Spring 2022

Theophila

Theophila Mathilda Barickman
Bard College

Theophila

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by

Theophila Mathilda Barickman

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2022

I dedicate this project to my mother and father who taught me to love actively.
And to Theresa Grace Allore who I love devotedly.

Acknowledgements

To those who kept me in love with learning:
Professor Karen Sullivan, Professor Marisa Libbon, Professor Kathrine Boivin, Professor David Ungvary, Professor Robert Cioffi and Reverend Mary Grace Williams.

To those who kept me paid and housed:
Tim Voell, Jenna Tocco and Amelia Legare.

To those who kept me from trying to carry the world alone:
Cameron Orr, Ezra Marney, Coco Goupil, Derk Derksen, Maggie Curtain, María Bernedo, Emma Kathrine and Captain Milmoe.

And to Manny Barickman who will eventually one-up me even at this.

Table of Contents

Introduction

You are an anchoress. You were born over one thousand years after Christ's Passion. You find value in religious devotion. At sixteen, you entered a convent, but the communal monastic life did not provide you with enough contact with Christ. You sought an intimate relationship with God and entered the anchorage. You live in a stone room connected to the village church. Daily you watch your God rise in the form of wafer and wine. With your eyes closed and your psalter in your hands, you can feel His arms enwrap your soul. When you meditate on His crucifixion, you can feel His blood seep from your stigmata. At night, inside your heart, He touches you like a lover.

Mystical marriage is a Catholic concept which describes a union between a mortal woman and God. This woman chooses to maintain her physical virginity in order to dedicate herself to God. Mystical marriage is centered around holy virginity. Virginity is a rational sexuality by which the mind imposes its will upon the body. Virginity allows a woman to return her body to its unfallen state in the Garden of Eden. Before the fall, humans were free from irrational desires and possessed full control of their bodies. Before the fall, humans could communicate with God. By maintaining her virginity, the virgin rejects the original sin of Eve and transcends her own fallen body. Through mystical marriage the virgin dedicates herself and her virginity to Christ and He becomes her spouse.

Marriage between God and humanity is based on the Song of Songs or Canticum Canticorum. The Song of Songs describes love for God using sensual, even sexual, images. The Song of Songs begins with the line "let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth" alluding already to a physical relationship between the speaker and her beloved.[1] The speaker in the Song of

[1] "*Osculetur me osculo oris sui quia*." SS 1:1.
In this project references to The Bible refer to the Vulgate Latin Bible.

Songs is situated as lover and describes a deep and passionate love for God. The Song of Songs focuses exclusively on the period of time leading up to marriage, a period of passionate devotion between two lovers. Within the framework of mystical marriage, the focus of The Song of Songs on the period leading up to marriage describes the incomplete nature of the virgin's union with God before her death and ascension to Heaven.

The virgin who participates in mystical marriage remains in the period of time between betrothal and wedding until she dies and is united with Christ. For this reason, the virgin is described as sponsa Christi, which translates to spouse of Christ. This terminology describes the relationship between the virgin and God as an engagement towards marriage. The virgin is best described as the bride of God and God as the bridegroom terms which emphasize the newness of their relationship. The bride is "getting married" or "newly married."[2] Marriage to God is incomplete before death and the terms used to describe mystical marriage reflect this fact.

Holy virginity is deeply embedded within the New Testament. Christ's virginity and the virginity of His apostles exemplify virginity as a virtue. Saint Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:7, "for I would that all men were even as myself"[3]. By this he means that he would command that all Christians dedicate themselves to prayer rather than procreation. However, Paul also says "it is better to marry than to burn" by which he means that not all humans contain the capacity for virginity[4]. Paul claims that both marriage and virginity are valuable to God, but he makes clear that virginity is superior to marriage. Virginity allows for greater devotion to God because the virgin does not possess the responsibilities to other people which mark the married person. Thus, virginity is the best way for a Christian to dedicate herself to God.

---

[2] "bride", n.1." *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2022)
[3] "*Volo autem omnes homines esse sicut me ipsum*." 1 COR 7:7
[4] "*Melius est enim nubere quam uri*." 1 COR 7:9

The concept of mystical marriage was largely developed by early Church thinkers during the time of the Church Fathers, men who wrote about Christianity within the early Catholic church. These men sought to create a framework for female virginity. Tertullian (d. 220 AD) was one of the first people to describe consecrated virgins as brides of Christ. Tertullian wrote to virgins in his letter "On the Veiling of Virgins" and told her that she does "not belie yourself in appearing as a bride [by wearing a veil]. For wedded you are to Christ: to Him you have surrendered your flesh".[5] Veiling is a modesty practice which shows that a woman does not wish to be seen by men. By veiling herself, the virgin asks not to be seen. Tertullian also describes virginity as a marriage—a lifelong choice to devote oneself to another person out of love or obligation.

Mystical marriage is unlike literal marriage. Within the Catholic framework literal marriage is towards the production of children. Christ and the virgin do not produce children, instead they are spiritually fruitful. The carnal nature of literal marriage is substituted for spiritual passion in the mystical marriage. Through mystical marriage the virgin produces love for God. In a conventional marriage the woman surrenders her autonomy to a husband in order to receive financial security. The husband is the "master of the house" who maintains control over his wife and children.[6] Female autonomy is deeply associated with virginity which means that virgins maintain their autonomy through marriage to Christ.

In this project I focus mystical marriage as practiced by the medieval anchoress. The anchoress is a female religious devotee who leads a solitary life in communication with God. Within Catholicism there are two primary contemplative practices: cenobitic monasticism and

[5] Tertullian. "On the Veiling of Virgins." *Ante-Nicene Fathers.* Trans Thelwall, Sydney. Ed Roberts Alexander; Donaldson, James; Coxe, A Cleveland, vol. 4. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885): 16
[6] "husband, n." *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2022)

anchoritic monasticism. Cenobitic monasticism is religious life practiced in community settings. This is the form of religious life practiced by nuns in convents. Anchoritic monasticism is highly isolated and focuses on developing a personal relationship with God.

Anchoritic monasticism was practiced in early Christianity by desert fathers, men who left society to live in the desert and talk to God. The church father Saint Jerome describes the history of anchorites in his Letter 22 thusly, "Paul introduced this way of life; Antony made it famous, and — to go farther back still — John the Baptist set the first example of it"[7]. Paul of Thebes and Antony the Great are both categorized as Desert Fathers—men who lived in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria. The Egyptian saint Paul of Thebes experienced exile in the desert which allowed him to become intimate with God. Antony lived at the same time as Paul of Thebes and is considered the founder of monastic life. John the Baptist is the prophet who came before Christ and foretold His coming. Each of these men lived, at least for a time, in the desolate wilderness and found God. Because of their withdrawal from all other community, those who practice anchoritic life are blessed with an intimate connection with God. After the establishment of monastic life, St Jerome describes anchorites as those who are religiously educated in monasteries and choose to "go from the monasteries into the deserts, with nothing but bread and salt."[8] By bringing "nothing" into the desert the anchorite shows his reliance upon God and his trust that God will provide. The desert into which the anchorites wander is symbolic of the nature of anchoritic life—a journey towards God through the wilderness of the mortal world.

---

[7] Jerome. "Letter 22" *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*. Trans Fremantle, WH; Lewis, G; Martley, WG. Ed. Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry. Vol. 6, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1893): 36
[8] Ibid.

Female religious life in the early days of the Church was primarily cenobitic. Saint Jerome was intimately connected with many wealthy, religious, Roman women such as Eustochium to whom he directed "Letter 22." Roman women who sought a religious life lived in all female religious communities within cities and towns rather than in the desert. Those few women who did reject society in favor of the desert were often reformed prostitutes and apocryphal.

The eleventh century saw a renewed interest in anchoretic life. At this time fairly equal opportunities existed for female and male anchorites. Male and female anchorites were educated in monasteries before choosing an isolated religious life. Male anchorites preferred religious seclusion in unpopulated forested areas. Women, however, could not be protected in such desolate areas. Instead, the "desert" into which anchoresses fled became a small room attached to a town church. The anchorage possessed a window which looked into the Church through which the anchorite could view mass. During the rest of the time the anchorite prayed, wrote, and read[9] religious texts.

Female anchoritic life follows the tradition of mystical marriage. Mystical marriage is an experience of connectivity which exists outside of the boundaries of a human body. God is an innate spiritual force which the anchoress can tap into. In order to access this energy, the anchoress must be entirely isolated and without distraction. Within the anchorage the anchoress participates in an incredibly dramatic love story staring herself and God. By entering into the anchorage, the anchoress becomes as if dead. The anchorage serves as an earthly tomb in which

[9] Anchoresses were not universally literate. If an anchoress was not literate, she may have had the opportunity to be read to and memorize important texts. Because this is a literature project in which I am examining texts which these women had access to I am assuming literacy.

the anchoress cultivates a relationship with God which will be completed by her death[10]. The anchoress spends her days in study as she attempts to understand God. The isolation required by anchoretic life can cause hallucinations and mental illness. The anchorage is not a place of comfort, it is a crucible through which the anchoress is tested or a flame over which she is tempered. Within the anchorage the anchoress is pinned on the cross in agony, bleeding love for Christ.

The medieval form of mystical marriage practiced by the anchoress possesses a deeply developed literary cannon which describes and informs the practice. The *Ancrene Wisse Group* is a collection of text from the English West Midlands written between the early 13th and late 15th centuries. *Ancrene Wisse* [Guide to Anchoresses] is a comprehensive guidebook to female anchoritic life in eight parts. The *Ancrene Wisse Group* also includes three saints' lives: that of Saint Julian of Nicomedia, Saint Katherine of Alexandria and Saint Margaret of Antioch. These women are early church martyrs who died in order to defend their love for God. Each of these women consider themselves mystically married to Christ and for this reason reject marriage to mortal men. These women experience direct communication with God. Sarah Salih in her book *Versions of Virginity in Medieval England* claims that saints are examples to virgins of "the angelic life achieved and perfected."[11] By this she means that anchoresses seek to live hyper-holy or angelic lives while on earth and saint's lives provide these women with examples of successful mystical marriage. Also included in *The Ancrene Wisse Group* is "The Wooing of Our Lord". "The Wooing of Our Lord" is a poem written in the voice of an anchoress who describes

[10] Death as the space of mystical marriage completed is an argument by Sarah Salih. Salih claims, "Death is where the fantasy of virginity achieved, stable and impermeable can best be located" (98). I am deeply informed and inspired by her writing. Salih, Sarah. *Versions of Virginity in late Medieval England*. (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001): 95

[11] Salih, Sarah. *Versions of Virginity in late Medieval England*. (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001): 53

her love for God. Based on The Song of Songs, this text describes the relationship between the anchoress and God using the language of passionate love. Each of these texts serves as a companion to the enclosed anchoress.

The conception of mystical marriage recorded by *The Ancrene Wisse Group* emphasizes passionate love for God. Love for God is the primary occupation of the anchoress. *Ancrene Wisse* uses the word "luve" [love] to describe the feeling which the anchoress must produce within her heart for God. "The Wooing of Our Lord" uses the more sexually charged "likinge" [pleasure]. The anchoress' relationship with God is the primary relationship of her life and it is defined by these texts as a love relationship. In this project I argue that the love for God which the anchoress cultivates is a product of her actions rather than a spontaneously generated emotion. Mystical marriage is the act of creating passionate love for God within an anchoress' soul.

Love for God is a virtue. Virtues are a gift of grace from God. In order to maintain virtue, it must be cultivated. The love created within an anchoress is lasting and requires constant maintenance. Literature written for anchoresses serves as tools for the maintenance of mystical love. The texts which I discuss in this project feed the anchoresses' love for God.

Love is an endlessly broad word. To understand love for God, the word love must be broken down. There are seven words for love in Latin. Each of these words evokes a different aspect of the experience of love. Love between God and the anchoress falls between two Latin forms of love: *caritas* and *amor*. *Amor* refers to "a real, internal love" [12] and *caritas* to "regard, esteem, affection, love".[13] The internal aspect of *amor* draws me to this word as a way of describing the love the anchoress enacts for God. Over time the connotation of *amor* becomes

[12] Lewis and Short. "*Amor*." *A Latin Dictionary*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1879)
[13] Lewis and Short. "*Caritas*." *A Latin Dictionary*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1879)

more aligned with the modern sense of love between lovers. Andreas Capellanus, a theorist of love in the twelfth century, used the word *amor* exclusively in this treatise *The Art of Courtly Love* to describe the love of lovers[14]. *Amor* describes the passionate intensity of the anchoress' love for God.

Caritas describes the active devotion of love for God. *Caritas* is the word used in what becomes a traditional reading during nuptial mass "love is patient, love is kind" found in 1 Corinthians 13:4[15]. The biblical term *caritas* becomes the English word charity[16]. In Christianity caritas refers to God's love for humanity, human's love for God and the love between Christians[17]. *Caritas* is a vital aspect of the love between the anchoress and God because it emphasizes the gentle constancy of their love.

By my claim that love is created through action, I also emphasize that love is more than a feeling. Feelings are passive and passing but love is active and constant. The passivity implied by the definition of love as a feeling comes with the danger of accidie. Accidie is a physical and mental lethargy produced by a "lack of interest in life." For the anchoress, accidie is a looming threat upon her love for God. Were the anchoress to experience accidie she would fail to love God. The anchoress' love for God must be active in order to prevent the depressive detachment found in love gone stale.

The active nature of the love created by mystical marriage is what allows it to be the center of a religious practice. The anchoress creates love for God by reading, writing and prayer. Her active love for God is pleasurable and provides meaning and focus to her life. As the

[14] Capellanus, Andreas. *The Art of Courtly Love.* trans. John Jay Parry. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960)
[15] "*Caritas patiens est benigna*" 1 COR 13:4.
[16] "charity, n." *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2022)
[17] Ibid.

anchoress becomes familiar with the literature which she has access to she develops intimacy with God. In a love relationship between humans, two are bound into one unit. Mystical marriage breaks down the boundaries of the self to create a fusion with God.

Through love for God the anchoress transcends her body. Literature for anchoress describes immanent and transcendent love. Immanent love is an experience on the human plane which takes place within the body. Literature for anchoresses often describes intimacy with God using metaphors which describe immanent love experienced by the body. Love for God is not immanent, it is transcendent. Transcendent love is the experience of communion with God which takes place outside of the body. The anchoress' interactions with God take place within her imagination. Imagination is the innate human capacity to conceive images of things which are not present.[18] Through the employment of imagination the anchoress leaves the immanent world which she experiences through her body and transcends into a spiritual state where she is with God.

Transcendent love is created by the act of imagination. Because transcendent love is an action it can be performed consistently which allows the anchoress to stave off accidie. A primary difference between immanent and transcendent love is that immanent love is a spontaneously generated feeling. Spontaneously generated love is a pleasurable but fleeting emotional experience which takes place in the body. Transcendent love is constant creation.

This project is divided into three chapters. In my first chapter I examine the rules which create transcendent love as they are recorded in *Ancrene Wisse*. The focus of this chapter is the analyze how the anchoress' actions create love for God. In my second chapter I compare three texts which depict mystical marriage: "The Life of Saint Margaret," *The Book of Margery*

[18] "imagine, v." *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2022)

Kempe and Julian of Norwich's "A Vision Shown to a Devout Woman." Through these texts I explore communication with God as an action which causes medieval women to transcend the imminent world and experience intimacy with God. In my third chapter I read "The Wooing of Our Lord" and argue that passion acts as a bridge between obligation and pleasure which causes the love between the anchoress and God to be constantly renewed. In this project I argue that love is an action performed by the medieval anchoresses which causes her to transcend immanent reality and achieve communion with God.

Love is a creative and spiritual act. Devotional love is not just for anchoresses, it is for everyone who seeks to love in a lasting way. In the twenty-first century love has been paired down to an emotion. By writing this project, I have come to understand love as an action which must be performed daily in order to stave off accidie.

Chapter One: The Art of Divine Love

The anchoress lives a highly regimented life. The rules which guide her life create love for God. The primary source for rules which guide the anchoress' life is *Ancrene Wisse*. *Ancrene Wisse* is a guidebook for anchoresses written primarily in a Middle English dialect of the West Midlands. Alongside the Middle English prose are embedded Biblical quotations in Latin. These are followed by translations which imply that not all readers of *Ancrene Wisse* were literate in Latin. *Ancrene Wisse* survives in seventeen editions from the Middle Ages. Translated into French and Latin, *Ancrene Wisse* gained popularity among the laity as well as anchoresses. Based on internal evidence, it was likely composed in the late 1220s[19]. Three sisters who chose religious virginity are referenced internally as the original recipients of the text.[20] However, the author seems to have always expected that the text would reach a larger audience[21]. *Ancrene Wisse* is associated with the *Ancrene Wisse Group* which includes the *Katherine Group* and *Wooing Group* prayers which share a common dialect and themes of female spirituality[22]. *Ancrene Wisse* translates into Modern English as Wisdom for Anchoresses or Anchoress' Rule. Ancrene Wisse provides modern readers with a greater understanding of physical requirements of spiritual marriage which generate love for God.

Ancrene Wisse teaches that earthly life in a body must be modified to produce a transcendent experience placing the physical body in opposition to the transcendent soul. This

---

[19] *Ancrene Wisse*. Trans Millett Bella. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009): xi

[20] These sisters are referenced twice in *MS Cotton Nero A. xiv*. They are referenced once in the Bella Millet translation. In Part 2 the scribe writes, "I would much prefer to see all three of you, my dear sisters, the women dearest to me hanging on a gallows in order to avoid sin." *Ancrene Wisse*. Trans Millett Bella. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009): 2:46

[21] "The text itself claims to have been written for three individual anchoresses, sisters in body and soul, and then revised for a larger community of 'twenty or more' anchoresses, the author clearly envisioned a wider audience right from the beginning." Catherine Innes-Parker, "Reading and Devotional Practice: The Wooing Group Prayers of British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. xiv," *Anchoritism in the Middle Ages: Texts and Traditions*, ed. Innes-Parker and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013): 137.

[22] Bledsoe, Jenny C. "Materiality, Documentary Authority, and the Circulation of the Katherine Group." *Early Middle English.* Vol 1.3. (York: Arc Humanities Press, 2021): 33-50.

transcendent experience is love for God. True communion with Christ is an experience of transcendence in which the soul is privileged over the body. Medieval women are disadvantaged by their sexed and gendered bodies—in literature they are the fairer sex, or more accurately, the weaker sex. Sex and gender are aspects of the anchoress' physical matter, not of her spiritual form. Without the façade of the body, the anchoress is of the same form as God. Transcending the body to experience life as spirit disrupts patterns of oppression which can cause women to hate or undervalue themselves. An anchoress is taught that she needn't be self-conscious or hyperaware of her body because her body is not as important as her soul. Inside the anchorage the anchoress is known to God, not as an inferiorly sexed body but, as an exultant soul. Experiences of the physical, the anchoress learns from *Ancrene Wisse,* are inferior to experiences of the soul.

