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Dungeons and Dragons: Enclosure, Femininity, and Maternity in *Seinte Margarete* and *A Revelation of Love*

Julian of Norwich's theological text *A Revelation of Love* has been extensively studied within the context of the mystical tradition. While her text is essential to the literary history of medieval mysticism, considering *A Revelation of Love* in the context of other medieval religious texts can illuminate connections across genre and time that show continuities in the cultural conception of two key elements of Julian's text: the space of the cell or the concept of enclosure and women's religious power. MS Bodley 34, referred to in this paper as The Katherine Group, is a collection of religious literature composed and curated for a medieval female religious audience. It features three anonymously authored virgin martyr hagiographies of which we will consider one: *Seinte Margarete*. While the texts differ in genre, they are both in conversation with medieval ideas about the nature and purpose of imprisonment or enclosure and the role of women in religious life and theology. St. Margaret of Antioch's cultural presence in late medieval England and the Katherine Group manuscript version of her passion illuminate the saint's ties to imprisonment, enclosure, and maternity in the medieval imagination. The presence of these themes and popularity of her cult makes *Seinte Margarete* a productive text to consider along *A Revelation of Love*. Placing Julian's theological text within the context of popular martyrological narratives brings forth points of continuity that speak to cultural conceptions both inside and outside the anchor-hold.

Representations of Femininity and Enclosure in *Seinte Margarete*

The Katherine Group's *Seinte Margarete* appears in a collection featuring two other virgin martyr hagiographies, that of St. Katherine of Alexandria and St. Juliana. The texts were intended for a female religious audience who may have been living in communal or solitary enclosure, like nuns or anchoresses. Hagiography was a popular genre during the medieval period and usually intended to provide both entertainment and education. One of the most popular hagiographical collections of the period is Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* or *The Golden Legend*. This collection's section on St. Margaret remarks on her connection to the pearl and exalts her virginity.<sup>1</sup> It positions Margaret as an example of the meek and virtuous virgin first and foremost. Characterizing Margaret as a meek maiden may also explain de Voragine's skepticism towards Margaret's defeat of a dragon in her prison cell. This skepticism over the most iconic moment of Margaret's hagiography is an expression of the anxiety felt by some male authors when writing narratives of powerful women capable of humiliating male authority figures. Katherine Lewis's research into St. Margaret's presence in late medieval England gets at the root of this anxiety by highlighting virgin martyr narratives' willingness to show women in active resistance to male authority and their popularity among women.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, "these narratives were popular with female readership because suffering was in some respects often represented as the definitive experience not just of virgin-martyrs but of all women."<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints. Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275

<sup>2</sup> Katherine J. Lewis, "'Lete me suffre': Reading the Torture of St Margaret of Antioch in Late Medieval England" pp. 69-82 in *Medieval Women : Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain : Essays for Felicity Riddy*. Edited by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts / Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Hull, 3. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000. pp. 73

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, pp. 81

martyrological trope of imbuing violent suffering with deep religious meaning and power is extremely prevalent in *Seinte Margarete* and may be one of the reasons her legend was so popular in late medieval England.

Margaret's passion begins with a declaration that all women, not only virgins, take care to hear her story: "Listen, all those who have ears to hear, widows with the married, and maidens above all should attend most earnestly to how they should love the living Lord, and live in virginity, the virtue dearest to him."<sup>4</sup> The text makes a point to include all women rather than exclusively address virgins. This declarative opening speaks to a larger pattern in Margaret's behavior throughout the *vita*: turning her suffering into a powerful event of religious conversion. Overall, Margaret shows a desire for her death to have a positive effect on Christians everywhere. She tells her torturers, "I will submit my body to every kind of suffering that you can contrive, however hard it may be to bear and endure, as long as I may have the reward that virgins receive in Heaven."<sup>5</sup> In this statement we can see Margaret exercising her autonomy by praying vocally and willing submitting to her torture. She sees herself as an example who has been chosen. She wants to display her devotion not only to God but to the crowd of non-believers.

