one tyme” (or “no tyme”) between life and death, and given her use of “poyn(e)” as a place/space (albeit an abstract one) throughout the text, her concept that “this lyfe and thy longyng that we haue here is but a poyn(e)” (at 622.28-9) can be taken both temporally and spatially. If, however, life is merely a temporal and spatial point of crossing, Julian’s point of view appears to be from a time and place beyond life. Julian cannot actually witness and write about life from a time and place beyond life; however, as a matter of faith, she can imagine life from God’s point of view. She does, after all, claim to envision the entire world, or “all that is made,” from such a perspective in the “quantitie of an haselnott” passage (300.12-13, 299.9). Yet a complex dynamic arises in Julian’s theological thought when the “lyfe...is but a poyn(e)” quotation is considered in conjunction with the claims that she “saw god in a poyn(e)” (336.3) and that God “is in the myd poyn(e) of all thynges” (338.20-21). If God is a point and life is a point, is God (by syllogism) life?

Elsewhere, Julian does indeed make statements that, when taken together, suggest this possibility—at least in
terms of God being the source for life. That is, she makes numerous references to the idea that God is, in one way or another, within us and sustaining us. She discusses, for example, the concept that our soul is united with and resides in God and, shortly thereafter, concludes: “God is more nerer to vs than oure owne soule, for he is grounde in whome oure soule standythe” (570.3-9, 571.11-12). Moreover, she claims (as quoted above) that God is “more nere to vs than tonge may telle or harte may thyngke” (662.27-28).

Both of these quotations suggest that God resides extremely near or within us. Julian also contends that “in man is god, and in god is alle” (322.16). This last quotation brings together the idea of God as a mid-point of creation with the apparently opposite concept that “we, soule and body [are] clade and enclosydde in the goodnes of god” (307.43-44). That is, not only are we enclosed in God, but He is also enclosed in us.

The rhetorical structure of these thoughts (as expressed directly at 322.16) is chiastic. Julian thereby

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32 See Chapter 4, page 157.
33 Wolfgang Riehle, in his discussion of Julian’s concept of God’s “indwelling,” emphasizes her frequent use of commutatio (a form of chiasmus): “[Julian] tells us that God dwells in the soul, and consequently the soul dwells in God....Such an antithetical mode of expression which is formed along the lines of the rhetorical figure of commutatio and which illustrates the indissolubility of the union between the soul and God, is highly characteristic of the style of her mysti-cal language. It does not, however, detract from the individuality of her dialectically skilful style if we observe that similar linguistic formulations can occasionally be found in German mysticism....And there cannot be really any question of an influence from German mysticism here. The parallelism would seem rather to be the result of both going
emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between God and humanity. The "in man is god, and in god is alle" statement is also paradoxical in that it suggests a God who resides both inside and outside of His creation. This belief is not synonymous with the concept of God's omnipresence. Julian does not simply say, "God is everywhere"; instead she makes a deliberately paradoxical statement. If the statement is taken as such and is not glossed over with a "God is everywhere" explanation, this paradox can be understood to open the way (or chink in the wall as it were) to the apophatic realm. Conceivably, it is at the point of crossing between the inside and the outside (or, as represented rhetorically, between the crossing of the two halves of the "in man is god/in god is alle" chiasm) where Julian can be said to have glimpsed "god in a poynste."

Life as a "poynst," moreover, can be seen as the temporal counterpart to the eternal "myd poynst" that is God. Whereas Julian glimpses "god in a poynste" from her temporal-bound position, she gains an apparently eternal point of view when she sees that "lyfe...is but a poynst." Although Julian's use of "poynst(e)" has never (to my knowledge) been discussed in the way I have brought forth here, Joan Nuth does make a suggestion along these lines: "When Julian 'saw

back to the same source, namely the words of Christ in John 6:56, where there is already a hint of this antithesis" (130-1; emphasis added). [John 6:56: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."]
God in a point' in the third revelation, she received a fleeting glimpse of God's point of view. The basic difference between God's perspective and ours lies in the fact that God is eternal Being and we are temporal beings" (100). Julian cannot gain access to an eternal point of view; however, the repetition of "poynt(e)" throughout the Showings helps her to suggest that very possibility. In addition to "all that is made" "lying in he palme of [her] hand (300.12-13, 299.10), Julian sees both God and human life as a point. Through rhetorical manipulation of one word, Julian subtly gives herself, as narrator, an omniscient point of view.