The Anchoress' relationship with God, who is out of this world, demands her detachment from her body. Strict isolation is the basis of the anchoress' communication with God. Without isolation, the anchoress becomes excessively attached to her physical body which detracts from her relationship with God. *Ancrene Wisse* writes into the religious tradition of the Church Fathers. St Jerome, a 4th century Theologian, wrote to religious virgins, "Ever let the privacy of your chamber guard you; ever let the Bridegroom sport with you within. Do you pray? You speak to the Bridegroom. Do you read? He speaks to you."[23] Jerome describes spiritual conversation with God using highly literal language. He does this because humans in bodies understand the experiences of other humans in bodies more easily than they understand out of

[23] Jerome. "Letter 22" *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*. Trans Fremantle, WH; Lewis, G; Martley, WG. Ed. Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry. Vol. 6, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1893): 22:25.

body experiences. Existence in a body is the condition of life on earth which is why St. Jerome and *Ancrene Wisse* both use physical communication to describe spiritual communication.

Existence in a body is a fallen condition. A body weighs down the soul because it requires constant tending; the body must be fed, the body must be washed, the body must sleep, the body becomes ill and, most horribly, the body suffers temptation and physical desire. The body is an obstacle which the anchoress overcomes in order to attain intimacy with God. Within the anchorage, the anchoress is freed from responsibilities to her body. Far from secular concerns the enclosed anchoress needn't run errands for food or speak to anyone outside of the church if she does not wish to. She spends her life reading or in prayer, activities which facilitate communication with God and heighten her experience of love.

Ancrene Wisse highlights the opposition between the physical body and the transcendent soul in order to teach the anchoress to overcome her body. In service of her relationship with Christ the anchoress must become detached from her body and empower her soul. In this chapter I will examine *Ancrene Wisse* as a tool which produces love for God.

Maintenance of the Mortal Form: Anchoretic Maids

Love for God is most intense in private. The anchoress' enclosure is best described as a flight from the secular world. The anchoress' departure from the secular world is compared to the solitude Christ sought during His earthly life,

> he fleh nawt ane othre men, ah dude yet His halie deore-wurthe apostles, ant wende ane upon hulles, us to forbisne thet we schule turne bi us-seolf ant climben with Him on hulles

> [He fled not only from other people, but even from His holy beloved apostles, and went up alone into the hills, as an example to us that we should go off on our own and climb with Him into the hills] (Ancrene Wisse, 3:22)[24]

Suggestive of a chase, the word "fleh" implies the difficulty of rejecting physical community for spiritual intimacy with God. In describing the apostles as "halie deore-wurthe" the author imbues them with Christ's love even as Christ leaves them. Christ flees because communication with God is private. The journey up the mountain reflects the "angusta" [straight] and "arta" [narrow] path to heaven described in Matthew 7:14. The path to God requires the rejection of all other things. *Ancrene Wisse* asks that the anchoress both "turne bi us-seolf", that is, leave the world alone and that she travels "with Him." This tension shows that the isolation of world rejection is cured by the constant presence of Christ during prayer. The imagery of the mountain climbed alone, transforms prayer into a journey. The difficulty of climbing the mountain reflects metaphorically the soul's journey towards transformative love for God.

Love for God is an experience which takes a human outside of her body. The imagery which transforms prayer into a journey with God can only be experienced if an anchoress, "lahe under us alle eorthliche thohtes hwiles we beoth i bonen" [leave below all earthly thoughts while we are in prayer] (3:22). The language of laying under, "lahe under", suggests that the anchoress ascends above her earthly thoughts and body though prayer. Earthly thoughts are thoughts about physical needs which tether the anchoress to her body. The flight from companions is completed by an escape from the need to care for the physical body. The anchoress' job is to love God, her job requires that she dismiss "eorthliche thohtes" and needs.

[24] All parenthetical citations in this chapter which are not otherwise demarcated refer to *Ancrene Wisse*.

The anchoress' physical needs are a distraction from love for God. Within the anchorage, the anchoress lives with one or two maids who tend to the anchoress' physical needs. Anchoretic maids are called for by *Ancrene Wisse* to perform secular tasks which would cause the anchoress to become overfocused on her physical needs rather than her contemplative vocation. Maids are an example of how the Church provides for the anchoress' spiritual journey. The start of the section on servants in Part Eight, which describes the outer rule, dictates,

> Ancre the naveth nawt neh honde hire fode beoth bisie twa wummen: an eaver the leave ed hame, an other the wende ut hwenne driveth neod, ant theo beo ful unorne, withuten euch tiffunge - other a lutel thuftene other of feier ealde
>
> [For the anchoress that does not have food at hand, two women should be employed: one never to leave the home, the other to go out when need arises; and the latter should be very plain without any finery- either a little maidservant or advanced in years] (8:31)

Through the stipulations placed on the maid's appearance, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* expresses concern about the maids attracting men to the anchorage. Describing the maid who goes out of the anchorage, *Ancrene Wisse* advises that she should be "unorne" or plain, attributes which imply unattractiveness. The "unorne" maid is able to move freely through the world without drawing eyes towards the anchorage or inspiring lust in men for the women enclosed there. Perhaps, too, the maidservant who is of "feier ealde" or "unorne" is preferable because she will not inspire jealousy in the anchoress. Based on their plainness or old age, maids in the anchorage are invisible as church mice. The anchoress' distance from food calls attention to the true isolation of the anchorage. Without modern methods of food preservation, the anchoress is unable to store food for prolonged periods of time. The anchoress' isolation would be broken by her need for food if she had to collect her own provisions. The anchoresses' servants free her

from secular responsibilities such as gathering food and allow her to focus all of her time on God. The maid's journey, to "ende ut hwenne driveth neod", emphasizes that seeking out food is something to be done only when it is driven by need. The presence of maids, too is out of need, predicated on the anchoress "naveth nawt" food "neh honde". Love for God requires that the anchoress be freed from distractions of the flesh such as food and the male gaze.

Maids to the anchoress are described as "meidnes withuten" or the maidens outside. Bella Millet suggests in a footnote to her translation of *Ancrene Wisse* that "meidnes withuten" resembles in sense "fratres exteriors" a term applied to lay brothers.[25] Lay sisters allow the anchoress to escape her body by providing for her physical needs. However, servants could tempt the anchoress to sin by inspiring within the anchoress a desire for superiority over her fellow woman. The presence of servants in the anchorage means that there is at least one aspect of the anchoress' life in which she has mastery over another person. The danger of mastery over the maids is presented as a test which requires that the anchoress maintain a sense of humility. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* states that "Yef Godd fondeth ancre" it is "leste ha falle i prude" [If God tests the anchoress (it is) so that she does not fall to pride] (3:33). The anchoress' maids, particularly because they serve the anchoress, could cause her to fall to pride based on feelings of superiority towards them. The anchoress' servants teach the anchoress humility and gratitude for without them she cannot perform her contemplative life.

Servants to the anchoress, lay sisters as they are, are not paid for their labor, "Nan ancre servant ne ahte bi rihte to easkin i-set hure bute mete ant clath thet ha mei flutte bi - ant Godes milce" (8:33) [it is not proper than any anchoress's servant should ask for a fixed wage apart from food and clothing enough for her to manage on, and the mercy of God]. Although provided

[25] *Ancrene Wisse*, trans. Bella Millett, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009): 277.

for physically, the servants to the anchoress, like the anchoress herself live for “Godes milce”; the choice to devote their lives to God creates a form of kinship between the anchoress and her maids. All of the women in the anchorage are there for the same reason but that does not mean that there are on the same level.

The anchoress’ privileged role over her maids is emphasized by the repetition of the word “leave” [permission] (8:31-35). The anchoress must grant her maids permission for confession, snacks between meals, communication with the outside world and errands. In each context, “leave” refers to the anchoress’ role as master over the maids. Maids are also expected to be “Ba beon obedient to hare dame in alle thing” [both be obedient to her dame in all things] (8:31). The use of the word “dame” emphasizes the anchoress’ superiority. “Dame” has the double meaning of referring to ladies of rank and to the superior within a religious context. This double meaning touches on the way in which servant’s presence in the anchorage allows anchoress to gain the power to command, a power she may not have had in the secular world if she was not born of rank.

The status the anchoress gains through her superiority to her maids is opposed to her religious vocation. Anchoritic life requires that the anchoress give up status and respect which are earthly conceptions. Christ’s high status as Son of God does not confer status onto her in this lifetime,

> “Muchel hofles hit is, cumen into ancre-hus, into Godes prisun willes ant waldes to stude of meoseise, for-te sechen eise th'rin ant meistrie ant leafdischipe, mare then ha mahte habben inoh-reathe i-haved i the worlde.”

> [it is quite ridiculous to come into an anchor house into God's prison, voluntarily into a place of discomfort, to look for comfort there, and status, and the respect due to a lady—more perhaps that she might have in the world]. (2:41)

A "prisun" is a place where criminals repent for their crimes, far away from society. The anchorage, like a prison, is no place for pride or superiority. *Ancrene Wisse* directs this command specifically at women who may not have experienced a sense of superiority in society. Upon entry into the anchorage, the anchoress must not take the presence of maids as a sign that she has become a lady. The word "leafdischipe" is aligned with the word "dame" and both are roles which the anchoress must be wary of as they could inspire pride. Pride is a sin which weighs down the soul and keeps a woman's sense of self rooted in her body. The anchoress must take action to avoid a sense of superiority over her maids.

Biblically, love for God is an action which must be performed with the utmost focus. To detract from the descriptions which emphasize the anchoress' role as taskmaster, the author of *Ancrene Wisse* describes the relationship between the anchoress and her maids using the example of the relationship between the Biblical characters Mary and Martha. Mary and Martha are the sisters of Lazarus and have an intimate relationship with Christ. When Christ visits, Martha runs about doing housework while Mary listens at His feet. *Ancrene Wisse* uses this story to remind the anchoress of the difference between her role and the maid's,

> Husewifschipe is Marthe dale; Marie dale is stilnesse ant reste of alle worldes noise, thet na thing ne lette hire to eren Godes stevene.
>
> [Being a housewife is Martha's part. Mary's part is silence and peace from all the noise of the world, so that nothing can prevent her from hearing God's voice.] (8:7)

This comparison is less fixated on the actual relationship between the anchoress and her maid and is instead interested in providing the anchoress with an example of a loving relationship between women who have different roles. Both Mary and Margaret's "dales" are acts of loving God. Mary exemplifies the contemplative life. She renounces as distractions "all worldes noise", responsibilities which would keep her from "eren Godes stevene". However, these things must still get done. That which is described as "husewifschipe" is comparable to the errands and chores which maids must perform in order to keep the anchorage in order. Describing each responsibility as "dale" or part emphasizes that each part is equally necessary. Though equal in necessity, Mary's choice is more holy as Christ states, "*Maria optimam partem elegit*" [Mary chose the better part][26]. One part is heavenly, and the other is necessary. The anchoress' role is to sit at Christ's feet and to love her sister for performing the services which she is too busy to complete.

Maids perform secular labor under the supervision of an anchoress who protects them from sin. *Ancrene Wisse* makes clear that the sins of the maids reflect on the anchoress, "yef thet ha sungith thurh ower yemeles, ye schule beo bicleopet th'rof bivore the hehe deme (8:35) [if they sin through your neglect, you will be called to account for it before the high Judge]. Maids sin only through "yemeles", negligence on the part of the anchoress. Based on her responsibility over the actions of her maids, the anchoress is more like a mother than a master. A mother guides her children to act rightly, so too the anchoress guides her maids.

The anchoress is responsible for her maid's religious life. The anchoress serves as a teacher to her maids "Ye ancres ahen this leaste stucche reden to ower wummen euche wike eanes, athet ha hit cunnen." [You anchoress' should read this last section to your women once a

[26] LK 10:42

week until they are familiar with it] 8:35. Through the command to anchoresses to "reden to ower wummen" the text of *Ancrene Wisse* emphasizes its own power as a tool for virtue. Familiarity with the text implies virtue. The injunction to anchoress to teach their maids serves to make all of them virtuous.

The danger of maids within the anchorage is noted in *Ancrene Wisse* and used to emphasize the anchoress' responsibility to be a loving master, "Ant muche neod is thet ye neomen to ham muche yeme, for ye mahen muchel beon thurh ham i-godet, ant i-wurset. [And it is most necessary that you take great care with them, as you can be greatly helped by them—and harmed to] (8:35). Referring to the maid's care of the anchoress, *Ancrene Wisse* demands that the anchoress return "muche yeme", or much care, to the maid. The type of relationship the anchoress should have with her maid is one in which both parties support the other. The danger alluded to by the relationship between maid and anchoress is the danger of temptation which exists in all relationships between humans on earth. The anchoress may be tempted to lord her power over her lay sister. "Muchel beon" refers to the goodness of a relationship built on a mutual love of God and desire to do good in His eyes. The different requirements of the role of the anchoress and the maid shows that love for God can be performed in diverse ways.

The relationship between the anchoress and her maids must be one of mutual love. Both the anchoress and the maid perform actions on the other's behalf. These actions are acts of love. *Ancrene Wisse* says of the emotion which the maids must feel for the anchoress, "Ba is right thet ha ow dreden ant luvien, ant thah thet ter beo eaver mare of luve then of drede. (8:35) [It is right that they should both fear and love you, but even so that there should always be more love than fear]. The coexistence of fear and love is found repeatedly in the Bible as a way to imagine the relationship between a human and God. Deuteronomy 10:12 relates that God requires that

believers, "*timeas Dominum Deum tuum et ambules in viis eius et diligas eum*" [fear the Lord your God and walk in His ways and love him]. Fear of the Lord inspires obedience. Obedience inspires acts of love. The anchoress seeks to be like God while she lives so she can rule with Him in her afterlife. In the anchoress' relationship with her maids, she is somewhat like a God. She has the choice to be swayed by temptation and lord over her maids without respect and must choose instead to look to God as an example of benevolent power. The anchoress' contemplative life relies upon the maid's active life. In order to transcend her body, the anchoress places the maintenance of her body into the hands of her maids. The maids display a form of love for God which is based on the maintenance of the anchoress' love for God. The differences between these two forms of love for God exemplify that acts of love need not be identical.

Penance: God's Mercy

Penance is an action which places the anchoress completely at God's mercy. By delivering herself into God's hand the anchoress shows her love for Him. Penance involves the confession of sins to a priest and the receipt of absolution. The priest acts as the voice of God. As all sins are associated with the body, it is the body which causes people to sin. The anchoress seeks to detach herself from her body in order to empower her soul to love God. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* compares committing sin to murder: "thu thurh deadlich sunne murthredest Godes spuse - thet is, thi sawle" [you murdered the spouse of God (that is your soul) through mortal sin] (5:8). Christ's marriage to the anchoress' soul is destroyed when she commits sin. In order to maintain her relationship with Christ the anchoress must not sin. However, when the anchoress does sin *Ancrene Wisse* describes how penance can return the anchoress into God's love.

The anchoress must confess her sins weekly to her confessor. Confession is the cleansing of the soul which the author compares to washing hands,

> Thu weschest thine honden in anlepi dei twien other thrien, ant nult nawt the sawle, Jesu Cristes spuse the eaver se ha is hwittre, se fulthe is senre upon hire, bute ha beo iwesschen - nult nawt to Godes cluppunge ofte umbe seove-niht wesschen hire eanes! [You wash your hands two or three times in a single day, but often you will not wash the soul—the spouse of Jesus Christ, who shoes up filth more clearly the whiter she is, unless she is washed—once in a week for God's embrace] (5:19)

The comparison between handwashing and soulwashing is a reminder that the anchoress' focus should be on her soul and her relationship with God rather than on the earthly concern of clean hands. The anchoress' cleanliness is all the more important because of her relationship with God. She is "Jesu Cristes spuse" and must be clean of spirit in order to receive "Godes cluppunge". Reference to "Godes cluppunge" in connecting with the cleansing of "the sawl" emphasizes that God holds the anchoress in spirit and not in body. By comparing confession to the cleansing of the soul *Ancrene Wisse* roots penance in the soul rather than the body. Soulwashing is an act of love for God.

Confession, as it is framed in *Ancrene Wisse,* is the best form of penance. Anchoresses are asked to accuse themselves in a demeaning manner

> Unwrih the ant sei, 'Sire - Godes are! - ich am a ful stod-meare, a stinkinde hore.' Yef thi fa a ful nome ant cleope thi sunne fule, make hit i schrift steort-naket - thet is, ne hel thu na-wiht of al thet lith ther-abuten, thah to fule me mei seggen.

> [Lay yourself bare and say ‘father, God have mercy! I am a filthy stud mare, a stinking whore!’ Give your enemy a bad name, and describe your sin crudely, strip it sark-naked in confession, that is, do not conceal anything about all the circumstances.] (5:10)

By speaking of her own sin in a self-flagellating tone, the anchoress shows that she does not require the harsh judgement of the Lord. She is absolved by merit of her shame. The word “unwrih” refers to the uncovering of a wound. The sin the anchoress commits symbolically wounds her soul. By uncovering this wound to Christ, she begs His pardon and asks that He heal her soul by absolution. The violent and shameful language the anchoress uses in confession emphasizes her audacity—to sin as the bride of Christ sacrilegious. The anchoress must describe her sin in a way that is as dirty as the act by using “ful nome” [foul names] such as “stinkinde hore” and “stod-meare”. The example the author gives is that of a physical sin. By partaking in physical sin, the anchoress strengthens the confinement of her soul within her body. Confession allows the anchoress to show her love for God by displaying how much she detests sin and loves God.

Beyond confession, the anchoress may perform penance in the form of self-discipline. Discipline is an act of physical punishment which the anchoress inflicts upon herself in order to repent for her sins. Penance, rituals and rites which clean a Catholic from sin, are assigned to the anchoress by her confessor. The value placed on discipline fluctuates depending on the context. At one point the author lauds discipline. Citing a passage from Paul,

> For as Seinte Pawel seith, ‘*Si compatimur, conregnabimus*.’ As ye scottith with Him of His pine on eorthe, ye schule scotti with Him of His blisse in heovene

> [As Saint Paul says, *If we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him*[27]; as you share His suffering on earth, so too will you share His joy in heaven] (6:1)

Earthly suffering is highly valued when it is framed as a continuation of Christ's suffering on the cross. This passage suggests the virtue of discipline. Discipline is presented by Paul as a way to imitate God and devalue the body towards the empowerment of the spirit. Yet this passage is singular in its direct praise of discipline. For the most part, Ancrene Wisse shows that punishment of the body actually roots existence within the body. The pain of discipline is deeply physical rather than spiritual. Ultimately, physical discipline is not aligned with the form of transcendence *Ancrene Wisse* teaches. Discipline is an act of love of which God, or at least the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, does not approve.