Margaret utilizes her own suffering to prove the power of the one true God. In order for Margaret's passion to be an effective communication of God's power it must be public, and it must be remarkable enough to inspire sympathy and conversion. When Margaret is about to be tortured in scorching water, she makes this prayer:

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<sup>4</sup> *Seinte Margarete*. Millet, Bella and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. pp. 45

<sup>5</sup> *Seinte Margarete*, p. 53

‘May this water become pleasant and mild to me, and grant that it may be for me a bath of bliss and baptism from the font, sanctification and light of eternal salvation. May the Holy Ghost come in the form of a dove to bless these waters in your blessed name. Secure my soul with baptism to yourself, and with the same waters wash me within, and cast out of me every kind of sin, so your bright bridal chamber may welcome me in. Here I receive baptism in the dear Lord’s name, and in his precious Son’s, and in the Holy Ghost’s; one God in goodness, enclosed and undivided.’<sup>6</sup>

Margaret makes the remarkable choice to turn her torture into her baptism. It speaks to the religious authority and power that Margaret has gained throughout the narrative that she has the ability to perform her own baptism. Her prayers are answered in real time and in public rather than within the enclosed space of the cell. The torture that Margaret evades is no longer a step on her journey of spiritual knowledge and power, it is the final the performance of divine power and meant to serve as a metaphorical baptism of the converted audience members. After Margaret speaks the earth trembles, “And a dove came bearing a golden crown, as bright as if it burned, and settled on that blessed maiden’s head. At this her bonds were broken and shattered; and she, as bright as the shining sun, came out of the water singing a song of praise.”<sup>7</sup> The physical show of God’s presence and power is the dove. It is a small and beautiful winged creature that stands in contrast with the fearsome dragon. Margaret, small and virtuous, triumphed over the dragon and the dove, small and white, has the power to break Margaret’s chains and save her from torture. Margaret’s crowning at the conclusion of her passion is an inversion of Christ’s crowning with thorns just as her baptism is an inversion of her torture. Margaret’s legend is one that centers around the power of choosing faith. Her martyrdom is an effective force of this conversion: “At the time this happened five thousand men were converted to our Lord, and this not counting women and children; and all of them were, as the governor commanded, beheaded

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<sup>6</sup> *Seinte Margarete*, pp. 77

<sup>7</sup> *Seinte Margarete* pp. 77

at once in Christ's royal name...and all ascended as martyrs joyfully to heaven."<sup>8</sup> Margaret's death, and the death of all the converts, are portrayed as a reward. In a setting of Christian persecution martyrdom is noble and victorious. Since the start of her torture Margaret has known that she must maintain her faith or die and she chose death. In her own words, "God died for us, the beloved Lord, and I am not afraid to suffer any kind of death for his sake. He has set his mark on me, sealed with his seal; and neither life nor death can divide us again."<sup>9</sup> Death is seen as a process of becoming one with God, a sweeter fate than remaining in persecution on earth.

Within her prison cell, Margaret is portrayed as powerful despite her smallness and isolation. Margaret's littleness stands in contrast to the great physical size of her foe, the dragon. Within the cell Margaret is able to transform into someone who is both little and powerful through the will of God. Her prayers are an essential part of the intercession she receives but the image of the cross is the ultimate symbol of her ability to transform her bodily incarceration into spiritual liberation. The origins of Margaret's legend belong to a Christian literary tradition of martyrological narratives set in and around Roman jails. Guy Geltner's survey of these narratives culminates in an identification of the "prison as a place of personal trial and eschatological triumph, and incarceration as a process of spiritual growth potentially culminating in revelation."<sup>10</sup> Margaret's imprisonment is then the beginning of her personal process of spiritual ascension. Upon entering her cell Margaret uses her physical agency to declaratively show the strength of her faith in the face of incarceration:

"And so she was taken...down to the darkest and worst of the dungeons; and she raised up her hand and blessed her whole body with the sign of the holy cross. As she was

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<sup>8</sup> *Seinte Margarete*, pp. 77

<sup>9</sup> *Seinte Margarete*, pp. 53

<sup>10</sup> Guy Geltner, "The Prison as Place and Metaphor" in *The Medieval Prison: A Social History*. Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 83-4

dragged in, she began to say this prayer to our Lord: ‘My own natural father rejected me and drove me away, his only daughter, and my friends are my enemies and hostile towards me because of your love, Lord; but I see you, Saviour, as both father and friend.’<sup>11</sup>

Margaret achieves her own spiritual transformation in making the sign of the cross. She is seeking comfort in reaffirming her faith, but she is also attempting to channel power into her prayer. The prayer is an expression of the loneliness and vulnerability she has faced due to her faith. It mirrors Margaret’s physical isolation. She plays with inversion, saying her friends are now her enemies. This shows her recognition of the inversion inherent to the holy locus of the prison and foreshadows her battle with the dragon where a little woman will overcome a powerful foe. Margaret states that the source of the hostility she is facing is due to God’s love. This is not done to blame God but to illuminate the reality of his presence and love as well as her duty to recognize and honor that love. Connecting her persecution to God’s love makes his love responsible for her imprisonment as well as her victory and power within the prison cell.