Like Margery Kempe, Julian also manipulates space through the rhetorical construction of dwellings. That is, Julian creates metaphorical dwellings in which she locates the divinity; in Julian's case, as will be seen, the dwelling place is also connected with the "poynt." Most of these dwellings centre around (or, to be more accurate, are centred in) the soul. She explains, for example, that God "made mannes soule to be his owne cytte and his dwellyng place" and that "in vs is [Christ's] homelysest home and his endlesse dwellyng" (525.145-46, 641.16-17). These ideas reinforce the "in man is god" passage quoted above, thereby suggesting once again that God is closer to us than we may

34 These quotations refer to the object she describes as having "the quantitie of an haselnott" (299.9-10).
have thought. Julian also recaptures the reciprocity of such human/divine indwelling:

For I saw full suerly that our substance is in god, and also I saw that in our sensuality god is, for in the same poynt that our soule is made sensuall, in the same poynt is the cytte of god, ordeyned to hym fro without begynnyng. In whych cytte he comyth, and nevyr shalle remewe it, for god is nevyr out of the soule, in whych he shalle dwell blessydly without end. (566.23-567.29; emphasis added)

Here again, Julian uses the word "poynt" to refer to something both temporal and spatial. Even Colledge and Walsh translate "poynt" in this instance as "instant and place" (287). However, they neglect to explain why they chose "instant and place" for "poynt" in this quotation but not in the previous examples cited. One could hypothesize that Julian's reference to the city of God (arguably, a place) influenced their decision to include "place" in their translation; however, Julian's use of the same word in reference to two separate incidents (first, that is, in a context that could be argued to be temporal--"in the same poynt" or at the same time "that our soule is made sensuall"--and, second, in a context that could be argued to be spatial--"in the same poynt" or in the same place "is the cytte of god, ordeyned to hym fro without begynnyng") supports the possibility that her use of "poynt(e)" elsewhere also implies both time and space. Moreover, she speaks here of the soul becoming sensual--that is, entering
the body—and, simultaneously, suggests a link between the human (soul and body) and the divinity in the capacity of the city of God. Once again the "poynt" is the nexus between opposites (in this case, between the human and the divine) and, therefore, represents another point of access to the apophatic.

Julian's belief that God dwells within us is evident from the quotations cited above. However, Julian also discusses the possibility of human entrance into the divine realm. In one such passage, Julian describes Christ looking into the wound in His side and explaining that this wound will be occupied by people:

[W]ith hys swete lokyng he led forth the vnderstandyn of hys creature by the same wound in to hys syd with in; and ther he shewyd a feyer and delectable place, and large jnow for alle mankynde that shalle be savyd and rest in pees and in loue. (394.4-395.7)

Julian's description of Christ's offer of a dwelling place can be seen to reciprocate her often repeated notion of the human soul as God's dwelling. However, this example not only speaks of a space in Christ, but also describes that space in terms of an apophatic image: the chasm of the wound. All the people who shall be saved will enter the chasm and, thereafter, will rest in peace and love.

This idea of entering into Christ is reiterated in another passage about emanation and return:
By the "myd person," Julian refers to Christ or, as Colledge and Walsh note, Christ as the "mediator." In their footnotes to the Middle English edition, they further suggest that Julian refers to Christ as such "because he is the second of the three Persons" (557.32). More notable is their suggestion that the term "myd person" "may well be of Julian's own coining" (557.32). Given everything discussed thus far in terms of points, crossing points, and God as "the myd poyn of all thynges" (338.20-21), Julian's use of the expression "myd person" could well imply that Christ is the ultimate mid-point, the point of crossing or the coincidence of opposites, the epitome of the potential of human union with the divine. She also reiterates the idea of human life being a point between emanation and return when she explains how we come out of, are enclosed in, and, finally, return to the divine. Presumably, the "in whom we be all enclosyd" clause--being rhetorically situated between "out of whom we all come" (birth) and "in to whom we shall all goo" (death)--refers to our human lifetime, the point between birth and death.