Mentions of physical discipline in *Ancrene Wisse* are most often disavowals. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* expresses great concern that anchoresses may partake in excessive punishments. What I describe as excess discipline is called singularity. Singularity is a term applied to a religious in a monastic context who is given a rule or a discipline but instead resists that rule in order to take on a greater discipline. The temptation to overdo discipline is disobedient and sinful. *Ancrene Wisse* lists various forms of discipline the anchoress should not perform,

> no-hwer ne binetli hire, ne ne beate bivoren, ne na keorvunge ne keorve, ne ne neome ed eanes to luthere disceplines, temptatiuns for-te acwenchen.
>
> [She should not sting herself anywhere with nettles, or scourge the front of her body, or mutilate herself with cuts, or take excessively harsh disciplines at any one time, in order to subdue temptations] (8:16)

[27] In her translation of *Ancrene Wisse,* Bella Millet uses italics to signify translations from Latin. I choose to follow her stylistic choice as I quote her translations.

These violent acts follow the suffering of Christ closely. Christ was “beate” by the Romans (Matt 15:15) and His head was “keorvunge” by the crown of thorns (John 19:2). Even the reference to the anchoress who “binetli hire” or stings herself with nettles, could be interpreted as a punishment which comes with exile and Jesus faced exiled when He was only and infant (Matt 2:13-23). However, these disciplines are “luthere” a word which means treacherous or deceitful. The disciplines described are enacted in order to “acwenchen”, or subdue, fleshly temptation. The trouble with using discipline to subdue temptation is that “luthere disceplines” are themselves a diabolical temptation. If something inside the anchoress wants to hurt her, that is the work of the Devil, not of God.

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* quotes Paul again in Part 7 to argue that hard discipline is not as valuable as intense love:

> Seinte Pawel witneth thet alle uttre heardschipes, alle flesches pinsunges, ant licomliche swinkes - al is ase nawt ayeines luve, the schireth ant brihteth the heorte
>
> “Saint Paul testifies that all external hardships, all mortifications of the flesh and physical labors count as nothing compared with love, which purifies and enlightens the heart. (7:1)

The author places physical experience and emotional experience in conflict. Pain and “heardeschipes” are of the “flesches”. Love comes from “the heorte”. The emotional pleasure of love is far greater than pain in the body. In these lines “the heorte” represents the soul and the “flesches” represents the body. Discipline places the anchoress’ focus on her body which is a distraction form her soul. Discipline is not an act of love. The basis of the anchoress’ relationship with God must be love not pain.

There is a direct opposition between committing a sin and loving God. Confession, which is the opposite of committing sin is an act of love for God. The discussion of penance in *Ancrene*

Wisse comes down to the argument that sin is rooted in the body and a religious life is rooted in the soul.

The Anchorage: "Fowr large wahes"

The anchorage itself is a crucial tool for the anchoress' transcendence. Withdrawal into the anchorage is an act of love for God. In a communal setting, everyone communicates using their body and speaks through their mouth. Tending to the soul is an activity which can only be performed in solitude. The escape from other humans allows for the escape from the body. The anchorage is attached to the Church near enough the choir space that the anchoress can see the priest take communion at mass through a "squint", a hole, in the wall of the church. My understanding of the space of the anchorage is based on the information provided in *Ancrene Wisse*. In *Ancrene Wisse*, the anchorage is used as a metaphor which symbolizes the anchoress' seclusion. Isolation is an act of love for God. Through the anchoress' isolation she embarks on a relationship with the Lord.

The anchorage is a space between worlds which protects the anchoress from the sinful abys of physical life, holding her spirit until it can pass on into the heavenly bliss of Christ's embrace. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* compares the anchorage to Jerusalem, "This word 'Jerusalem' spealeth 'sihthe of peis' ant bitacneth ancre-hus" and goes on to explain "For th'rinne ne thearf ha seon bute peis ane" [the word 'Jerusalem' means 'sign of peace' and describes the anchorage. For therein she shall see nothing but peace] (3:31). Word choice in this sentence emphasizes sight using the words "sihthe" and "seon." The nature of the sight granted in the anchorage, however, is more accurately a form of blindness as the anchoress sees nothing "bute peis". The anchoress is protected from visions of reality which is often less than peaceful by the walls of the anchorage.

The anchorage is a constantly changing metaphor. Expanding on the wordplay embedded in the word anchorage the author explains

> For-thi is ancre "ancre" i-cleopet, ant under chirche i-ancret as ancre under schipes bord, for-te halden thet schip, thet uthen ant stormes hit ne overwarpen. Alswa al Hali Chirche, thet is schip i-cleopet, schal ancrin o the ancre, thet heo hit swa halde thet te deofles puffes-thet beoth temptatiuns - ne hit overwarpen.
>
> [That is why the anchorage is called ‘anchor,’ and anchored under the church like an anchor under the side of a ship to hold the ship, so that waves and storms do not capsize it. Just so, all Holy Church (which is described as a ship) should anchor on the anchoress, for her to hold it so that the devil’s blasts, which are temptations, do not blow it over] (3:13)

The word “ancre” which is repeated six times in various forms emphasizes the stability the anchorage provides the anchoress. The anchoress is protected and hidden from the world. She does not receive esteem from her role as anchor to the metaphorical ship, instead she is hidden “under schipes bord”. The anchoress’ role in the community is also to pray for the salvation of members of her Church. Storms which threaten to “overwarpen” the ship that is the “Hali Chirche” lack power because of the stability of the anchoress. The metaphor of the anchoress protecting the Church goes both ways, the Church serving to “ancre o the ancre” meaning the Church will “hald” the anchoress against storms that “beoth temptations”. The anchoress appears by this metaphor to be in relationship with her space in a mutually beneficial manner. Her strength is praised when her role is “for-te halden thet schip” but she is not expected to be entirely self-sufficient, the “Hali Chirche” is present to support her against earthly “temptatiuns” which would unmoor her from her spirt. The physicality of the metaphor of ships in storm is

diametrically opposite to the spiritual experience it describes. The anchoress' experience is anchored in her spirit. Storms are distractions which cause her spirit to focus on her body, but ultimately, her focus on the experience of her spirit is anchored by her enclosure in the anchorage. By acting as an anchor for the community, the anchoress loves God.

Another metaphor *Ancrene Wisse* uses to describe the anchorage is as a crossroad between life and death. *Ancrene Wisse* describes the anchoress' world rejection as a form of death, "Thus riht is euch religius dead to the worlde ant cwic thah to Criste" [So properly every religious is dead to the world, but nevertheless alive to Christ] (6:3). The author suggests that the religious person's death "to the worlde" is "thus riht" meaning correct or proper. Simultaneous "riht" is reminiscent of "rite" which would refer to a religious ceremony or act. Worldly is the anchoretic rite which allows the soul to live in Christ. "Cwic" is evocative of "quicken", the moment during a pregnancy when the fetus begins to move in the womb. Through this metaphor the anchoress is placed in the womb of Christ. The metaphor of pregnancy reflects the anchoress' enclosure which protects her and nourishes her spiritual growth. Yet the anchoress's world rejection is also a form of death. The comingling of metaphors which describe death and new life suggest that the womb and the tomb are closely aligned. Just as the womb introduces a child to the world, the tomb brings the pious Christian into new life in Heaven.

The anchorage as a womb is a productive metaphor in *Ancrene Wisse*. This metaphor transforms the anchoress' actual death into a spiritual birth. The author describes the anchoress' eventual death as a birth,

> I nowther nes He worltlich mon, ah [wes] as ut of the world for-te schawin ancren thet ha ne schulen with the world na thing habben i-meane. 'Ye,' thu ondswerest me, 'ah He

> wende ut of ba!' Ye, went tu alswa of ba thine ancre-huses, as He dude, withute bruche, ant leaf ham ba i-hale.
>
> [He was not a worldly man, but, as it were, out of the world, to show anchoress that they should have nothing in common with the world. 'Yes,' you answer me, 'but He went out of both.' Indeed, you should go out of both your anchor-houses just as He did, without a breach, and leave them both intact] (6:13)

Within the anchorage, the anchoress is prepared for eternal life in heaven just as a fetus is prepared for life outside of its mother's body. Like the fetus in the womb the anchoress is protected from the world by the anchorage. The anchoress' division from the world is emphasized by the author's claim that she "schulen with the world na thing habben" meaning she will have nothing in common with humans of the world nor with worldly desires. By leaving the world "i-hale" or intact, the author refers both to the anchoress' virginity and to her participation in worldly life. When Mary gave birth to Christ she did so while retaining her virginity which the author of *Ancrene Wisse* describes by the phrase "withute bruche" which is a reference to the anchoress' own virginity. The anchoress must die without having caused any sin which is symbolized by the virgin birth of Christ. The anchoress' experience on earth is not a life of the body. Rather, it is a journey of the soul which brings the anchoress closer to heaven.

The anchorage provides the anchoress with a staging area in which she may replicate Christ's life. The metaphor of the anchorage as womb is used to connect the anchoress' enclosure to Christ's world rejection. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* directs the anchoress to look examine her condition and compare it to Christ's,

> Beo ye i-bunden in-with fowr large wahes? - ant He in a nearow cader, i-neilet o rode, i stanene thruh bicluset hete-feste! Marie wombe ant this thruh weren His ancre-huses

> [Are you confined within four spacious walls? So too was He in a narrow cradle, nailed on the cross, closely confined in a tomb of stone. Mary's womb and this tomb were His anchor-houses.] (6:3)

Even in comparison, the author emphasizes the anchoress' difference from Christ. The author describes the anchorage as "large" to juxtapose it against the "nearow cader" Christ slept in as an infant and the stone tomb in which He was buried before His ascension. This juxtaposition marks the anchorage as a blessing. Christ was forced into a small human body although He is divine. The anchoress is blessed with room for her soul to grow within the "fowr large wahes" of her anchorage. Sandwiched between two obvious four walled spaces, the comparison of the anchorage to Christ "ineilet o rode" is less legible. Through the comparison to "o rode" the author defines the anchoress' enclosure as a form of penance which imitates the crucifixion. The anchoress' enclosure enhances the anchoress' capacity for imaginative transcendence. Imaginative transcendence is the anchoress' ability to transcend her body by imagining that she is experiencing that which God felt in His lifetime. The act of imaginative transcendence is an act of Love for God.

Speaking to God through Prayer

The anchoress' intimacy with God is based on her capacity to speak to Him through prayer. Prayer is an act of love for God. Communication with God takes place entirely within the soul. *Ancrene Wisse* teaches the anchoress that spiritual routine and complete focus are the keys to divine communication. In 1215, imaginative transcendence becomes a formal Catholic practice based on the determination by the Fourth Lateran Council that during mass the host becomes the flesh of Christ. The consecration of the Eucharist emphasizes that religious

imagination transforms reality. In this section I show that the hyper-physical language which *Ancrene Wisse* uses to describe intimacy with God teaches the anchoress to enact love for God.

Through prayer the anchoress takes action to become closer to God. *Ancrene Wisse* tells the anchoress that she is closest to God during mass

> Nis bute a wah bitweonen ant euche dei He kimeth forth ant schaweth Him to ow fleschliche ant licomliche in-with the measse - biwrixlet, thah, on othres lite under breades furme. For in His ahne, ure ehnen ne mahten nawt the brihte sihthe tholien. [There is only a wall in between; and every day He comes out and reveals himself to you physically and bodily in the Mass—changed, however into the appearance of something else, under the form of bread. Because in His own our eyes could not tolerate the dazzling vision] (4:79)

The "wah bitweonen" the anchoress and Christ is the wall of the church. The wall is also the symbolic division between embodied humans and the Divine. "Euche dei" [every day] Christ visits the anchoress during mass. By the language "he kimeth forth ant schaweth Him to ow" *Ancrene Wisse* argues that Christ's presence is particularly for the anchoress, He appears in order to show himself "to ow" [to you], to the anchoress. This specification emphasizes the intimacy between Christ and the anchoress. Christ appears to the anchoress in the form of the Host. *Ancrene Wisse* stresses that this is not His true form. Christ takes the form of the Host because human "ehnen ne mahten nawt the brihte sihthe tholien" [eyes may not tolerate His bright sight]. Christ is benevolent for coming to the anchoress in a form she can bear. The anchoress must remain invested in her spiritual routine in order to witness Christ's coming in the form of the Host.

Christ's presence during mass is an example of the work the anchoress performs in order to achieve intimacy with Christ through imagination. Christ is not a physical presence in the anchoress' life. The anchoress must imagine Christ in order to love Him. *Ancrene Wisse* describes anchoress' encounter with Christ with physical language,

> Efter the measse-cos, hwen the preost sacreth - ther foryeoteth al the world, ther beoth al ut of bodi, ther i sperclinde luve bicluppeth ower leofmon, the into ower breostes bur is i-liht of heovene, ant haldeth Him hete-veste athet He habbe i-yettet ow al thet ye eaver easkith.
>
> [After the kiss of peace in the mass when the priest is taking communion—there forget all the world, there be quite out of your body, there in the burning love embrace your lover, who has descended from heaven into the chamber of your breast, and hold Him tightly until He has granted you everything you ask for] (1:17)

The kiss of peace signifies brotherly love between Christians. The anchoress, who is more deeply connected to Christ himself than to human Christians, substitutes the "measse-cos" for a moment of intimacy with Christ Himself. She "foryeoteth al the world" to focus herself entirely on God and even to reject her physical form so as to "beoth al ut of bodi." Outside of her body and the world, the anchoress clings to Christ, who is described as "leofmon" a word which refers to the courtly lover of a lady. The nature of the embrace is intense, even sexual; "sperclinde" has a variety of senses from sparkling to burning which all evoke the passion between the anchoress and Christ. Holding Christ against her breast, the anchoress pulls Christ inside her heart, "into ower breostes." The anchoress asks Christ for salvation for herself and her community as she holds Him in her arms. The anchoress is audacious, holding Christ until He grants "ow al thet ye eaver easkith." The word choice in this section displays the quasi-sexual nature of the

relationship between the anchoress and Christ. The assumption that the anchoress' relationship with Christ is non-sexual because it is non-physical is a prudish misconception. The mediaeval scholar Sarah Salih argues that "virginity is not a denial or rejection of sexuality but itself a sexuality"[28]. As a virgin, the anchoress is no less intimate with her spouse than a sexually active married couple. Virgin sexuality exists in the passionate embrace the anchoress shares with God. The physicality of the language used in this section describes an entirely transcendent experience in a way in which an embodied human can understand and recreate.

Intimacy with Christ requires focus which is an act of love. During prayer, the anchoress must concentrate on God in every way. *Ancrene Wisse* claims that the anchoress who does not focus on God will be deeply lonely,

> Ne thunche hire neaver wunder yef ha nis muchel ane, thah He hire schunie, ant swa ane thet ha putte euch worldlich thrung, ant euch nurth eorthlich ut of hire heorte, for heo is Godes chambre
>
> [She should not be at all surprised if she is not alone a great deal, that He avoids her—and alone in such a way that she puts every worldly pressure and every earthly disturbance, out of her heart, because it is Gods chamber] (2:32)

The word "schunie" is emphatic and suggests excommunication from God's grace. The anchoress cannot merely be confined, she must actively deny herself both "worldlich throng" and "nurth eorthlich" or company and noise. The "throng" and "nurth" are experienced through physical senses rather than through the spirit. Only the heart, following the science of this passage, is capable of sensing and communicating with God in a way that transcends the body. The argument that the heart is "Godes chambre" refers to the manifestation of God within the

[28] Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in late Medieval England*, (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001): 10

soul. The heart, free from earthly concerns is a comfortable chamber where God will dwell happily. God will not live in a heart that is fixated on the life of the body when it should be focused on the life of the soul.

The anchoress maintains her focus on God through constant occupation with religious reading and work. *Ancrene Wisse* commands her

> beon neaver idel but ah wurchen other reden, other beon i bonen, ant swa don eaver sum-hwet, thet God mahe of awakenin
>
> [Be never idle, but working or reading, or saying your prayers and so are always doing something productive, which may awaken God] (1:26)

By reading and prayer the anchoress has the power to "awakenin" God within her soul. Awakening God is the productive work which the anchoress performs. Focus on God is an extension of focus on the spirit. Reading and prayer are not particularly physical activities, they are mental. Mental activities stir the spirt. Through reading and prayer, the anchoress rejects her physical form by focusing her energy on spiritual ascension. The action, "sum-hwet", the anchoress does through prayer, reading, and spiritual work is love God.

The work of the anchorage is based around the eight Hours. The routine created by the Hours regiments the anchoress' love for God. Each Hour requires a different prayer. These hours teach the anchoress to never be idle. *Ancrene Wisse* reminds the anchoress that she must pay particular attention while praying her eight Hours,

> Thah ye ahen of Godd thenchen in euch time, meast thah in ower tiden, thet ower thohtes ne beon fleotinde thenne
>
> [You should think upon God in each moment, but most of all at the times of Hours, that your thoughts do not wander then] (1:32)

The author of *Ancrene Wisse* warns against becoming distracted due to the monotony of repeated prayers. Hours provide the anchoress with set times at which she speaks to God in spirit. During these conversations, the anchoress transcends her body. The anchoress' imagination is a powerful conjuring tool. The anchoress imagines Christ into her space by "thenchen" of Him at all times. God listens to the anchoress more closely when the anchoress is focused. The term "fleotinde" appears to be derived from the term "tīnen" which means to be lost or to perish. Connecting back to the straight and narrow path the anchoress walks, the definition of "fleotinde" as "to wander" displays how wandering thoughts can distract the anchoress from God. Prayer is an act of love for God. If the anchoress becomes distracted, she prays idly, by idle prayer she does not enact love for God.

The anchoress' day is bookended by prayer. When she wakes up, she prays. When she lays down her head, she prays. This routine creates constant love for God. Prayer to Christ in the evening generates deep intimacy. The relationship between the anchoress and Christ creates an equivalency between speaking to a lover with whom one shares a bed and the anchoress' bedtime prayer. *Ancrene Wisse* describes bedtime

> On ende, [on] ow-seolf ant o the bedd bathe, *In nomine Patris et Filii*. I bedd se vorth se ye mahen, ne do ye, ne ne thenchen na thing bute slepen
>
> [Finally make the sign of the cross on yourself and over the bed as well, *In the name of the Father and the Son*. In bed, as far as you can, do not do or think about anything other than sleeping] (1:29)

Before sleep, the anchoress makes the sign of the cross over herself and her bed. By evoking the crucifixion before she sleeps, the anchoress expresses gratitude for His sacrifice. She also prepares for the possibility of death while she sleeps. By asking the anchoress not to think of

anything in bed, the author condemns fantasy and masturbation in the anchorage which are embodied experiences. Her prayer, "in the name of the Father and the Son" makes sleep an act of love for God.

Heaven, The Final Escape

The afterlife is of obvious importance to the enclosed anchoress. In Heaven, where Christ exists, love for God is immediate in a way it is not on earth. Meditation of heavenly reward is an opportunity for the anchoress to imagine intimate love with Christ. By her enclosure, the anchoress chooses to remove herself from earthly pleasures and earthly pains in order to prepare herself for a life with Christ in heaven. Sarah Salih emphasizes that virginity is only true in the afterlife, "Death is where the fantasy of virginity achieved, stable and impermeable, can best be located; the identity that the martyrs anticipate in this world is perfected in the next".[29] Virginity is a tether which ties the anchoress to Christ. The anchoress enters the anchorage with the desire to achieve "stable and impermeable" virginity by rejecting a sexual world of reproduction and physical intimacy. Protected by the anchorage walls the anchoress focuses her soul on heaven where she will achieve perfection.