The appearance and defeat of the dragon draws on a history of imprisonment in hagiography that often emphasizes saints’ encounters with the divine. Drawing on the example of St Peter, hagiographers created a prison space “where Christ appears, angels visit, and rays of light break through stone walls.”<sup>12</sup> The prison becomes a space with the potential to represent both confinement and the promise of freedom. The prison was a significant locus for early Christians who were able to develop and employ a work of mercy<sup>13</sup> to critique the Roman penal system. As Margaret is one of the earliest holy martyrs it stands that her legend would include

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<sup>11</sup> *Seinte Margarete*, pp. 57

<sup>12</sup> Megan Cassidy-Welch, . *Imprisonment in the Medieval Religious Imagination, c. 1150-1400*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. pp. 38

<sup>13</sup> Grounded in scripture, when Christ spoke, “I was in prison, and you came to visit me.” (Matt. 25:36) (Geltner, p. 84)

some of the oldest beliefs about the prison space. The miraculous encounter with the dragon is specific to Margaret's own personal connection to the divine and essential to her spiritual transformation in the cell. When the dragon appears, Margaret is terrified but during this new trial and prays for assistance:

Her face grew pale with the terror that seized her, and she was so frightened she forgot the plea she had made before, to be granted a sight of her unseen fore, and it did not occur to her that her prayer had been answered; but at once she fell to her knees on the ground, and raised her hands high towards heaven, and with this prayer she prayed to Christ: 'Invisible God, full of goodness...help me, my Lord, against this dreadful creature, so that it may not harm me'<sup>14</sup>

Margaret is not invincible; she is susceptible to fear. Up until this point Margaret's bravery has been unchallenged, but her moment of terror humanizes her to the reader. It emphasizes her vulnerability as well as God's power. The text makes clear that the appearance of the dragon is not due to the evil power of the fiends of hell but to God's decision to answer Margaret's own prayer. Fear only drives Margaret further into her faith as her encounter with divine turn the prison into a miraculous space. She addresses the 'Invisible God' and in doing so shows that the physical presence of evil has only reassured her of her faith in God. The proof of evil only supports her belief in God's goodness; it produces an inverted result. This mirrors the inversion of imprisonment as Margaret's bodily confinement only serves to further her spiritual liberation.

Margaret's victory over the dragon gives insight into the ways in power is inverted in Margaret's favor through God's divine will:

And then she traced on her body, downwards and then across, the precious sign of the beloved cross that he was raised on. And the dragon rushed at her as she did this, and poised his hideous mouth, cavernously huge, high above her head, and stretched out his tongue to the soles of her feet and tossed her in, swallowing her into his monstrous belly — but to Christ's honour and his own destruction. For the sign of the cross that she was armed with swiftly set her free, and brought him sudden death, as his body burst in two in

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<sup>14</sup>*Seinte Margarete*, pp. 59

the middle; and that blessed maiden, completely unharmed, without a mark on her, walked out of his belly, praising aloud her Saviour in heaven.<sup>15</sup>”