Throughout her Showings, Julian maintains not only that the divine dwells within us, but also that we dwell
within the divine. Although these ideas are not always presented together, they nonetheless combine over the course of the text to present a theology of mutual exchange. As in the case of Margery Kempe, Julian also frequently uses the rhetorical figure of chiasmus as a structural parallel to her theology. Since I have already written extensively on the way Julian uses a number of rhetorical figures as mimetic parallels to her thought, I will only briefly outline a few examples of chiasmus as they apply to my argument in this dissertation.

Like Margery, Julian’s use of chiasmus is remarkably extensive. Along with the “in man is god, and in god is alle” (322.16) example, many of her chiastically structured sentences embody her theological concept of unity. For example, during her telling of the lord and servant allegory, Julian discusses how the servant stands for all men: “For in the syghte of god alle man is oone man, and oone man is alle man” (522.103-04). Not only does Julian claim an understanding of God’s all-encompassing point of view, but she also emphasizes the idea that opposites coincide in God’s view by structuring the sentence with chiasmus, a figure of mutual exchange between opposites. In

36 Based on my MA thesis and other examples noted during my current work, Julian uses chiasmus over three dozen times. See also the examples of Julian’s use of chiasmus already mentioned in this Chapter (361.13-15), and those in Chapter 4 (661.18-20 and 484.15-16).
and of itself, this example does not contribute much to our understanding of Julian's theology. However, this is but one of several chiastically structured sentences within her explication on the lord and the servant (Showings, Chapter 51).

Of particular interest is a thirteen-line passage in Chapter 51 in which chiasmus occurs three times. This passage spans over two paragraphs dealing with two distinct subjects; however, I quote the paragraphs together in order to examine the chiastic thought underlying both:

And all that be vnder hevyn, whych shalle come theder, ther way is by longyng and desyeryng; whych desyeryng and longyng was shewed in the servuant stondyng before the lorde, or ellys thus in the son stondyng afore the fadyr in Adam kyrtyll. For the longyng and desyer of all mankynd that shall be safe aperyd in Jhesu. For Jhesu is in all that shall be safe, and all that shall be safe is in Jhesu....

Also in thys merveylous example I haue techyng with in me, as it were the begynnyng of an A B C, wher by I may haue some vnderstondyng of oure lordys menyng, for the pryvytes of the reuelacion be hyd ther in, not withstondyng that alle be shewyng be full of prevytes. (538.260-539.272; emphasis added).

If the theoretical implications of chiasmus (as they are outlined earlier in regard to Margery Kempe) are applied to this passage, three points of crossing occur in this section of Showings. Prior to the first chiasm, Julian is discussing how humanity will be saved by Christ and enter a
state of everlasting joy. She then explains that the way in which they "shalle come theder" is through longing and desire. However, as discussed earlier in this dissertation, we know that longing and desire must be given up in order to reach that which is longed for/desired. Within the structure of the chiasm, the words "longyng and desyeryng" are literally reversed; indeed, they are reversed again further along in the passage. Yet the chiasm itself also creates an absence (or chasm) of longing and desire at the theoretical point of crossing. Julian may well be suggesting here that the way into heaven is through a coincidence of opposites or, more precisely, through the opening created at the point of crossing or (ex)change between opposites. This point of crossing is suggested rhetorically through the chiasm and theologically through the invocation of Christ (the embodiment of coincidence) both prior to and within the section quoted. Julian's statement that all will be safe in Christ is also structured with chiasmus; thus, Julian once again reinforces her faith in the power of Christ and the coincidence of opposites.

This is especially relevant with respect to the pryvytes/reuelacion/shewyng/prevytes chiasm. Here, Julian juxtaposes that which is shown with that which is hidden. The tension between these two opposites is necessarily

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37 See Chapter 4, pages 143-4.  
38 This double reversal forms an ABBAAA pattern.
carried throughout the Showings; indeed, such tension between the seen and the unseen would be at the heart of any mystical text that attempts to verbalize the ineffable. How can the hidden be shown? How can the unsayable be said? (Are these not the questions with which we started and with which we must finish?) For Julian, "thys merveylous example" of the lord and the servant represents a pinnacle of her thought between the short and long texts.  

Through it she has gained "some vnderstandyng of oure lordys menyng" and it is this understanding that she structures on chiasmus. The final chiasm in the cited passage emphasizes the mysteries that must remain hidden despite the numerous revelations and the chasm that must remain void despite the numerous gestures toward it.