The heavenly rewards of enclosure are great. To the anchoress, the author describes heavenly freedom,

> Ah ancres, bisperret her, schulen beo ther, yef ei mei, lihtre ba ant swiftre, ant i se wide schakeles - as me seith - pleien in heovene large lesewen, thet te bodi schal beon hwer-se-eaver the gast wule in an hond-hwile

[29] Salih, Sarah. *Versions of Virginity in late Medieval England*. (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001): 98

> [But anchoresses who are enclosed in this world will be, if anyone can, both lighter and swifter in the next, and range at will in the wide pastures of heaven, so loosely tethered (as they say) that the body will be wherever the spirit wishes in a moment] (2:33)

The language of spiritual lightness, "bisperret", "lihtre" and "gast" lauds life without a body. Yet the reference to "wide schakeles" suggests that she will still not be wholly free. Freedom, then, is not what the anchoress, who wishes to marry and be tethered to God, seeks. Heaven is described as a large plain over which the anchoress can fly. The freedom of heaven is juxtaposed with the inherent unfreedom of enclosed life. The hope of heaven in the afterlife makes bearable the painful imprisonment of the anchoress within her body within her anchorage.

Suffering on earth is contextualized by the rewards of the afterlife. The anchoress' discomfort in her anchorage is an act of love for God. People who experience great suffering, will be more greatly rewarded in heaven,

> Ther-toyeines ha schulen habben heovenliche smealles, the habbeth her of irnes swat, other of heren thet ha beoreth, other of swati hettren, other of thicke eir in hire hus, ant muhlinde thinges, stench other-hwiles ant strong breath i nease
>
> [those people will have heavenly smells who in this world sometimes have to endure stench and a foul smell from the sweat caused by the mail-coats or hairshirts that they wear, or from sweaty clothes, or from stuffiness in their house and things going moldy] (2:37)

References to "irnes" and "heren" that anchoress "beoreth" describe iron mail- and hair shirts which anchoresses wear as disciplines. The disciplines the Discipline, here, is a valid way to work towards the kingdom of God. The repetition of "swat", sweat, emphasizes the discomfort of living in a body which must regulate its temperature with bad smells. Anchoresses must have

their windows closed to protect them from visual temptation, thus the trouble of "thicke eir in hire hus." "Mulding thinges", "stench" and "strong breath" are all expected forms of suffering in a small space without much airflow. Some of the difficulties the anchoress may face are fairly mild, while others are greater. By discussing pains great and small, the author emphasizes that the anchoress' focus should be on her "heovenliche" rewards rather than her physical state. Focusing her mind on Heaven is an act of love for God.

The anchoress' enclosure is based on her intention to become disconnected from her body and eventually enjoy the bliss of Heaven. The author calls the anchoress to remember her intention

> Thenc, ancre, hwet tu sohtest tha thu forsoke the world i thi biclusunge biwepen thine ahne ant othres sunnen, ant forleosen alle the blissen of this lif, for-te cluppen blisfulliche thi blisfule leofmon i the eche lif of heovene.
>
> [Consider, anchoress, what you were looking for when you renounced the world at your enclosure to weep for your own sins and others' and abandon all the joys of this life in order to embrace your joyful lover joyfully in the eternal life of heaven] (2:41)

The anchoress' responsibility and reward are laid out plainly in this line. The anchoress embraces God in the hereafter because she weeps for her own "ant others sunnen" in this life. The sacrifice of her life in order to atone for the sins of others is a sacrifice akin to Christ's martyrdom on the cross. On earth, the anchoress chooses "forleosen all the blissen of this lif" and she must not complain of the consequences of her choice. The world is an enormous sacrifice, but it is not without its heavenly reward. "Blisfulliche" and "blisfule" flank the determiner "thi" which refers to the anchoress. Bliss is an experience of the soul displaying that her rewards will be of the spirit and not of the body—her body is of little importance as it is only a vessel in this

world. Christ is referred to as “leofmon” a word used to refer to a lover. To “cluppen” Christ, to hold Him and be held by Him, is the reward of the anchoress. By abandoning the world, the anchoress creates spiritual intimacy with Christ in this life and she is granted greater hope of a life in His company in the hereafter.

An anchoress must enact her love for Christ through meditation on reunion with God. The more the anchoress focusses on Christ, the closer He draws to her. For this reason, *Ancrene Wisse* encourages anchoresses to miss their divine spouse,

> Alswa ure Laverd, thet is the sawle spus, thet sith al thet ha deth, thah He hehe sitte - he is ful wel i-paiet thet ha murneth efter Him, ant wule hihin toward hire mucheles the swithere with yeove of His grace other fecchen hire allunge to Him to gloire ant to blisse thurh- wuniende
>
> [Our lord, who is the soul’s husband, who sees everything that she does although He sits on high is very pleased that she misses Him, and will hurry towards her much faster with the gift of His grace, or fetch her altogether to Himself for everlasting glory and bliss] (6:10)

Describing Christ as “sawle spus” conveys the relevance of mystical marriage within an anchoretic context. The author is specific that Christ is spouse to “sawle”, not the anchoress as she is embodied. God’s love for the anchoress is shown by His interest in all “thet ha deth” [that she does]. Ancrene Wisse describes the relationship between the anchoress and God as one of a kind despite the fact that the anchoress is one of many women married to God. Missing Christ is an act of loving Him which pleases Him “ful wel.” Loving Christ while meditating on His absence causes Christ to “hihin toward hire” displaying the anchoresses’ impact on her spouse. Yearning for Christ is a form of suffering which causes Him to seek her out and grant her

"grace" a gift which only God can provide. Death is the ultimate reunion between the anchoress and Christ. When the anchoress yearns for Him, she also yearns for death. The greatest intimacy between the anchoress and God is not found in this life, but in the next. In order to create intimacy with God the anchoress must enact her love for Christ through meditation.

Conclusion

Loving God is the anchoress' vocation. Like any job the anchoress must perform various tasks to achieve the lofty goal of loving God. *Ancrene Wisse* acknowledges the separation between Christ and the anchoress and provides the anchoress with duties which produce intimate love for God. Anchoretic maids allow the anchoress to focus on love for God by freeing her from responsibilities to her physical form. Through penance the anchoress loves God by trusting Him to forgive her for sins and accept her as a fallible human. The anchorage acts as a staging space for love of God and a metaphor for the anchoress' detachment from the physical world. Through prayer the anchoress learns to speak her love directly to God without her mouth. The fantasy of Heaven emphasizes the incomplete nature of the anchoress' transcendence while she lives on Earth while reminding her that complete transcendence is possible. The most valuable tool the anchoress possesses in the anchorage is *Ancrene Wisse* itself. *Ancrene Wisse* provides the anchoress with literal instructions on how to perform love for God. The literal nature of *Ancrene Wisse* makes it the cornerstone of anchoretic life. Love for God is the anchoress' lifelong pursuit. *Ancrene Wisse* simplifies love for God into basic actions which the anchoress can perform within the anchorage.

Chapter Two: God Speaks Like a Lover

Through prayer and through meditation people across time claim to speak to God. "The Life of Saint Margaret" serves as an example of direct communication with God. Saint Margaret of Antioch is a fourth century Catholic virgin martyr.[30] Her Life relates how she was born into a pagan family and raised by a Christian nurse. Olibrius, described as the "schireve of the lond" [governor of the land] sees Margaret tending to sheep and is immediately taken with Margaret (Margaret, 89). Olibrius demands that Margaret come home with him and become his wife or concubine. Margaret tells Olibrius that she is married to God and her martyrdom begins. She faces many trials at the hands of Olibrius as he attempts to convince her to end her mystical marriage. In the dungeon of his palace, Margaret faces demons from Hell which symbolize the influences on Olibrius' mind which cause him to abuse her. In Olibrius' court, Margaret is burned, boiled, and cut. Finally, Margaret is killed by beheading and her soul is taken up to Heaven.

Margaret's story was very popular in the Middle Ages, a fact attested by her inclusion in many legendries. Legendries are collections of saint's lives. One prominent legendary is *The Golden Legend* which dates to about 1260.[31] Based on *The Golden Legend*, Margaret is the patron saint of childbirth, the passions of the heart and temptations by demons.[32] In this chapter I read the MS Bodley 34 version of "The Life of Saint Margaret." Margaret's relationship with God is prominent in the MS Bodley 34 version of her Life. She speaks to God as she is

---

[30] "If Margaret was a historical person—which is not definite, although she remains on the Catholic calendar—she and her martyrdom date from fourth-century Antioch (near the modern city of Antakya in Turkey), during the persecutions of Emperors Diocletian and. One of the earliest references to her occurs in a ninth-century Latin martyrology" *The Katherine Group: MS Bodley 34: Religious Writings for Women in Medieval England*. Ed Emily Rebekah Huber and Elizabeth Robertson. (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 2016): 5.
[31] Jacobus de Voragine. "Introduction." *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*. Trans. William Granger Ryan. Volume 1. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): xiii
[32] Ibid: 368-370.

tormented, and God responds with signs and words spoken aloud. Margaret serves too as an example of mystical marriage. She tells Olibrius that to Christ she has "mi meithhad iyettet" [given my maidenhead] a claim which marks her has married and therefore unmarriageable (Margaret, 91). Married to God and in constant communication with Him, Margaret serves as an example to anchoress' who seek the same union with God. "The Life of Saint Margaret" presents an immanent example of divine communication. Margaret speaks aloud to God through prayer and God responds with spoken language and visible signs which Margaret experiences through her body. This literal communication is not completely aligned with communication between an anchoress and God.

In order to understand the form of communication presented in "The Life of Saint Margaret" within the context of the medieval anchoress I draw on two other fourteenth century texts which present transcendent forms of communication: "A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman" and *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Reading "The Life of Saint Margaret" alongside two High Medieval accounts of divine communication teases out the basic principles of communication with God and connects the much earlier saint's life with mystical experiences contemporary to the audience of "The *Ancrene Wisse* Group."

Julian of Norwich, the author of "A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman", was born in the early 1340s.[33] Trained at a convent, as all anchoresses are, Julian was enclosed in the Church of St Julian in Norwich. At the age of thirty, Julian received an illness from God. During a period of 48 hours, she receives visions from God which transform her perception of the world and

[33] "We can assume she was born in 1342-43 and thus that, as a young child, she lived through the Black Death. […] There is a strong possibility that she was a nun at the Benedictine convent at Carrow, a mile from the Church of St Julian's, Conesford, in Norwich, where she was later enclosed as an anchoress." Julian of Norwich. "Introduction." *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*. Edited Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jennings. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006): 4.

increase her religious knowledge. Julian recorded these visions in two texts, “A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman” and “A Revelation of Love.” The earliest woman author in English, Julian’s autobiographical visions are an intimate recollection of her communication with God.

Julian is a contemporary of Margery Kempe. Margery and Julian met and spoke together about God around 1413[34]. While Julian’s communication with God was accepted and respected, Margery faced harsh criticism regarding her behavior as a bride of Christ. Born into a middle-class family, Margery was married with children before she received communication from Christ. Her journey to God began with a vision of heaven to which she responds “Alas, that evyr I dede synne, it is ful mery in hevyn" [alas that I ever did sin, it is so merry in heaven] (Margery, 15)! After her vision she rebuffs her husband and ceases sexual conduct. As she grows in her relationship with Christ she travels on pilgrimage, often without a male escort. She speaks openly about her relationship with Christ and is rejected in many places she goes. She does not allow the rejection of others to cause her to feel ashamed of her faith. Margery is not bound to any religious order and her religious education is scant at best. What she knows is directly from God and from Church services. At points, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is frustrating to read because of Margery’s unconventional and frankly annoying behavior. It is no wonder she was not widely liked during her lifetime.

Margery has a deeply unmediated relationship with God yet what we know of her we know through mediation. *The Book of Margery Kempe* is not written by Margery Kempe who was illiterate. Margery’s book is recorded by a religious person and partially dictated from

[34] Julian of Norwich. “Introduction.” *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*. Edited Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jennings. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006): 6

Margery's own mouth[35]. The indirect nature of the record of Margery's life is similar to that of "The Life of Saint Margaret" a text which relies on a frame narrative about a man named Teochimus. Teochimus introduces himself in the beginning of the text as a "ilered I Godes lei" [learned in God's law] (Margaret, 87). Teochimus' education aligns him with the scribe who recorded Margery's life. Margaret and Margery are both illiterate members of the laity rather than the clergy. For a learned male scribe to record the words of an illiterate woman grants her credibility within a patriarchal system. Julian, embedded in the Church through her anchoretic vows, gains credibility through her connection to the Catholic institution.

Communication with God is vastly different from communication between humans. For one, God is a preeminent, immortal, master of the universe, and humans are mortal creatures living within physical bodies. Communication with God allows Medieval women to transcend their own immanence and join God in Heaven. By immanent I refer to the containment of the soul within a body. After the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, Jesus lost the physical body which allowed Him to speak to humans as a human. Medieval belief suggests that humanity is living in the time of the Holy Ghost. The conceptualization of the Holy Ghost as the voice of God, begins in the New Testament. In John 15:26, Christ speaks of the disbelief of those who oppose His identity as the Messiah. He tells His followers that through the Paraclete, He will be vindicated, "when the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He shall give testimony of me"[36]. While Christ exists in a human form, He is unable to defend himself against those who disbelieve and torture him. The Paraclete is

[35] "Kempe then approached an acquaintance, an Englishman (possibly her son) who had lived for a long time in German-speaking Europe; she narrated to him as much of her account as she could" Anthony Bale, "Introduction" *The Book of Margery Kempe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015): xviii

[36] "*Cum autem venerit Paracletus quem ego mittam vobis a Patre Spiritum veritatis qui a Patre procedit ille testimonium perhibebit de me*." JN 15:26

described as a messenger who, according to Western Catholicism, comes both "from the Father" and from Christ the Son. Without Christ manifest on earth, the Paraclete's "testimony" remains, allowing for communication between humanity and God.

Christian scholars, in the interest of connecting all Biblical texts, trace the Holy Ghost from the New Testament to the Old Testament. Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet describes God in a manner comparable to the depiction of the Holy Ghost in the New Testament. Isaiah describes the Messiah, which Christians take to mean Jesus Christ, in this way:

> the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness. And He shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears. [37]

These lines beautifully describe the experience of the mystic who receives communication from God. When the mystic receives visions from Christ it is because the Lord chooses to "rest upon" her mind. The form of knowing here, is non-physical, the word "spirit" is repeated no less than five times. The repetition of "spirit" displays the internal nature of divine communication. This internality is emphasized when Isaiah states that the communication cannot be judged by "the sight of the eyes" or "the hearing of the ears." The sight of the soul is imagination. Communication with God is best described using the word imagination which represents non-physical experience. Speaking to God through imagination does not make the anchoress' experience of communication with God fake, only non-physical.

---

[37] "*Et requiescet super eum spiritus Domini spiritus sapientiae et intellectus spiritus consilii et fortitudinis spiritus scientiae et pietatis. / Et replebit eum spiritus timoris Domini non secundum visionem oculorum iudicabit neque secundum auditum aurium arguet*" IS 11:2-3

God understands that human understanding is centered within the physical body and therefore uses the physical body to communicate signs. The capacity to understand the transcendent (that which is in heaven) through the physical body is a gift from God. The twelfth century theologian William of Saint-Thierry uses physical terms to understand God. Karen Sullivan summarizes William's theology by claiming that he "focuses upon Christ as a man, and not as God it is because as a man himself, obliged to perceive through his senses, he needs to imagine Him as a physical being before he can understand Him as a metaphysical being".[38] The body is the greatest barrier between God and humanity. Transcendent communication is the first step towards complete love of God. Transcendent communication with God includes hearing the words and feeling the emotions of God, an experience which heightens religious knowledge. The goal of mystical marriage is to experience a state of bliss inspired by transcendent communication with God.

Visions of God take place within the mystical bride's mind. These visions contain boundless love and produce intense emotions within the mystical bride. Like dreams, visions are difficult to verbalize. Saint Margaret has the benefit of receiving immanent communication with God which those around her see. Her divine communication takes the traditional form of doves from the Holy Ghost and visible blessings. Julian and Margery's visions take place within their minds. The language used to describe their visions alludes constantly to the physical world. Metaphors and similes compare God to that which the mystical bride understands through her experience as a soul within a body. Through metaphor and simile, Julian of Norwich and the authors of Margaret and Margery's lives verbalize visions of God.

[38] Karen Sullivan, "Truth and Imagination: From Romance to Children's Fantasy" *The Danger of Romance*, (University of Chicago Press, 2018): 8.

The process through which a woman becomes connected with God is arduous and only truly completed by death. This point is clarified in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "We see now through a mirror in a dark manner: but then face to face"[39]. The "mirror" refers to the way in which humans are only capable of understanding that which they see reflected in their world—that is the physical. It is in spite of this difficulty that God speaks to women and attempts to speak to Margaret, Margery and Julian "face to face." These texts challenge the belief that transcendent communication with God is possible only after death by representing women in intimate communion with God while on earth.

The Bride of God Observed

Andreas Capellanus, in his *De Arte Honeste Amandi*, determines thirty-one rules for courtly love. The thirteenth rule "when made public, love rarely endures"[40], argues for private intimacy between lovers. For a mystical bride, such privacy in love should be easy. When your lover lives in your heart and your soul rather than in the physical world, it shouldn't be hard to maintain the privacy of your relationship. Privacy becomes complicated when God grants the mystical bride visions which she wishes to share with humanity.

The audience who observes a relationship experiences that relationship very differently from the lovers. How people receive the relationship between a virgin and Christ is based on their own beliefs about the reliability of women and the reality of God. Margaret, a saint, is a well believed figure. The relationship she describes between God and herself is corroborated by God's active involvement in her martyrdom. Margery, a married woman who lives in the world is less reliable than Julian or Margaret. She stresses her fallibility to her reader and candidly

---

[39] "*Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem*." 1 COR 13:12

[40] Andreas Capellanus. *The Art of Courtly Love*. trans John Jay Parry. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960): 185

describes her sinful thoughts and actions. Julian exists between Margery and Margaret. She is believable because of her status as an anchoress.

Whether a mystic should be believed was a highly contested subject in the late Middle Ages. Jean Gerson, a high medieval French theologian, wrote a letter on how to decern "True from False Revelations" which makes suggestions about determining the validity of a claim of divine communication. His arguments provide insight on how religious and non-religious people alike judged claims of communication with God. Throughout this section, I rely on his arguments to underscore the ways in which Margery and Julian's communication with God is understood by other humans.

Communication with God detaches a human from society. The greater knowing granted by divine communication makes these women more knowledgeable and holy than those who they interact with. The manner in which these women respond to their increased holiness in conversation and by their self-presentation influences the way in which they are perceived by those around them.