Her ability to overcome the dragon is rooted in making the image of the cross. It is a self-contained action that can be done even within the space of her cell. It is a show of fortitude and of bodily agency in the face of bodily incarceration. Even the dragon’s attack can be seen as a different kind of incarceration as Margaret is swallowed and enclosed in the stomach of the beast. The ease with which the dragon tosses her in his mouth and traps her in his belly emphasizes Margaret’s own smallness. The visual contrast between the dragon and Margaret is powerful and her odds of surviving seem poor. Margaret’s own reference to ‘Invisible God’ highlights why assuming power based on physical size or visual presentation has no place within the cell. The physical space has already been transformed into a miraculous and liminal space with the potential for an expression of divine power. Margaret crossing of herself is a physical manifestation of her faith; the power she wields is God’s response to her faith. Margaret breaks the dragon’s belly in two and emerges unharmed from her second cell. The narrative is careful to show Margaret as a maiden who, in the midst of her passion, has been granted God’s power through his mercy. She is not portrayed as infallible but as God’s instrument. She leaves the dragon’s belly praying, showing that her awareness of the root of her newfound power. She has gained new spiritual knowledge of her purpose within this second enclosure. After she defeats the dragon, Margaret is invulnerable to the second fiend and steps even further into her own authority by using her torture to convert the crowd of witnesses.

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<sup>15</sup> *Seinte Margarete*, pp. 61



## II

### Enclosure and Maternity in *A Revelation of Love*

In many ways the revelations are a meditation on pain and suffering and fittingly they begin with a vision of Christ's bleeding head. "And in this soddenly I saw the reed bloud rynnynge downe from under the garlande, hote and freyshely, plentuously and lively, right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thornes was pressed on his blessed head."<sup>16</sup> Julian begins her presentation by collapsing temporal boundaries. Past and present exist at once and the effect is a timelessness or a more cyclical sense of time as opposed to a linear expression of time or narrative. The lack of awareness about time and its passing helps to prepare the reader for the non-linear structure of the text. The revelations are presented in order of appearance, but the text is constantly in a process of showing what bodily vision Julian is seeing as well as what truths or images are being revealed to Julian through her spiritual sight or her mental understanding of Christ's communications. For example, "With this sight of his blessed passion, with the Godhead that I saw in my understanding, I knew well that it was strength inough to me, ye, and all creaturs livyng that sould be saved against all the fiends of hell and against all ghostely enemies."<sup>17</sup> It is not so simple as merely recounting visual images; Julian must find a way to express textually the knowledge that she simultaneously receives and her own interpretation of the meaning of every aspect of the revelatory experience. Along with the sight of Christ's bleeding head and her sureness of Christ's presence she is imbued with the knowledge of humanity's redemption. The visual must be considered alongside spiritual in order to further understand what is being

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<sup>16</sup> Julian and Denise Baker. *The Showings of Julian of Norwich: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005. pp. 8

<sup>17</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 8

revealed. Within the enclosed space of the sickroom and the anchoritic cell she undergoes revelation that cannot be contained within temporal or sensory boundaries.

The revelations are atmospheric, and Julian does not so much reconsider them but re-experience them through mediation and interpretation. This difficult task is translated into the textual mode through its own ordering and syntax. Above, Julian has received a vision of Christ's bleeding head and understands the truth and power of the redemption. She continues by stating, "In this he brought our Ladie Saint Mari to my understanding. I saw her ghostly in bodily lyknes, a simple mayden and a meeke, yong of age, a little waxen above a chylde, in the stature as she was when she conceivede."<sup>18</sup> With the knowledge of the redemption fresh in her mind Julian is showed a ghostly likeness of Mary. Her vision of is of a young and pregnant Mary, characterized in Julian's understanding by her simplicity and meekness. The manner of revelation is encouraging Julian to connect humanity's deliverance not only to Christ's passion but to his human mother. The visual of Mary's pregnancy reaffirms and honors Christ's humanity. The contrasting images of Jesus in the process of dying and Jesus in the process of gestation show the interconnectedness of Christ's death and the life of humanity. Because the revelations ask Julian to draw a connection between Christ's passion and Mary's willingness to carry the son of God, Christ's death is coded as a kind of maternal care and sacrifice. Julian is even given insight into Mary's choice: "And this wisdom and truth, knowing the greatnes of her maker and the littlehead of her selfe that is made, made her to say full meekely to Gabriell, 'Loo me, here, God's handmaiden.'<sup>19</sup> What informs Mary's response is her awareness of her own nature as well as God's nature. She understands that God has made her and rather than keep

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<sup>18</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 8

<sup>19</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 9

humanity as a creation separate from him, he chooses to fuse his divinity with humanity through Christ. “For this was her marvayling, that he that was her maker would be borne of her that is made.”<sup>20</sup> Mary understands the nature of her decision and chooses to give life to Christ by keeping him safe within the enclosed space of her womb. Her pregnant body is physical manifestation of the unification of the human and the divine. It is a physical expression of God’s love and presence that he chooses to express through the process of pregnancy and birth. Pregnancy and maternity are not an insufficient imitation of God’s love but a suitable process that truly expresses the unconditional unity and care of God’s love.