The chiasm is a single unit with two apparently opposite parts; it must remain as a single unit and cannot, without changing its very nature, lose one of its two "sides." It is in this way that Julian sees her personal relationship with the divine—reciprocal and everlasting. She writes near the end of her Showings in the context of Christ’s promise of protection, "I love the and thou lovyst me, and oure loue shall nevyr be depertyd on two" (719.18-19; emphasis added). As Paul Rorem points out, medieval authors such as Bonaventure and the Cloud-author integrated

39 The allegory of the lord and the servant does not appear in the short text.
"the Dionysian unknowing into the dominant Western theme of union through love" (222); even Julian's final comments remain consistent with medieval understanding of negative theology.
Conclusion

The mystical text is forever removed from its reader. Not only does the written language inevitably fail to capture the mystic's entire visionary experience, but the mystics themselves also fail in their attempts to know the divinity in its absolute essence. Likewise, the reader is removed from the mystical text. Over five hundred years have passed since Margery and Julian wrote their respective works. Our understanding of these medieval authors is necessarily influenced by our contemporary culture and theory; thus, no work on Margery or Julian can ever be complete in its understanding of these women, their thoughts, or their texts.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to illuminate some of the rhetorical strategies used by Julian and Margery in their efforts to reconstruct visionary experience. They both admit that words fail them; they both admit that they cannot fully know the divine. Nonetheless, they both succeed in pointing toward that which can never be represented fully. They both emphasize the importance of paradox, and, to do so, use the rhetorical figures of adynaton, contentio, and chiasmus. They both play with the concepts of time and space. They both play with the language that inevitably
fails them. Margery Kempe wavers, as if drunk, between the literal world and the figurative realm. Julian of Norwich contemplates the "poynt" of crossing and the "nought" between the human and the divine. Both women, in this play with opposition and paradox, rhetorically reconstruct the coincidence of opposites—a concept rooted in Christ, the embodiment of coincidence between the human and the divine.

Neither Margery nor Julian speaks directly of a rhetorical plan. Whether or not they had even heard the term "coincidence of opposites" remains unknown. Yet, as this study attempts to argue, both women understood the necessity of coincidence in the relationship between the human and the divine and the necessity of representing that coincidence in the written record of their mystical experiences. My analysis of these records combines theories on apophatic theology with theories on access to the apophatic realm. According to theories of apophatic theology, God cannot be known or represented at all. According to theories of access to the apophatic realm, the mind (through, for instance, the dynamic of paradox) can be brought to the state of unknowing associated with apophatic mysticism. Conscious memory of this state of unknowing, however, remains an impossibility.

Although the state of unknowing cannot in itself be reproduced, the dynamic of paradox can be. These mystics, though they can never reveal a hidden God, can nonetheless
recreate rhetorical icons of paradox. These rhetorical icons, in turn, recreate the point of crossing between opposites—the ineffable point of coincidence that is both an absolute chasm of difference and an absolute "nought" of union between opposites. Margery, though she herself cannot have conscious memory of such coincidence with the divine, can nonetheless continually place her Creature into a rhetorical chasm of confusion between the human and the divine. Julian, likewise, though she herself has not consciously reached the "poynt" of union, can nonetheless reveal her faith in its existence through repetition and other rhetorical techniques.

Perhaps in continually pointing to a hidden God, perhaps in having Christ say to Margery, "'I am an hyd God'" (Book 30.26-7), the mystical writers invite readers to seek that which is hidden. Once found, the journey ends:

Here, completely beyond the mind with its affirmations and negations, one meets God and is united with God. Affirmation and negation may have combined to guide the approach, but the final arena for meeting God is beyond all this....Negation is negated, and the human mind, befuddled, falls silent. The treatise, the corpus, its author, and this commentary having nothing more to say. Only silence.

(Rorem 213)

The mystical texts are not, in and of themselves, silent; they are, instead, mere starting points on the way toward such absolute silence. Julian recognizes the written
representation of mystical experience as a starting point; indeed, she claims that her book "is nott yett performyd" (731.2-3). Performance of the ineffable mystical union with the divine is beyond all words and all discussion of what each vision, each representation, and each rhetorical figure may or may not have meant.
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