Teochimus is the primary audience of Margaret's martyrdom. It is through him that we receive her Life. Teochimus introduces himself at the beginning of "The Life of Saint Margaret" as a religious scholar. His reverent respect for Margaret is clear from the moment he reveals himself as her witness. After she is beheaded, Teochimus buries Margaret. Through the act of burial, Teochimus takes responsibility for the maintenance of both Margaret's dead body and her holy Life which he lives on to tell:

> Ich, Teochimus, ant toc hire leofliche lich, ant ber ant brohte hit ayein into Antioches burh with murthe unimete. [I, Teochimus, came and took her lovely body and bore it and brought it again into the city of Antioch with immeasurable mirth] (Margaret, 116).

Through his emphasis on "Ich" [I] Teochimus shows that he alone inters Margaret's corpse. In the Bible, there is often danger associated with the burial of the dead. Particularly in the Book of Tobit, burial of the dead is a holy action with mortal consequences[41]. Although Margaret brought many converts through her martyrdom,[42] it was Teochimus who risked his life in burring her body. His devotional love validates her claim of sainthood.

Teochimus represents active audience participation within the life of saint. Through his record of her Life, he preserves the miracles of Margaret's martyrdom. It is possible that Teochimus is a work of fiction created to frame Margaret's narrative. As a tool of the frame narrative, Teochimus authenticates Margaret's story which she is unable to do because of her death. Teochimus mediates Margaret's martyrdom and serves as a male believer who validates her experience to the patriarchal system.

The response Margaret receives from those who view her martyrdom is overwhelmingly positive. Those who view her torture are converted en masse,

> O thet ilke time turnden to ure Lauerd fif thusent men yet withuten itald children ant wummen, ant alle weren ananriht, as the reve het hit, o Cristes kinewurthe nome hefdes bicorven
>
> [At the same time five thousand men turned to our Lord still without counting children and women, and all were immediately, as the governor ordered it, beheaded in Christ's royal name] (Margaret, 112).

---

[41] "*Denique cum reversus esset rex Sennacherim fugiens a Iudaea plagam quam circa eum Deus fecerat propter blasphemiam suam et iratus multos occideret ex filiis Israhel Tobias sepeliebat corpora eorum / at ubi nuntiatum est regi iussit eum occidi et tulit ei omnem substantiam eius*" [And when king Sennacherib was come back, fleeing from Judea by reason of the slaughter that God had made about him for his blasphemy, and being angry slew many of the children of Israel, Tobias buried their bodies. But when it was told the king, he commanded him to be slain, and took away all his substance.] TOB 1:21-22

[42] Unfortunately, most of the people she converted were immediately slain…

Mass conversion is typical in stories of torture and martyrdom. It is unsettling that apart from Teochimus, all of Margaret's audience members are killed. Without an audience of believers, Margaret is disempowered and left in the hands of her enemy. The death of the converts emphasizes that Margaret's fate is death. Nothing can stop the Satanic forces which control Olibrius from enacting her violent end—she is fated to die. Her sacrifice brings many people to Heaven—not to earthly salvation. This suggests that God prioritizes heavenly bliss over earthly religiosity. The purpose of the mass murder of converts is to mark the persuasive power of Margaret's torture. Ultimately, the positive response of onlookers is not what brings Margaret closer to God. She is brought near God because of Olibrius's punishment. Punishment, not peace marks the earthly journey of she who wishes to speak to God.

Margery Kempe receives the most backlash from the way in which she presents her relationship with Christ to society. Blessed by God with intense emotional responses to spiritual ideas, Margery often cried loudly in church and in public. Unable to control her volume, those around Margery were deeply annoyed by her behavior because they found it unseemly. The scribe of Margery's *Book* claims that such frustration stems from a lack of knowledge:

> Other whech had no knowlach of hir maner of governawns, save only be sygth owtforth er ellys be jangelyng of other personys, pervertyng the dom of trewth, seyd ful evyl of hir and causyd hir to have mech enmyté and mech dysese
>
> [Others who had no knowledge of her manner of self-conduct except by outward appearances, through the tattling of other people, through the perverting of true opinion, said really wicked things about her and caused her to have much enmity and much distress] (Margery, 43)

The wicked things said about Margery primarily suggest that she is not receiving messages from God. Margery's detractors claims that her visions are from demons who wish to pervert her knowledge of right and wrong. Those who interact with Margery see only "sygth owtforth" [outward appearance] and Margery's outward presentation is loud and often disagreeable which is difficult to reconcile with the humility required for divine communication. For her reading audience Margery displays her internal "maner of governawns" to prove the integrity of her divine communication. Social rejection takes an intense emotional toll on Margery.

Through her rejection, Margery Kempe learns humility. At the beginning of her re-marriage to Christ, Margery's understanding of divine love is incomplete. Margery is vain,

> Sche thowt that sche lovyd God mor than He hir. Sche was smet wyth the dedly wownd of veynglory and felt it not
>
> [She thought that she loved God more than He loved her. She was smitten with the deadly wound of vainglory and felt it not] (Margery, 17)

God loves more than any human is capable of loving, therefore Margery's belief that her love is "mor" than His is unfounded. By "dedly wownd" the scribe means that Margery's soul is endangered by her vanity. Were Margery respected and admired as a bride of God, her vanity would only become more of a threat to her soul. Margery's vanity provides an explanation for her social rejection. Unlike other mystical wives, Margery lacks humility and must be taught to be humble.

To learn humility, God hides himself within Margery and sends her into a world which mocks and disbelieves her. God explains Himself thusly, "dowtyr, I am as an hyd God in thi sowle" [daughter, I am like a hidden God in your soul] (Margery, 183). The internality of Margery's relationship with God contrasts with her worldly life. Margery is not cloistered, she

lives in the lay world, but her relationship with God is cloistered within her. Margery's relationship with God is well suited to the advice of Andreas Capellanus who stresses the importance of keeping ones love private "least some person spying on their love might have opportunity to spread malicious gossip"[43]. "Malicious gossip" aimed at Margery Kempe is a direct result of her constant, and often boastful, representations of her relationship with God. Yet God is not deterred by gossip. Margery becomes closer to God as she is rejected by the world.

The backlash she receives serves as a form of martyrdom. The suffering she experiences through her rejection "evyrmor strengthyd in the lofe of owyr Lord and the mor bold to suffyr shamys and reprevys for hys sake in every place" [ever strengthened in the love of our Lord and all the more bold to suffer shames and rebukes for His sake in every place she went] (Margery, 69). In conventional terms, Margery responds poorly to her increased holiness. Rather than becoming humbler as is expected of her, she remains bold. Still, God does not hate Margery for her boldness, instead, He instead strengthens her.

Jean Gerson explains that "Holy angels and true prophets do not preach or order anything that is contrary to good morals or sincere faith"[44]. This claim places Margery in hot water. Margery dresses in a manner which those around her find unseemly, she is loud in public and, most immorally, travels alone as a married woman. Does this mean that she is not a prophet? Absolutely not. Margery's God makes clear through His communication that Margery is meant to worship God and be rejected by society. Margery may be annoying, but she is certainly following the divine orders she receives.

---

[43] Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*. trans. John Jay Parry. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960): 152

[44] Jean Gerson, "Distinguishing True from False Revelations." *Jean Gerson: Early Works*. trans. Brian Patrick McGuire. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998): 350

Interactions with outsiders, people who are not privy to the visions which the mystical bride receives, provide the anchoress with an opportunity to verbalize her internal experiences. In "A Vision Shown to a Devout Woman," Julian speaks to a priest between visions. He is the only human to whom she speaks to during her elucidating vision. The priest asks Julian "howe I farde, and I saide that I hadde raved that date. And he laughed loude and enterlye" [how I fared, and I said that I had visions that day] (Julian 109). Julian describes her experience with the word "raved" which means to wander or to stray within the mind. By representing her soul's journey as an expedition within the mind, Julian places her experience within her body. The priest does not laugh to tease Julian, he laughs "enterlye", that is sincerely. The priest responds just as Jean Gerson advises by neither rejecting nor confirming the revelation until he has more information.[45]

To the priest, Julian describes the visual aspect of her communication with God. Instead of waxing long, Julian says only "the crosse that stode atte my bedde feete, it bled faste" [the cross that stood at the foot of my bed bled heavily] (Julian, 109). Julian focuses on a vision which animates the room around her. She refers to a physical object which she and the priest can both see—the cross at the foot of her bed. The priest can understand her vision within the context of the room they are in together. At this point, Julian has been shown much more than a bleeding cross. That she describes only this shows her reticence to describe her vision. Based on the claims of Jean Gerson, her reticence suggests her holiness. Gerson explains that visions should

[45] "If someone comes who claims to have had a revelation of the type that Zechariah and other prophets in sacred history are known to have received, what are we to do and how are we to act? If we immediately deny everything or ridicule the matter or accuse the person, we will seem to weaken the authority of divine revelations […] we are obliged to find a middle way."
Jean Gerson. "Distinguishing True from False Revelations." *Jean Gerson: Early Works*. trans. Brian Patrick McGuire. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998): 350

only be shared "to build up the church and religion"[46]. In her sickness, Julian cannot explain her entire vision in a way which would provide religious guidance. The bleeding cross is an animation of the crucifixion which displays the lasting effects of Christ's sacrifice. Julian shares this vision because it is a shadow of the Passion which can serve to "build up the church" by displaying the presence of God in the world.

In her weakened state, Julian does not judge the legitimacy of her own vision and turns to the priest to validate her experience. The priest responds to Julian's claim seriously "with this worde, the person that I spake to wex alle sadde and mervelande" [with this word, the person that I spoke to became serious and marveled at me] (Julian, 109). The priest immediately believes Juliana and take her claim seriously. His belief stems from her humble account of what she has seen. The priest's admiration inspires shame within Julian. His belief does nothing for Julian's trust in herself. Julian becomes frustrated, "Howe shulde a preste leve me? I leved nought oure lorde God" [Why should a priest believe me? I did not believe our Lord God] (Julian, 109). Her response displays her deep humility, a sign of piety. Julian feels anger towards herself because of her own disbelief when she was first shown a vision. Her disbelief suggests that she does not believe herself worthy of divine visions. Julian's conversation with the priest exemplifies her humility. Julian rejects vanity: her humility detaches Julian from human society.

Julian's humility functions in the same way as Margery's vanity. Just as Margery is punished for her excessive belief in her own worth by being seen as unworthy by others, Julian is seen by others as deeply worthy because she disbelieves herself. Julian spends her life recording her visions in autobiographical documents. Her intense humility makes her visions more comfortable to read than *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Margery's text, full of public confidence

[46] Jean Gerson. "Distinguishing True from False Revelations." *Jean Gerson: Early Works*. trans. Brian Patrick McGuire. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998): 109

is the antithesis of the act of divine communication—a deeply private act. She may not be any less honest than Julian, but she is certainly more annoying. Julian's reverential tone paired with her humility displays her meekness. Mighty God rewards and loves the meek. Julian's meekness contrasts with the might of the Lord in order to show both of their attributes in greater relief.

Julian and Margery are examples of how private devotional practice can lead to communication with God. Personal presentation can elevate or debase the words of God. Margery fails to communicate her message to humanity in a believable way because of her pride. In fact, we could consider the loss of *The Book of Margery Kempe* to history until 1934[47] a curse resulting from her pride.

Unlike Margaret, neither Margery nor Julian received visions which others could see. For this reason, their representations of their visions are the only way of determining their experiences. Their communication with God takes place within their souls. Society sees women in terms of their bodies. A woman's role is incredibly physical. The woman bears children, raises them, and cares for their bodies. The actions which define the mystical bride are anti-physical. The mystical bride seeks to transcend her body. To escape the expectations placed on women's bodies, the woman who wishes to commune with God must be rejected by society or leave of her own free will. The rejection which Margery faces is spiritually productive because it cases her to become alienated from society. Exclusion from society brings Margery closer to God. Although she is not cloistered, she is isolated. Julian, already cloistered, has a great opportunity for metaphysical communication. Her anchoretic vocation guides her divine communication. Outside of society the body decreases in significance. This causes the soul to become the active aspect of the self.

[47] Anthony Bale. "Introduction" *The Book of Margery Kempe*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015): ix

These stories display the lack of narrative importance placed on those who respect and honor the mystical bride. Importance instead rests upon those who punish the bride. Margaret's Olibrius, Margery's rude neighbors and town gossips inspire their world rejection. Julian's own self-doubt brings her closer to God. After her conversation with the priest, God shows Julian more visions in order to assuage her doubt. The internal audience plays the role of the mother bird, pushing her babies out of the nest so they may fly to God. Martyrdom, or death, ultimately completes the relationship between God and the mystical bride. Without society, the anchoress is free to delve deeper into her relationship with God.

Sexual Intimacy Between God and His Bride

Fire symbolism is evocative of passion and desire. The feeling of warmth fire produces contrasts with the danger of immolation. Perhaps it is the present danger of fire which makes it such an apt analogue for sex. In the Middle Ages, there were endless rules regarding sexual intimacy. Young women in the Middle Ages were subjected to conceptions of womanhood which elevated virginity to a virtue and deemed sex sinful. Virginity heightens the value of a woman within the deeply patriarchal social structure of the Middle Ages. As a virgin, a woman is untethered to a husband and under her own, or her father's, dominion. Sex destroys a virgin's claim to independence and places her under the control of a man. Sex, like a burning fire, blackens the virgin's soul and destroys her.

Yet, there is a fire that burns without consumption: God's fire. In Exodus, God appears as a fire within a bush which does not consume the bush. God appears to Moses and Moses says, "*quod rubus arderet et non conburetur*" [this bush was enflamed and was not consumed] (Exodus 3:2). Fire which does not consume is a mark of God's all-encompassing power. He is the supreme maker who requires no fuel. "*Conburetur*" translates into English as "consumed"

or, far more poetic, “to burn away with love.” The intimate connection between consumption and love is clear in the second translation. Desire, like fire, has the capacity to destroy the one who desires. God, whose fire does not consume, inspires a form of desire which does not destroy the lover even as she burns for Him.

Saint Margaret calls upon the aspect of God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush as she is set aflame by Olibrius. Margaret identifies the fire of God with healing and comfort, “Heh Healent Godd, with the halewende fur of the Hali Gast, moncune frovre, fure mine heorte, ant let te lei of Thi luve leiti i mine lenden” [High savior God, with the healing fire of the Holy Ghost, humankind’s comfort, inflame my heart and let the flame of Your love burn in my loins] (Margaret, 110). Margaret calls upon God as “Healent”, a word for the Savior which explicitly refers to His capacity to heal humanity. The emphasis placed on healing brings about the reversal of Margaret’s immolation. Margaret, like the bush, is not consumed because she is healed even as she is burning. She associates healing with the “Hali Gast” who brings the “halewende fur” which causes her to “wende” [wander] towards health, even as the flames lick her body. Margaret’s love for God causes a physical change within her body.

The Trinity unites in love for Margaret to enflame her with intimate passion for God. Margaret calls upon two persons of God: she calls on the “Hali Gast” and “Healent” Christ. These two persons of the Trinity evoke two feelings in her body. The Holy Ghost burns in her heart, a point made clear by her direct injunction “with the halewende fur of the Hali Gast, […] fure mine heorte” [with the healing fire of the Holy Ghost, inflame my heart]. Another fire burns lower on her body, “leiti i mine lenden” [light it in my loins]. This flame in her loins is from a different person of God; this is shown by the new subject “Thi.” Based on Margaret’s intimacy with Christ, “Thi” likely refers to Jesus Christ the Son. Christ rewards Margaret’s devotional

sacrifice of her body by causing "te lei of Thi luve leiti i mine lenden" [the fire of Your love burns in my loins]. As a noun, "lenden" refers to the lower midsection of Margaret's body. Margaret's loins are an intensely private part of her body particularly because she is a virgin. To cry out for God to "leiti I mine lenden" is a sexual request. For a fire to burn in her loins is to experience sexual desire, even gratification. In meaning, it is as a verb that "lenden" becomes sexual. Translated as "to come together, assemble; also, be united (in wedlock)", "lenden" takes on a sexual flare.[48] "To come together" is indicative of intercourse and the union implied by wedlock is a sexual one. Margaret expresses earlier in the text that she has "iyeve" the gem of her virginity to Christ a statement which either denotes her virginity or suggests that she has a sexual relationship with God. Can virginity consecrated to God be understood as a sexual relationship with the Divine? The physicality of Margaret's language emphasizes the active nature of her love for God.

"The Liflad ant te Passiun of Seinte Margarete" is often a very literal text. Margaret asks for protection from the fire which Olibrius sets beneath her. Her protection comes in the form of spiritual transformation. The fire is transformed into a simile, it is like a fire: it represents deep burning passion. Locating passion in Margaret's loins transforms her from a non-sexual creature to a sexualized virgin devoted to Jesus Christ. The direction of Margaret's sexuality—towards Christ—rather than destroying her virginity, heightens her devotion. The difference between sexuality directed towards God and sexuality directed towards humans is that sexual desire for God does not destroy a woman's independence. Margaret remains untethered from mortal men. She is imbued with the power of the Lord and empowered with freedom from male dominance.

[48] "Lenden." *Middle English Compendium.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2022)

Another example of divinely centered sexuality is Margery Kempe. Unlike Margaret, Margery is not virginal. Her lack of virginity implies a greater knowledge of sex and changes her perception of carnal desire. Margery transitions from carnal activities to sensual ones when she vows chastity. With her husband, Margery experienced little to no pleasure during sex acts and discontinues intercourse with her husband when she devotes herself to God. Through her devotion to God, Margery discovers a new form of sexual gratification.

The sexual aspect of Margery's devotion is compared to fire. Margery's fire is described without any reference to fire's danger, it is presented as a blessing,

> Also owr Lord gaf hir an other tokne, […] and that was a flawme of fyer wondir hoot and delectabyl and ryth comfortabyl [Also, our Lord gave her another sign [...] and that was the flame of the fire of love, marvelously hot and delicious and very comforting] (Margery, 81)

The danger is missing in this conception of holy fire. Margery's fire is not the impetus of healing, rather it as a sensual pleasure which changes the way in which Margery interacts with the world. The fire is described as a "flawme of fyer" alluding to the biblical "*flamma ignis*" [flame of fire].[49] This Biblical allusion is the primary connection between Margery's fire and Moses'. Margery's fire neither threatens nor consumes her. There is an obvious lack of danger in Margery's situation. The fire is exclusively good.

The exclusive goodness of the fire presents a, alternative way of thinking about God. Old Testament God, and perhaps Saint Margaret's God as well, are violent against those who detest them. Moses' enemy Pharaoh is destroyed in the sea[50], Olibrius will certainly burn in Hell, but Margery's naysayers go unpunished. Instead of destroying Margery's enemies, Margery's God

[49] EX 3:2
[50] EX 14:27

tells her that they are part of her trial. Instead of protecting Margery from actual dangers (imprisonment, rape, and the dangers of pilgrimage), Margery's God gives her "a flawme of fyer wondir hoot and delectabyl"—he gives her pleasure. This pleasure allows Margery to manage her other troubles and pass through them. Medievalist author Johan Huizinga argues that in the Middle Ages religious thought transforms each experience into a "feeling for God's majesty"[51]. Margery takes the feeling of warmth which she finds in her body and attributes it to God. She describes with pleasure what women going through menopause describe as hot flashes. Menopause is a fire Margery walks through which does not consume her. Everything Margery experiences, even menopause, is a pleasure from God and therefore a gift.

The pleasure Margery experiences in Christ is not limited to warm feelings—she too feels heat in her loins. Margery's description of intercourse with God is far less oblique than Margaret's. It emphasizes that divine sexual intercourse does not corrupt virginity. After gracing Margery with His flame, God comes to Margery and seduces her. He begins His seduction by reminding Margery of her purity, "oftyntymes have I telde the that I have clene forgove the alle thy synnes" [I have often told you that I have wholly forgiven you for all your sins] (Margery, 83). Margery expresses anxiety, especially near the beginning of her relationship with Christ, regarding her lack of virginity. The phrase "clene forgove" implies that Christ has cleaned away Margery's sin as a housewife cleans a table. "Forgove", a past tense form of forgive, is much like "forgon", another Middle English word which refers to surrender. Through her surrender to God, Margery is wiped clean of sin.

[51] "Symbolic thought causes the continuous transfusion of the feeling for God's majesty and for eternity into everything that can be perceived and thought." Johan Huizinga. *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*. trans. Rodney J Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch. (University of Chicago Press, 1996): 239

Christ grants Margery virginity through His unending grace and then asks her to give her new virginity to Him. Propositioning her, Christ tells Margery, “Most I nedys be homly wyth the and lyn in thi bed wyth the” [I must be intimate with you and lie in your bed with you] (Margery 83). The word “homly” describes the intimacy between Margery and Christ. “Homly” refers to sexual intimacy as between a husband and wife in the home. The word also relates to shamelessness and simpleness. This multifaced word prevents one understanding of Margery’s sexuality. Contrasted with the emphasis placed in the previous line on Margery’s cleanliness, Christ’s desire for Margery recalls Margaret’s assertion “Ich hit habbe iyeve The mi meithhad” [I have given you my maidenhead] (Margaret, 91). Clean from her previous sexual iniquities, Margery is ready to give her newly regained virginity to her new spouse Christ.

An exchange takes place when the virginal woman marries Christ. One which is simultaneously spiritual and physical. Margaret does not provide details about how she gives her virginity to Christ, Margery does. In a somewhat incestuous line, Christ requests from Margery every form of love and intimacy possible between a human man and woman,

> take me to the as for thi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, and as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be lovyd as a sone schuld be lovyd wyth the modyr and wil that thu love me, dowtyr, as a good wife owyth to love hir husbonde [Take me to yourself as you would your wedded husband, as your dear darling, and as your sweet son, for I will be loved as a son should be loved by his mother and I want you to love me, daughter, as a good wife ought to love her husband] (Margery, 83)

The relationship between God and a virgin goes beyond the relationship any man could have with the same woman. Christ is spouse, son, and father to Margery. Margery loves Christ as would a wife, daughter, and mother. As God exists in variety through the trinity, Christ exists as

various beloved men to Margery. The lack of singularity, that God cannot be pinned down, is precisely what makes Him incomparable to a human lover.

Boldness distinguishes the relationship between Christ and a virgin from the relationship between a husband and a wife. In opposition to the relationship between mortal husband and wife in which the wife is made meek by her husband, Christ uplifts the virgin. In an image between physical and spiritual, Christ tells Margery "Thu mayst boldly take me in the armys of thi sowle and kyssen my mowth" [you may boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth] (Margery, 83). God asks her to "kyssen" His mouth which implies physicality. Margery does not hold Christ in her physical arms, she holds Him "in the armys of thi sowle." Margery's soul is an internal second body where she can be with Christ in immense privacy. The carnal aspect of their intimacy is so deep inside Margaret as to barely exist in the physical world. The boldness with which Margery holds Christ emphasizes the power which she gains through her union with God. "Boldly" possesses its modern meaning as well as meaning arrogant. It is arrogant to kiss the most powerful source of divine energy in the Universe. This line suggests that God enjoys Margery's arrogant humanity and desires her boldness.

If sex destroys the independence of a medieval woman, sex with God heightens her independence from humanity. Through her chaste relationship with her husband and her spiritually carnal relationship with God, Margery is freed from the boundaries which imprisoned other women of her time. Margaret is freed from the prospect of marriage because of her devotion to her divine husband. Like the fire which warms Margaret without pain, God grants virgins a form of intercourse which leaves their virginity intact. Sexual and sensual passion between the mystical couple heightens a virgin's capacity for understanding the bliss of Heaven. God is the perfect lover because He is an outlet for desire which does not result in destruction.

The Knightly Bride

Demons are as violent as God is gentle. Demons attempt to coerce humans to stray from the path of righteousness in order to destroy their soul and sentence them to eternal damnation. The battle between a human and demonic forces is one which takes place internally. Carolyn Walker-Bynum argues in her book *Jesus as Mother* (1982) that after the 11th century the religious drama relocated into each individual Christian's heart and became "less a battle than a journey–a journey toward God"[52]. Demons and the vices they bring make this "journey" harrowing. Walker-Bynum's understanding of the religious drama does not take into consideration the fact that the "battle" against demons does not truly go away, instead it moves inside the heart of an individual. The virgin's choice to direct her life towards holiness places her in opposition to demons and vices. These forces become her enemies which she must defeat through her heroic holiness.

The imaginative capacity which allows a virgin to speak to God is what endangers her where demons are concerned. To manipulate their prey towards sin, demons change a pious person's perception of good and evil to lead them to temptation and sin[53]. In many cases, God seeks to rescue humans from danger. Where demons are concerned, God sends His devoted servants into battle alone. In the case of virgin brides of Christ, the opportunity for individual action goes against traditional conceptions of man's role in a relationship. Christ, the husband, fails to protect His bride by allowing her to face demons individually. Christ trusts His bride to protect herself. By abandoning His mystical bride to demons, Christ reverses their gender roles:

---

[52] Walker-Bynum, Carolyn. "Introduction." *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982): 16.

[53] "It is imagination that makes humans succumb to demons, who cannot alter what is, but can alter what seems to be in order to deceive us" Sullivan, Karen. "Truth and Imagination: From Romance to Children's Fantasy.*" The Danger of Romance.* (University of Chicago Press, 2018): 4

Christ is the maiden, and the virgin is the knight. The valiant virgin protects her lover Christ by defending her own soul against temptation.

Imprisoned in a dungeon, awaiting yet more trials, Saint Margaret appeals to Christ to argue against the demon which possesses Olibrius to torture her. Rather than asking for Christ to destroy the demon, Margaret asks for Him to watch over her argument,

> Bihald me ant help me, ant lef me thet Ich mote legge mine ehnen o the luthre unwiht the weorreth ayein me, ant lef me deme with him, Drihtin of dome
>
> [watch over me and help me, and give me leave that I might lay my eyes on the loathsome fiend who wages war against me, and give me leave to argue with him, God of judgment] (Margaret, 97)

By asking Christ to watch over her Margaret shows that she fights for Him. Her request "help me" contrasts with "lef me deme with him" which expresses her desire to face the demon independently. Margaret judges the demon even before she asks Christ's leave, referring to the demon as "luthre unwiht" which displays her disgust. Her early judgement displays her strength and foretells her capacity to war successfully against the demon. Margaret directs her prayer to "Drihtin of dome", the God of doom or judgement. Margaret is like God in that she too seeks to dole out judgement onto the demons of Hell. Margaret prays for the same capacity for judgement which God possesses, a request which makes her equal with her divine husband.

God makes Margaret His equal and allows her to face the demon. He trusts that Margaret's judgement of the demon will be as pitiless as His own. Surrounded by new converts, who stand outside the bars of her cell, Margaret faces the demon. The description of the demon is particularly vivid,

> Ant com ut of an hurne hihendliche towart hire an unwiht of helle on ane drakes liche, se grislich thet ham gras with thet sehen thet unselhthe glistinde as thah he al overguld were [and there came quickly out of a corner toward her a demon of hell like a dragon, so frightening that they were horrified when they saw that evil thing glistening as though he were all gilded over] (Margaret, 97)

The speed of the demon "hihendliche" or rapidly, conveys its lack of forethought. The demon's only desire is to destroy Margaret as quickly as it can. The creature is "ane drakes liche", like a dragon. This subtle simile creates a disconnect from the appearance of the demon and its identity. The demon is not a dragon, instead it is a conglomeration of humanity's greatest fears and vices. Again, the narrator uses simile, "as thah" to describe the golden skin of the dragon. Gold, with its associations with God, is false sign of divinity on the dragons hide. Margaret's bravery is emphasized by the fear attributed to the onlookers.

Margaret does not shrink from the dragon; she steps into its mouth bearing the sign of the cross and destroys the dragon with her faith. Facing off against the dragon, Margaret teeters on the line between male and female,

> For the Rode-taken redliche arudde hire thet ha wes with iwepnet, ant warth his bone sone, swa thet his bodi tobearst omidhepes otwa [For the Rood-token that she was armed with speedily defended her and soon became his slayer, so that his body burst in two at the middle] (Margaret, 99)

The word "arudde", which means to defend, suggests that through the sign of the cross Jesus protects Margaret. However, "iwepnet" displays Margaret herself wielding the cross. Margaret is dependent upon Jesus to arm her against the demon. Once armed, Margaret battles demons herself. Margaret's bravery during her trial implies her masculine destructive power which

contrasts with her female form. Through her mystical marriage, Margaret transcends the boundaries which define sex as a series of characteristics which demean women and uplift men.

Margery transcends gendered boundaries in all aspects of her life. Through her mystical marriage she is freed from the restrictive conventions of medieval womanhood. In her battle against demons, Margery faces the gaping maws of enemies which wish to consume her. Margery describes the threat of being eaten alive,

> And in this tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, develys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys of fyr as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in [And at this time she saw, so she thought, devils opening their mouths all inflamed with burning flames of fire, as though they might have swallowed her in] (Margery, 11)

As with Margaret, the depiction of the demons is uncertain. She sees "as hir thowt" [so she thought] and the anxiety about being eaten is accompanied with "as thei" [as though]. The uncertainty Margery expresses marks the demons as representations of Margery's anxieties. Margery's concerns about her own capacity for salvation keep her from being near to God. Margery fears that she will be consumed with evil thoughts, a fear which manifests itself as a vision of demons. For a demon to consume Margery would be for her to relinquish her freedom and control and come under the sway of evil. Throughout her story, Margery constantly rejects being controlled by others, particularly men. Her brazenness is at odds with her female body and her behavior is judged harshly by those around her.

The demons take on the shape of Margery's fears in order to better manipulate her. Margery's demons congeal into a vision which directly names her fear,

> And also the develys cryed upon hir wyth greet thretyngys and bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendam, hir feyth, and denyin hir God. [And the devils also cried out after

her with grave threats, and told her that she should forsake her Christianity, her faith, and deny her God] (Margery, 11)

Their words are "thretyngys" [threats] which seek to distract Margery from the path to heaven. Yet, even as the demons name her anxiety, a hole through which Margery can escape to God is revealed. The demons call Jesus "hir God." By attaching a pronoun to God, the demons name the way in which Margery claims God as her own. The bond between Margery and God is so strong it is impossible for demons to deny. Margery can escape demonic power by claiming God as her own and clinging to Him.

Through trials against demons, Margery and Margaret are drawn closer to God. By battling for their own souls, they prove their devotion to Christ. Julian of Norwich takes this idea further, writing in her "Vision" that Christ told her "Sinne is behovelye" [Sin is necessary] (Julian, 91). "Behovelye" contains various meanings. It means both necessary and beneficial. That sin is beneficial seems counterintuitive. Sin causes desolation and the destruction of the soul. Julian explains that sin is necessary "for we ere alle in party noughted, and we shulde be noughted, folowande oure maister Jhesu, to we be full purgede" [for we are all partly immoral, and we should be immoral, following our master Jesus, until we are fully purged] (Julian, 91). The journey towards Christ requires that mortals begin immoral. Were a soul to come to Jesus already pure, she would not need Christ. Christ acts as a teacher for the immoral and works to purge the soul by teaching her to "folowande" Christ. Julian's conception of faith lauds the benefit of sin as a counterpoint to virtue. Most humans are not wholly good, yet Christ loves all humanity. It follows that Christ loves sin in that it brings repentant souls to Him.

Johan Huizinga argues that medieval people are interested in visions of hell because "human language is unable to evoke a vison of bliss equally drastic as the one it evokes of terror"

(Huizinga, 256). I find that visions of terror remind the women who face them of their own bravery. The popularity of visions of Hell comes from the fact that sin is so widespread in humanity. Humans live constantly in sin: we sin by passing violent justice upon other mortals and by enjoying sexual pleasure. Earthly life is difficult to compare to Heaven and much easier to compare to Hell. Christ is a source of power which allows the meek to face their enemy: sin. By transforming metaphysical fears and villainous desires into physical demons, Margery particularly can face her fears and overcome them.

What is particular about these three visions of sin is that they all show Christ's confidence in His mystical brides. Christ does not seek to defend these women from demons, rather He allows them to face vice head on and triumph in each instance. The heroism of these women as they face off against the Enemy undermines the conception that women are weak. These women show their valor to Jesus and to themselves. A marriage to Christ is non-traditional in many senses, particularly in the way it frames the mystical bride as heroic—masculine—as she retains her gentility (feminine).

The Beatific Vision

Life on earth is filled with suffering and toil. In Heaven, all things are peaceful. The gift of bliss which God grants His beloved can free her mind from the troubles of earth. The Church Fathers write extensively on the difference in value between earthly pleasures and heavenly ones. Saint Jerome decries the allure of earthly pleasures, "What have I to do with the pleasures of sense that so soon come to an end?"[54] The emphasis Jerome places on the temporary nature of earthly pleasures implies the endless pleasure of heaven. On earth, divine bliss manifests as a

[54] Jerome. "Letter 22" *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*. Trans Fremantle, WH; Lewis, G; Martley, WG. Ed. Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry. Vol. 6, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1893): 22:18

feeling of happiness which radiates from the recipient. The bliss I describe is not an emotion, it is a pure state of being resulting from deep intimacy with God.

Described in Catholic theology as the Beatific Vision, bliss is inspired by unmediated knowledge of God. The Beatific Vision is the realization of the verse in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "We see now through a mirror in a dark manner: but then face to face; Now I know in part, then I will know even as I am known."[55] An ancient mirror, composed of mica, creates a hazy image which does not accurately reflect the face. God, who knows all, shares bliss with the anchoress by revealing Himself to her to such an extent that she knows Him as well and He knows her. To gain knowledge of another person is often a sexual innuendo. The knowledge given by God, is an innuendo for all-encompassing pleasure. Medieval marriages define the marital debt as the husband or wife's right to have sex with their partner. Bliss is the marital debt owed the anchoress by God. Awareness of the bliss of the afterlife frees mystical wives from anxiety about missing earthly pleasures and transforms her perception of the world.

Bliss blesses recipients with the capacity to accept the temporality of suffering on earth. Faced with a demon, Margaret says, "Ich habbe isehen blisse ant Ich blissi me throf" [I have seen bliss and therefore I make myself blissful] (Margaret, 100). Her words are both a prayer and a statement. Her capacity to change her emotions is a function of her relationship with God. The word she uses, "isehen", to describe her bliss refers both to physical sight and spiritual insight. Her delineation of her experience of bliss as through sight follows the tradition of 1 Corinthians 13:12 in which sight describes communication with God. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* explains that in this context words which refer to sight "distinguish it [the Beatific vision] from the

[55] "*Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem nunc cognosco ex parte tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum*." 1 COR 13

mediate knowledge of God which the human mind may attain in the present life"[56]. Sight refers not only to vision through the eyes but vision which comprehends Heaven. Margaret uses language to transform herself from a suffering mortal into a heavenly creature.

Detachment from earthly bereavement inspires greater detachment from earthly reality. Julian experiences such detachment during her sickness. Julian describes her detachment as incredibly joyful,

> This feeling was so gladde to me and so goodly that I was in pees, in ese, and in reste, so that there was nothinge in erthe that shulde hafe greved me [The feeling was so happy to me and so pious that I was in peace, in ease and in rest, so that there was nothing on earth that should have grieved me] (Julian, 81)

In this moment Julian experiences nothing of the pain of her illness. Her experience is a form of distraction, a fact attested by her statement that nothing on earth could "greve" her. Her lack of grief implies ascendance to Heaven where concern is banished. Intellectually, Julian could be aware that she remains ill. However, bliss allows her to transcend intellectual knowing—a product of earthly experience—and know the peace which God knows.

Julian relinquishes her free will in order to obtain bliss. She describes her bliss as a gift from God, "God gafe me again the comforth and the reste in saule: likinge and sykerness, mightlye festnede withouten any drede." [God gave me again comfort and rest in my soul: pleasure and certainty made me feel secure and without any dread] (Julian, 81). Unlike Margaret, Julian does not take responsibility for her capacity to make herself at peace. Julian describes her feeling as "sykerness" [certainty] a feeling which is difficult on earth where change is rampant. The security she describes with the word "festned" evokes moored ships and tied horses.

---

[56] Edward Pace, "Beatific Vision," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907)

Metaphorically, Julian associates herself with boats and horses which lack self-control. Humanity possesses free will. Julian relinquishes her free will and comes under the control of a God who will "festnede" her to Himself. Bliss grants stability which is antithetical to the instability of the world. Therefore, bliss is transcendence.

Margery does not experience transcendent bliss. As I explain in my section on The Fire, Margery experiences joy and pleasure through God. However, her experience of peace is always centered in her body. Further, intense pleasure from God, rather than causing her to go deeper inside of her soul, consistently causes her to "sobbyn ful hedowslych" [cry very astonishingly] an experience which externalizes her emotions (Margery, 101). The difference between transcendent bliss and physical pleasure is the way in which the body is involved. Bliss is possible only when the body ceases to be the focal point of experience. Margery's inability to experience bliss does not mean her communication with God is a failure, only that she will experience bliss for the first time in Heaven.

Bliss inspires a pure state of being outside of the body. Communication with God exists between the immanent and transcendent. Metaphysical communication with God describes the experience of hearing and understanding messages from God through imaginative faculties. The normal state of being in Heaven, Bliss is the highest form of communion with God possible on Earth. Transcendence is the capacity to escape the imagining mind into the pure state of bliss. Intellectual knowing brings Margaret and Julian to God, the become one with God through bliss.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the specific ways in which mystical wives detach themselves from the system of marriage which oppresses and disempowers women. Such detachment follows the instruction of *Ancrene Wisse*:

> Husewifschipe is Marthe dale; Marie dale is stilnesse ant reste of alle worldes noise, thet na thing ne lette hire to heren Godes stevene. [Being a housewife is Martha's part. Mary's part is silence and peace from all the noise of the world so that nothing can prevent her from hearing God's voice] (*Ancrene Wisse*, 8:7)

The job of a housewife debars her from focused education and religious practice. Martha represents the non-religious woman who must perform tasks which maintain the stability of a home. The mystical bride serves her mystical bridegroom by listening to Him. The noise of the world, "worldes noise", represents both idle chatter and the distraction of providing for one's physical needs. As I described in the first chapter, anchoresses have servants who provide for them physical by cleaning, cooking, and collecting food. By rejecting the role of housewife, the mystical bride follows in the path of Mary.

Each of the women I discuss in this chapter reject from the role of "housewife" in order to listen to God. Margery does so most literally, she begins as a housewife and becomes a holy woman. St. Margaret is also torn from her physical duties within the text of her Life. She is taken by King Olibrius as she tends to sheep (Margaret, 89). Margaret has clear physical expectations placed upon her as a woman which she rejects in favor of martyrdom. Julian rejects the role of housewife in favor of a religious vocation.

The relationship between the mystical bride and Christ departs from the social norms of typical heterosexual relationships. Sarah Salih argues against the idea that the relationship between the virgin and Christ is a "reworking of desire for men" claiming instead that divine intimacy enables the virgin's autonomy.[57] The basic difference between human marriage and

[57] Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in late Medieval England*. (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001): 72 "Their indissoluble connection with Christ instead enables their autonomy. Nor is desire for Christ a substitute for or a reworking of desire for men"

divine marriage is that complete equality exists between the mystical bride and God. The relationship between the mystical bride and God disrupts traditional expectations of heterosexual marriages.

To escape the confines of the traditional marriage, the mystical bride must be expelled from communities in which heterosexual marriage is practiced. Disbelief and disgust directed at the mystical bride push her further from the society of other humans. The form of sexuality practiced by mystical wives produces intimacy unheard of between humans. Such intimacy values the pleasure of both partners rather than focusing on male pleasure. Invited to act as knights and do battle with demons, God dismisses the supposed weakness of womanhood and rewards female strength. Finally, the knowledge which God instills in His bride through bliss makes her His equal.

Boundaries placed upon women by patriarchy dissolve under divine scrutiny. 1 Corinthians 13:10 describes the destruction of partial understanding in the face of God's infallible knowing, "*cum autem venerit quod perfectum est evacuabitur quod ex parte est*" [But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away]. The form of marriage practiced by humanity in which the woman is subservient to the man is a falsehood before God. Between Christ and the mystical bride, marriage is "perfectum." Neither is better than the other and each is beloved for herself, not for the service she provides.

Chapter Three: The Pleasure of Passionate Obligation

About six by five inches, MS Cotton Titus D xviii would fit comfortably in small hands. *The Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, henceforth *The Wooing of Our Lord*, is singularly contained in MS Cotton Titus D xviii.[58] Beginning on 127r with a capital "I" which extends 18 lines down the margin, "The Wooing of Our Lord" is the second to last text in the manuscript. Titus D xviii is an exceedingly plain manuscript with some decoration in red and green. "The Wooing of Our Lord" is marked by a rubricated title, "her biginnes the yohuuge of ure lauer" in the top right corner of the page which could serve to make the text easier to find. It makes sense that the text would be bookmarked, as a meditative text it was intended to be read and re-read by anchoresses. Reading *The Wooing of Our Lord* is an action which creates intimacy with God.

The Wooing of Our Lord and *Ancrene Wisse* share a thematic fixation on mystical marriage as the epitome of intimacy between the anchoress and God. As well as *The Wooing of Our Lord*, Titus D xviii contains *Ancrene Wisse*, "Sawles Ward", "Hali Meidhad*"* and "Saint Katherine*"*. The first three texts are didactic prose pieces which describe the manner in which mystical marriage is practiced within the walls of the anchorage. "Saint Katherine" describes the mystical marriage perfected in the body of a Saint. Catherine Ines-Parker argues that *Ancrene Wisse* is such an important influence on *The Wooing of Our Lord* that "the text cannot be understood without reference to it."[59] *The Wooing of Our Lord* is written into the anchoretic traction begun by *Ancrene Wisse*. "Saint Katherine" and *The Wooing of Our Lord* emphasize the intimacy with God which the virgin archives. *The Wooing of Our Lord* is a text of the *Ancrene Wisse* group.

---

[58] MS Cotton Titus D XViii.
[59] Catherine Ines-Parker, *The Wooing of Our Lord and The Wooing Group Prayers.* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2015): 41

The Wooing of Our Lord describes the anchoress as "spouse" of Christ (ll. 429). Beginning in the thirteenth century this word is often used figuratively to refer to mystical marriage between a religious person and God.[60] "Spouse" does not specify whether the marriage is complete, or the couple is merely engaged. "Spouse" does not determine a gender which emphasizes that the marriage is between the genderless soul rather than the female body of the anchoress. The use of the word "spouse" describes the moment in which the relationship exists. Like the *Song of Songs*, *The Wooing of Our Lord* is interested exclusively in the lead up to the union between Christ and the anchoress rather than the consummation or the married life. By placing focus on wooing, the poem emphasizes that while on earth the virgin is Christ's bride rather than His wife. The difference between the bride and the wife is that the bride has not made her relationship with the bridegroom permanent. In the Middle Ages, this difference is extremely important in determining whether or not a relationship is one of love or of obligation. Andreus Capellanus, an author who recorded rules for courtly (that is extramarital) love in his guide *The Art of Courtly Love* (ca 1100). Capellanus claims "that marital affection and the true love of lovers are wholly different and arise from entirely different sources" and further argues that the "love of lovers" is far superior to the mere "affection" of married couples.[61] "Marital affection" arises from an obligation to care for one's spouse whereas "the true love of lovers" comes from the pleasure of the bond between lovers. Is the relationship between the anchoress and Christ an act of pleasure or of obligation?

The Wooing of Our Lord exists in a space between *Ancrene Wisse* and The Song of Songs. This space is the anchorage. As I explored in my first chapter, the anchorage is depicted

[60] "spouse, n." OED Online, (Oxford University Press, 2022)
[61] Andreas Capellanus. *The Art of Courtly Love*. trans John Jay Parry. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960): 171

by *Ancrene Wisse* as a tomb/womb in which the anchoress prepares herself for union with God—a union which takes place only after death. Similarly, The Song of Songs depicts the lead up to marriage without describing the moment itself. Sarah Salih argues that mystical marriage itself is unconsummated until the moment of death[62]. Mystical marriage is a constantly renewed love relationship not an obligation born of a marriage contract. *The Wooing of Our Lord* is thematically inspired by both texts, presenting a relationship with God aligned with that depicted in *Ancrene Wisse,* and the sensual wooing process as in The Song of Songs.

Mystical marriage is an active relationship which involves the constant renewal of love. *The Wooing of Our Lord* depicts a tension between pleasure and obligation. An initial consideration of the relationship depicted in *The Wooing of Our Lord* might reasonably suggest that it is entirely opposed to what Capellanus describes as "the true love of lovers" because the relationship between the anchoress and Christ is one of obligation. However, an examination focused more specifically on the pleasure which the anchoress feels as she meditates upon Christ reveals a meaningful resonance between mystical marriage and "the true love of lovers". As I show in what follows the tension between these two interpretations invite the reader to understand the anchoress' passion as a bridge between obligation and pleasure.

Obligation

By vow and enclosure, the anchoress is obliged to love Christ. At best this obligation is a labor of love, at worst it becomes acedia—a listless responsibility which sucks the pleasure out of life. In the Middle Ages, marriage is a responsibility for both the husband and the wife. Saint Augustine defines the good of marriage as "faith, offspring" and "sacrament".[63] For an anchoress

[62] "The marriage to Christ is consummated in the moment which also fixes and perfects the virgin body, that of death" Salih, Sarah. *Versions of Virginity in late Medieval England*. (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001): 70
[63] Sullivan, Karen. "On Marriage" 19

only two of these goods are applicable, faith and sacrament. Faith, Augustine explains, means that "after the marital bond, one is not to join with any other."[64] Identically, sacrament emphasizes "that the marriage be not severed, and that one dismissed is not to join with another."[65] Rather than producing love, faith and sacrament emphasize the responsibility that the husband and wife have for one another. Marriage is an agreement to devote oneself to another for life: it is an obligation. Accidia is a possible symptom of obligation which causes the obligated person to because listless and disinterested in her role. Anchoretic enclosure causes the anchoress to become obligated to Christ and fill her days with meditation on an absent husband.

Christ is a desirable suitor because He is the king of Heaven. The speaker asks if there is anyone higher, "swete ihesu up o hwat herre mon mai i mi luue sette? / Hwer mai i gentiller mon chese then the that art te kinges sune that tis world wealdes" [sweet Jesus, on what higher man may I set my love? / Where may I choose a nobler man than you, who are the son of the king who rules this world] (ll. 111-112). The anchoress chooses to "sette" her love on Christ. Love, then, is like virginity which is a gift that can be given. In a comparison with mortal men, Christ will always win. This line marks Jesus as the spouse of the anchoress rather than wedding her to the entire trinity. Of the trinity, Christ is the most suitable spouse because He is gendered (unlike the Holy Ghost) and manifests on earth as a human. Unlike the other aspects of God, Christ is fully human and fully God. Choosing Christ out of the trinity displays the speaker's intention to humanize God. Aligning Christ with a mere man makes her relationship more accessible to a mere woman. The author modernizes Christ by comparing Him to other "gentiller mon" [noblemen] in order to make His love relevant to her experience. Placing emphasis on Christ's superiority to other men, the speaker suggests that a woman is obligated to choose as her lover

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

the man who can give her the most. This obligation is certainly true for the medieval woman who seeks to marry a human man. Through marriage, a medieval woman ties herself to a man who will provide for her and her children for his entire life. Medieval marriage is a contract of mutual obligation not one of love[66]. The speaker in this poem aligns marriage to Christ with the contemporary understanding of marital obligation.

The anchoress reciting *The Wooing of Our Lord* locates God within a marriage fantasy which enumerates His knightly qualities and merely implies His divinity. For the first 182 lines of *The Wooing of Our Lord*, the speaker summarizes the greatness of Christ in comparison to a human suitor. She praises Christ's, "fairnesse", "richesce", "largesce", "wisdom", "strength", "nobesce ant hendelieic", "meknesse ant mildeschipe ant mikel debonairte" (ll. 173-182). Each of these are noble virtues which apply across gender. The application of these noble traits to God draws Christ down from heaven and shapes Him into a form which can be understood as flesh. His perfection is explained in fleshly, human, terms. But isn't Christ's superiority in comparison with humans is a given? — He is God. These traits are enumerated as the price which Christ pays to love the anchoress. At the conclusion of this list, the anchoress is bound to God because He has purchased her love, "thu with alle the thinges that man mai luue with bugge / hause mi luue chepet" [you with all the things with which a man may buy love, / have purchased my love] (ll. 181-182). This language of purchasing love obliges the bride to the bridegroom. The word "bugge" means both to buy and to redeem. In these lines, "bugge" implies Christ's salvation of the anchoress through His sacrifice on the Cross. Christ purchases the anchoress' love and makes her His bride, obliging her to serve Him.

---

[66] "There was no room for the ideal of love, for the friction of faithfulness and sacrifice, in the very material considerations that enter into a marriage, above all an aristocratic marriage" Huizinga, Johan. *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*. trans Rodney J Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch. (University of Chicago Press, 1996): 150.

Payment associated with marriage is not unusual in the Middle Ages. A nuptial payment ensures that the wife has a safety net were something to happen to her husband. A nuptial payment emphasizes the value placed upon the wife. Wife is an unpaid job, and the nuptial payment is a form of payment for wifely work. In one Medieval dowry contract the husband explains, "it is right for her [the wife] to enjoy nuptial payments, who will sustain the burden of generation in the sufferings of childbirth."[67] The anchoress does not produce children for Christ but her marriage to God is still productive based on her capacity for devotion. Devotion is a form of obligation which must be performed with great emotion. Thus, devotion is a choice while obligation is a necessity.

Marriage, Saint Paul explains is "by permission, and not commandment", by which He means that Christians are obligated to remain chaste, not to marry[68]. Chastity describes the capacity to remain pure from unvirtuous sexual intercourse—that is sex which is out of wedlock or not for the purpose of procreation. Marriage is a way of remaining chaste by channeling sex into a single relationship. Chastity can be a result of marriage, but it can also be an act of will. For this reason, Saint Paul observes, "to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I", that is without marriage.[69] The anchoress' obligation to remain chaste is stressed in *The Wooing of Our Lord*, "is riht that i luue the, / ant league alle other for the. / For muchel thu hayes ti milce toward me scheawed" [it is right that I love you, / and leave all others for you, / for greatly have you shown your mercy towards me] (ll. 140-142). Marriage to God is "riht" in two ways. For one, it is a rite of the church which the anchoress observes. It is also righteous to remain chaste through marriage to God. The second line defines the monogamous

[67] Aurea Gemma
[68] 1 COR 7:6
[69] 1 COR 7:8

nature of the relationship between Christ and the anchoress who rejects all other lovers for God. Monogamy is a virtue of chastity and an effect of the anchoress' obligation to Christ. Finally, the anchoress refers to the greatest reason for her obligation to Christ—his salvation of humanity. Reference to Christ's "milce" allude to His sacrifice on the cross. Christ's death is one of the greatest reasons the anchoress is obliged to love Him, He has saved her from Hell. Marriage to God is a fulfillment of chastity and the most devout are obligated to remain virginal.

The monogamous nature of the mystical marriage is presented as an obligation. The anchoress' relationship with Christ bars her from the love of any other man, "Ne thole me neauer mi luue nowhere to sette o karlische things, / ne eorthli thing ne fleschli ayaines to yerne" [never allow me to set my love on ignoble things, / or yearn for worldly things rather than you] (ll. 127-128). This line displays the detachment from earthly experience required by mystical marriage. The anchoress' monogamy to God includes her external actions and her internal desires. The word "yerne" places the focus on her internal desires rather than external actions. Even though the word "sette" implies a physical placement of love, it speaks not of physical intimacy but of the placement of desire on a person. This is likely because the anchoress is enclosed and does not have intimate contact with anyone besides her maids, Christ, and religious people who visit her. Therefore, she has little opportunity to betray her relationship with Christ through action. The anchoress must not betray Christ by desiring another. She must control her internal desires which are the primary way in which she can betray God. Mystical marriage takes place within the anchoress which means that her obligation to God extends into her thoughts.

Chastity, which i is framed as an obligation in *The Wooing of Our Lord*, is presented in *The Art of Courtly Love* as an innate quality of love. Andreas Capellanus claims that Love "adorns a man, so to speak, with the virtue of chastity, because he who shines with the light of

one love can hardly think of embracing another woman".[70] Capellanus suggests that monogamy extends into the mind causing the lover to "hardly think" of infidelity. In this framework, if a person were to think about cheating, they would be cheating. The framing of chastity by lines 127-128 of *The Wooing of Our Lord* imply that the maintenance of a fidelity is a hard obligation. Framed by Capellanus it is merely an effect of love. These two ways of thinking about chastity come from different moments in a relationship. Capellanus associates ease with chastity because he is describing the early stages of love rather than post-marital devotion. The anchoress is called the bride of Christ which implies that she is at an early stage in her relationship with God. Mystical marriage, however, is a lifelong endeavor which produces lasting obligation. The speaker in *The Wooing of Our Lord* prays for support to maintain her chastity over a long period of time. An obligation is maintained through constant renewal.

The greatest obligation to love Christ is His sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice is mentioned in nearly all of the quotes I have chosen to define obligation. Thus, the importance of the crucifixion in the relationship between the anchoress and Christ is obvious. The speaker dismisses all reasons for loving Christ besides His sacrifice, "Ah ouer alle other things makes te luuwurthi to me tha harde atele hurtes" [But over all other things, those hard, cruel hurts make you worthy of my love] (ll. 183). The consonance of "harde atele hurtes" create the feeling of plodding along through suffering. The rest of the sentence flows without many hard consonants. In the final three words the hard consonant sounds from the "d" in "harde" and the "t"s in "atele" and "hurtes" press down on the reader like the heavy cross Jesus carried on His back. The phrasing of "luuwurthi to me" emphasizes the personal nature of the relationship between Christ and the anchoress. Jesus is not merely "luuwurthi" to anyone, He is worthy of devotion

[70]Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love,* trans. John Jay Parry. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990): 31

specifically from the speaker of the poem. This suggests the high standing of the reader herself which requires that her spouse be of equal or higher merit than herself. The anchoress' virginity is a merit which makes her a well-suited bride. The anchoress devotes herself to Christ out of an obligation to Him based on His sacrifice as a well as an obligation to herself to love the One who can do her the most good.

Pleasure

Pleasure is a feeling of gratification produced by performing a task or experiencing a sensation which is enjoyable. Like obligation, pleasure can be brought on by external and internal stimuli. For the most part, pleasure is the opposite of obligation. Obligation is produced by an outside force which acts upon a person in order to impact their actions. Pleasure is an internal force which impacts a person's actions. Pleasure is a gift; obligation is a necessity. In the same way in which accidia causes a person to become lethargic, pleasure can inspire dedication and renewed energy.

Pleasure is associated with sexual intimacy. The word for pleasure used in *The Wooing of Our Lord* is "likinge" (ll. 143). "Likinge" broadly denotes pleasures. More specifically "Likinge" refers to physical or sexual pleasure[71]. In *The Wooing of Our Lord* the anchoress experiences sexual pleasure from meditating upon Christ's beauty. The anchoress' pleasure and obligation are both rooted in her mystical marriage. The anchoress is obligated to Christ by her vows and His sacrifice, yet she finds pleasure in Christ's love.

The speaker in *The Wooing of Our Lord* makes clear that mystical marriage through anchoretic enclosure is, or should be, a pleasure. The line "Ah ihesu swete ihesu leue that te luue of the beo al mi likinge" [Ah, Jesus, sweet Jesus, grant that the love of you be all my pleasure]

[71] "Liking and Likinge," *Middle English Compendium Dictionary*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2019)

(ll. 143) is repeated 11 times throughout the poem. By this line, the author emphasizes the anchoress' intention to seek pleasure in her obligation to Christ. Through the word "likinge", the speaker implies sexual desire. The use of "likinge" to describe the non-physical relationship between Christ and the anchoress displays the medieval impulse for comparison.[72] The association between pleasure and sexual pleasure is analogous to the association between mystical and literal marriage. Pleasure experienced through sexual intercourse is a vice while pleasure experienced through spiritual intercourse with God is a virtue. "Likinge" which connotes both kinds of pleasure inherently compare sexual pleasure with spiritual pleasure. By granting that His love "beo al" the anchoress' pleasure, Christ reinforces the anchoress' chastity. Spiritual pleasure is not only like sexual pleasure, it is superior.

Pleasure is the primary object for which the anchoress prays in *The Wooing of Our Lord*. The line "leue that te luue of the beo al mi likinge" is the refrain of the poem. For the first seven repetitions, the line is refrained in its entirety. On the 8th repetition, the scribe writes only "Ah ihesu swete te ihesu leue that te etc." [Jesus, sweet Jesus, grant that your etc.] (ll. 172). "Etc." implies "te luue of the beo al mi liking" for the 9th and 10th repetitions as well. The simplification of the refrain displays the scribe's expectation that the anchoress memorizes this section. The expectation of memorization shows that the scribe expects that the anchoress will find this line illuminating. Through the repetition of this line the anchoress who recites this poem seeks pleasure in her quasi-sexual relationship with Christ.

Through her isolation, the anchoress gains intimacy with Christ which she describes as delightful. By reading and by meditation the anchoress lives in Christ's life

[72] Huizinga describes a medieval "need to worship the inexpressible through visible signs" to which I refer here. Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. U Mannitzch & R Payton. (University of Chicago Press, 1996): 234

> Broht tu haues me fra the world to bur of thi burthe
>
> steked me i chaumbre
>
> I mai ther the swa sweteli kissen and cluppen,
>
> and of thi luue haue astli likinge
>
> [You have brought me from the world to the bower of your birth, enclosed me in a chamber. There I may so sweetly kiss you and embrace you and of your love have spiritual delight] (ll. 385-388)

In the last two lines, the speaker describes physical closeness to Christ. Again, she uses the word "likinge" which implies the sexual nature of her intimacy with God. The anchorage is the space in which the anchoress can enjoy intimacy with Christ while on earth. Within the anchorage the anchoress stages interactions with Christ. The anchoress is able to "cluppen" Christ only in the anchorage. Describing the anchorage as "bur of thi burth", the anchoress uses her space to recreate moments in Christ's life. The anchorage is a blank slate on which the anchoress can draw scenes Christ's life in order to study His experience. In these three lines the speaker presents three versions of Christ: Christ the infant, Christ crucified, and Christ the soul's spouse. Christ crucified exists in the word "steked" which describes Christ's affixion to the cross. Within the anchorage, the anchoress is metaphorically bound to the cross. Placed in close proximity with a description of the anchoress "sweteli kissen and cluppen" Christ, crucifixion is associated with pleasure rather than pain. The anchorage is a place where the anchoress can curate her experience of Christ and enjoy the pleasure of intimacy with Him.

Meditative practice is a pleasure for the anchoress. *The Wooing of Our Lord* is a meditation on God as a lover. The anchoress likens herself to the angels who spend eternity in God's brilliant presence, "Al engles lif is ti neb to bihalden / for thi leor is swa unimete lufsum

ant lusti on to loken:" [all the life of the angels is to behold your countenance / for your face is so immeasurably lovely and delectable to look upon] (ll. 34-35). Christ's appearance reflects His inner aspect. The beauty of Christ's face is a metaphor for His immeasurably virtuous deeds. "L" words proliferate the second line creating alliteration which emphasizes the anchoress' love. The anchoress seeks to look upon Christ's "leor", His cheek. She describes His face as "lufsom" which refers to womanly beauty. The word choice is feminine which displaces Christ's maleness in favor of His genderless beauty. "Lusti" describes sexual temptation which Christ inspires within the anchoress. The final word in these lines, "loken" describes the eyes becoming locked on an image. By locking her eyes on Christ, the anchoress displays singular desire for Him. These lines do not provide an exact description of God. Instead of trying to capture God's appearance, the speaker describes the experience of looking at God. Through the repetition of this poem, each anchoress reading the text develops her own image of God on which to gaze.

Pain transforms into pleasure through God's grace. The speaker goes on from imagining the angels to visualize suffering souls in hell brought pleasure by the sight of God's face, "that if the forwariede that wallen in helle mihten hit echeliche soon; / al that pinende pik / ne that walde han thunche bote a softe bekinde bath" [that if the damned who boil in hell might see it eternally / all that torturing pitch / would seem to them but a gentle, warm bath" (ll. 36-38). The metaphor of sinners in hell relates to the anchoress' containment within the anchorage. Like the boiling evil souls, the anchoress faces isolation in order to view Christ. Looking at Christ's face implies studying the gospels. Bible study allows a reader to understand God. Studying Christ's life makes even the worst situation pleasurable.

The Wooing of Our Lord approaches Christ as a lover. Symbolic language compares Christ to earthly delights. In the first lines of the poem, the speaker voices her desire for Christ

by listing what He is to her, “Mi huniter, / mi haliwei. / Swetter is munegunge of the then mildew o muthe” [my honey drop / my healing balm. / Sweeter is the memory of you than nectar in the mouth] (ll. 6-8). These lines inspire a fluidity of experience within the reader by using the physical to imply the spiritual. Allusions to honey describe the sweetness of Christ’s love. Honey is food and displays God’s capacity to provide nourishment for His people. With descriptions of honey and nectar the speaker evokes pleasurable physical sensations. These physical sensations arouse emotional pleasure in the reader’s mind. Referring to Christ as “mi haliwei” implies His sacrifice on the cross. The greatest act of healing Christ performed is His salvation of humanity. The anchoress requires healing balm for her soul rather than her body. The speaker highlights Christ’s generosity. In doing so, the speaker implies God’s grace. Grace is God’s capacity to give blessings to the undeserving. Grace is a pleasure which enlightens the recipient and fills them with goodness. God’s graceful generosity appears to the anchoress as blissful pleasure.

Mystical marriage is described in *The Wooing of Our Lord* as both an immanent and transcendent pleasure. Why then, does it also appear as an obligation?

Passion

Between obligation and pleasure is passion. Passion is the fire which ignites the anchoress’ heart and allows her to lead a devotional life without becoming disenchanted by her obligation. Passion is first used to describe intense emotion in another text of the *Wooing Group* entitled “Lofsong Louerde” [The Love song of our Lord].[73] Before this use, passion referred almost exclusively to Christ’s martyrdom. Christ’s Passion refers to the period of time in Christ’s life beginning with His trial before Pilate and concluding with His death on the cross. Christ is not obligated to give himself for humankind. His Passion is a moment of magnanimity in which

[73] "passion, n." OED Online, (Oxford University Press, 2022)

He generously gives that which humanity neither deserves nor asked for. The anchoress works to love Christ with the same passion with which He died for humanity. *The Wooing of Our Lord* creates passion in its anchoretic audience by describing the anchoress' obligation to love Christ within the context of the pleasure which comes from service to Him.

The anchoress gives her body to Christ in recognition of His Passion. Because her body is of less value than Christ's her gift is an act of charity, "Ah me bihoueth that tu beo earth to paie. /A wrecche bodi and a wac bere ich ouer eorthe / and tat switch as hit is haue yiven and yive wle to thi seruise" [But for my sake you are easy to pay / a wretched and weak body I bear on earth / and that, such as it is I have given and will give to your service] (ll. 395-397). There is a tension between "paie" and "yive." "Paie" suggests a debt while "yive" describes a charitable act. By describing her body as "wrecche" and "wac" the anchoress claims that her body is unequal payment for the redemption she receives from Christ. The inequality of her sacrifice when compared to Christ's causes the anchoress' gift to transform from a payment into Charity. She gives her body "switch as hit is" in spite of the fact that nothing she can give will equal the crucifixion. The anchoress has "yiven and yive wle" to display that her charity exists outside of time. On earth she dedicates herself to Christ the moment she joins a convent or enters an anchorage. She will give herself to Him again upon her death. The nature of her gift is aligned with Saint Paul's conception of charity, "*et si distribuero in cibos pauperum omnes facultates meas et si tradidero corpus meum ut ardeam caritatem autem non habuero nihil mihi prodest*" [And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing] (1 Corinthians 13:3). For Paul, the goodness of an act is rooted in the emotion behind it. "Caritatem" means both charity and love. A good act

is only valuable if it is done with love. The anchoress gives herself to God because of her passionate love for Him.

Passion distinguishes marital affection from the love of lovers. The anchoress acts out of passionate love rather than simple affection. Andreas Capellanus describes passionate love as "a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive mediation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace".[74] By "suffering" Capellanus describes intense longing. This longing is synonymous with passion. The passion of the anchoress inspires her longing to "embrace" Christ. In order to do so, the anchoress must climb with Him onto the cross. She does so by entering the anchorage. The anchoresses suffering is equivalent to the amorous desires of the lovers Capellanus praises.

In giving her own body, the anchoress attempts to recreate Christ's Passion within herself. In this way, she achieves the amorous intimacy Capellanus associates with sex between lovers. Meditating on God's torture, the anchoress imagines herself as Christ crucified,

> Mi bodi henge with thi bodi neiled o rode
> spurred querfaste with inne fowr wahes
> and henge i wile with the
> and neauer mare of mi rode cume til that i deie
> [My body hangs with your body, nailed on the cross enclosed securely within four walls, and I will hang with you and never more come down from my cross until I die] (ll. 398-401)

[74] Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960): 28

The anchoress' cross is her anchorage. "Henge I wile with the" displays the anchoress' intention to become near Christ by imitating His life. In order to draw the spirit of Christ into the anchorage, the anchoress becomes Him. Planning to hang in torture until the day "that I deie," the length of the anchoress' crucifixion far surpasses the time Christ spent on His cross. The anchoress extends His Passion by recreating it within her cell. In doing so she creates emotional passion for her religious vocation.

Passion distinguishes the anchoress' marriage from traditional marriage in which a couple is bound by mutual obligation. The anchoress is not truly a wife because her marriage remains incomplete until the moment of her death. Sarah Salih argues that the love between a virgin and God reflects the Song of Songs because it is "a desire spoken in a female voice for the absent lover, a desire which is eternal yearning, forever on the verge of fulfilment" (Salih, 66-7). Whatever the anchoress attempts through meditation will not be fulfilled until her ascension to Heaven. Love always "verge of fulfilment" but yet unconsummated is what causes the fire of passion in a secular relationship between lovers.

The anchoress seeks earthly suffering in order to mourn the suffering Christ experienced on earth. Mary mother of God witnessed His crucifixion and mourned Him immediately after His death. The anchoress turns to Mary for guidance on how to properly mourn the loss of Christ, "Bote lafdi for the Ioie that tu hefdes of His ariste the thridde dai ther after: / leue me understonde thi dol and herteli to felen sum hwat of the sorhe that tu tha hefdes and helpe the to wepe," [But lady, for the joy that you had in His arising on the third day thereafter, / grant that I may understand your grief and feel in my heart something of your sorrow and help you to weep] (ll. 378-379). The speaker makes a one-to-one comparison between grief and joy. This implies that the passion of grief is aligned with the passion of joy. The anchoress must experience one

passion in order to experience the other. The anchoress prays to “understonde” and remember the sorrow of Christ’s passion so that she can experience the “ioie” [joy] of His rising when she ascends to Heaven. Passion is the bridge which connects painful obligation to pleasurable choice.

In conclusion, the obligation to love God requires that the anchoress must be passionate in her devotion. This passion produces pleasure. The passion the anchoress experiences prevents her from feeling frustration or lethargy due to her obligation to love Christ. The relationship between the anchoress and God is a closed chain. The love which the anchoress gives to God is returned to her. In the mystical marriage no love is lost, instead it constantly circles from the anchoress to God and back to the anchoress. Passion is always restored because the obligation to love God is a choice made freely. Love between the anchoress and God is freely given and freely received.

Conclusion

It is through devotion that anything lasting is created. I began to associate love and devotion as a very small child. Deuteronomy 6:5 commands the Israelites "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength." As I child I repeated this verse in Hebrew nightly before bed. The love which the Israelites must feel for God comes across in this line as a form of hard labor. In order to love God, the Israelites must engage every gift which they have received from God—their capacity for love (heart), their inner self (soul), and their physical body (strength). By loving God, the Israelite redirects the energy which God used to create her back towards God. Like water, love is in a constant cycle of being pulled up to Heaven and rained down upon humanity.

In order to feel passionate love for God, the anchoress devotes herself to worship of Him. She enacts love in response to the commandment "you shall love the Lord your God." Margery Kempe, Saint Margaret and Julian of Norwich's stories are examples of God's love resting on a woman. Instead of hording God's love, these women choose to share God's love with humanity. Margery loves God through travel which allows her to share her visions with many people across the world. Saint Margaret faces martyrdom in order to convert others. The conversion which she inspires causes more people to feel God's love. Julian of Norwich is shown visions of complete love which display God's love for her. She returns God's love by sharing these visions with the world through writing. Women who participate in mystical marriage embed themselves within the love cycle which connects God and humanity.

The anchoress' devotion is centralized around literature which guides and inspires her. The *Ancrene Wisse Group* is the anchoress' constant companion within the anchorage. Even when God Himself is absent, the anchoress possesses the literature which will draw Him into her

space. *Ancrene Wisse* teaches the anchoress how to enact love for God by simplifying what is a lifelong undertaking into manageable rules for daily life. The meditative practice displayed in *The Wooing of Our Lord* calls the anchoress to simultaneously examine Christ as an accessible lover and the untouchable divine. Reading and prayer are simple yet transcendent acts of devotion. The *Ancrene Wisse Group* teaches that simple tasks performed consistently inspire transcendence.

The form of devotional love which causes the cycle of love between God and humanity is most aligned with *caritas*. *Caritas* is a form of love which can be broadly directed at a community. *Caritas* is unlike *amor* which is based on a fleeting feeling which must constantly be recaptured. Instead, *caritas* is created through actions which cause a person to feel more deeply connected to their own community. *Caritas* is the love which inspires a person to bring a casserole to a fellow religious congregant after a death. There is no expectation of return embedded within *caritas*, this love is performed because it is pleasurable to do good to those around you.

The anchoress loves God singularly but the form of devoted love she practices can be implemented on a large scale in order to produce a more generous and sympathetic society. Love which the anchoress produces for God fills her with bliss. The notion of *caritas* reminds us that by loving others, we experience love. The anchoress daily devotes herself to God through prayer and experiences love. As modern people we can daily devote ourselves to humanity by loving other humans.

As a society, we have abandoned *caritas*. *Caritas* is diametrically opposed to capitalism. Capitalism tells us that we must horde wealth and fear those who come to take what we have. Under capitalism each person works exclusively for their own benefit rather than for the benefit

of the community. The capitalist mindset has infected our hearts and makes us see all situations in terms of personal loss and personal gain. The relationships which we build with others are diseased in this way. We choose to distance ourselves from friends who cannot benefit us socially. We ostracize people who disagree rather than attempting to understand them because we fear that we will be ostracized as well. Our relationships are based on personal gain rather than devotional love.

We have abandoned *caritas* because we do not believe that when we give our love away it will come back. This is because we have been taught that love is a spontaneously generated emotion which appears out of nothing. This is a fantasy. Love comes from the work of caring for another person by working to understand them and their needs. We have also been taught that the love of lovers (*amor*) is superior to the love of community. This is a falsehood. Love of the community and the love of lovers are equally powerful. In order to destroy these false fantasies, we must relearn the art of *caritas*.

In Matthew 22:37 Christ repeats Deuteronomy 6:5 to the Pharisees. He goes on to say, "The second is like this: you shall love your neighbor in the same way you love yourself. / These commandments are the whole of the law."[75] By these lines Christ likens love of one's neighbor to love of God. By loving one's neighbors a person learns to love indiscriminately. Everything created by God is awesome. The neighbor who Christ commands Christians to love is anonymous. Christ teaches that all humanity is deserving of love because humanity is a divine creation. Christ teaches a form of love which is endlessly generous.

By practicing love of neighbors and of strangers, we continue the cycle of love. Our responsibility as humans is to love one another indiscriminately. Generous love has no

[75] MT 22:39-40.

drawbacks, it is entirely beneficial. We must devote ourselves to loving one another with the healing love of *caritas*.

Bibliography

Manuscripts

MS Cotton Titus D XVIII. British Library.

MS Cotton Nero A XIV. British Library.

Primary Sources

Ambrose. "Concerning Virginity (Book 1)" *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series.* trans. de Romestin, H; de Romestin, E; Duckworth, HTF. ed. Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry. Vol. 10. Buffalo NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1896.

Ancrene Wisse. ed. Robert Hasenfratz. Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000.

Ancrene Wisse. trans. Millett Bella. University of Exeter Press, 2009.

Andreas Capellanus. *The Art of Courtly Love.* trans. John Jay Parry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.

Augustine. "Of Holy Virginity." *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*. Trans Cornish, CL. Ed Schaff Philip. Vol 3. Buffalo NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1887.

Gerson, Jean. "On Distinguishing True from False Revelations." *Jean Gerson: Early Works.* Trans Brian Patrick McGuire. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998.

Ines-Parker, Catherine. *The Wooing of Our Lord and The Wooing Group Prayers*. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 2015.

Jacobus de Voragine. "Introduction." *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints.* trans. William Granger Ryan. Volume 1. Princeton University Press, 1993.

Jerome. “Letter 22” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*. trans. Fremantle, WH; Lewis, G; Martley, WG. ed. Schaff, Philip; Wace, Henry. Vol. 6. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1893.

Julian of Norwich. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love.* ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jennings. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.

Tertullian. “On the Apparel of Women” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. trans. Thelwall, Sydney. ed. Roberts Alexander; Donaldson, James; Coxe, A Cleveland, vol. 4. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885.

Tertullian. “On the Veiling of Virgins.” *Ante-Nicene Fathers.* trans. Thelwall, Sydney. ed. Roberts Alexander; Donaldson, James; Coxe, A Cleveland, vol. 4. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885.

The Book of Margery Kempe. ed. Anthony Bale. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015.

The Book of Margery Kempe. ed. Lynn Staley. Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications: 1996.

The Katherine Group: MS Bodley 34: Religious Writings for Women in Medieval England. ed. Emily Rebekah Huber and Elizabeth Robertson. Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University. 2016

Secondary Sources

Bledsoe, Jenny C. “Materiality, Documentary Authority, and the Circulation of the Katherine Group.” *Early Middle English*. Vol 1.3. Yorkshire: Arc Humanities Press, 2021: 33-50

Innes-Parker, Catherine. “Reading and Devotional Practice: The Wooing Group Prayers of British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. xiv,” *Anchoritism in the Middle Ages: Texts and Traditions.* ed. Innes-Parker and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa. University of Wales Press, 2013.

Elliot, Dyan. *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell.* University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

Huizinga, Johan. *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*. trans. Rodney J Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch. University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Lewis and Short. *A Latin Dictionary*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1879.

Middle English Compendium Dictionary. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan: 2019. Web.

OED Online. Oxford University Press, 2022. Web.

Pace, Edward. "Beatific Vision." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2. Buffalo, NY: Robert Appleton Company, 1907.

Salih, Sarah. *Versions of Virginity in late Medieval England.* Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2001.

Sullivan, Karen. “Truth and Imagination: From Romance to Children’s Fantasy.” *The Danger of Romance*. University of Chicago Press, 2022.

Walker-Bynum, Carolyn. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Walker-Bynum, Carolyn. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Winstead, Karen A. *The Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.