The connection between Christ and maternity is expanded upon in the following chapter and will be interpreted in the context of the previous visions and their implications. Julian explains that what is revealed to her in her ghostly sight simultaneously occurs with her vision of Christ’s bleeding head:

In this same tyme that I saw this sight of the head bleidyng, our good Lord shewed a ghostly sight of his homely lovyng. I saw that he is to us all thing that is good and comfortable to our helpe. He is oure clothing that for love wrappeth us and wyndeth us, halseth us and all becloseth us, hangeth about us for tender love that he may never leeve us. And so in this sight I saw that he is all thing that is good as to my understanding.<sup>21</sup>

Julian’s ghostly sight of ‘his homely lovyng’ is referring to Christ’s intimate love. There is a real effort to create an image of Christ as a comforting and familiar presence. He is seen as humanity’s clothing, something that continually encloses the wearer. The reasoning behind this enclosure, or this clinging, is his pure love for humanity. It calls to mind the earlier vision of the pregnant Mary who out of awareness of her own nature enclosed Christ in her womb. To take

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<sup>20</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 9

<sup>21</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 9

this further, she also held him as an infant and clothed him as a child. In this context, Christ's awareness of his own dual nature informs his manner of maternal and intimate loving.

The revelations use the figure of Mary and the concept of maternity to help Julian better understand the nature of Christ's love and God's presence in every individual. To illustrate the wisdom of clinging to the goodness of God many methods of prayer are revealed to Julian all at once. Most are concerned with details of Christ's flesh, blood, and crucifixion and the greatness and goodness of God. The prayers are supposed to keep the worship of the Christian focused of the goodness of God rather than the power of intermediaries. But the collection of prayers also features Mary: "And we praie him for his sweet mother's love that bare him. And all the helpe that we have of her, it is of his goodnes."<sup>22</sup> These two prayers feed into one another. Mary is venerated for her love that gave life to Christ and the help that she provides to Christendom is done through the power of Christ at her behest. Their mother and son connection is a point of veneration within itself. Julian writes, "For the meanes that the goodnes of God hath ordeineth to helpe us be full faire and many... the chiefe and principall meane is the blessed kynde that he toke of the maiden."<sup>23</sup> The inclusion of Mary in this section is significant as it positions her as the greatest intermediary between humanity and God. She is the provider of human nature. Her meek and virtuous assent gave life to Christ and his sacrifice gave eternal life to all Christians. The prayer above states that the power of Mary's sweet love is what gave life to Christ. Christ's sweet love redeemed humankind. In understanding how Christ took on Mary's nature by living inside of her the reader is better equipped to understand the way that God lives inside of them. God's love is manifested in gifting humanity his son, which prompts Mary's love, which

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<sup>22</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 11

<sup>23</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 11

prompt's Christ love. Julian positions the soul as something that naturally and perpetually seeks God, like a child seeking its mother. This implies that God is also seeking humanity in some manner:

For to the goodness of God is the highest praier, and it cometh downe to us to the lowest party of our need. It quickened our sowle, and maketh it leve, and make it to waxe in grace and vertu. It is nerest in kynde and redyest in grace. For it is the same grace that the soule sekyth and evyr schalle tylle we knowe oure God verely that hath is all in hymn selfe beclosyde.<sup>24</sup>

Julian states that the goodness of God moves inside of humanity. She uses words associated with pregnancy, 'quickened' and 'waxe', to articulate the way that God's goodness gives life to humanity. When she describes the soul as waxing with grace and vertu it brings to mind images of the pregnant virgin Mary whose body was "waxen above a chylde" in Julian's vision of her. The human understanding of the natural process of birth and pregnancy is employed to help the reader understand how God's goodness is innate to humanity and that God is innately good himself. Pregnancy provides an example of naturally occurring enclosure of a person within another person. It also provides an example of bodily union between two people. Julian employs this to communicate humanity's current state, safely enclosed in God's goodness. She also uses it to help create an image of humanity's future of an eventual and eternal state of full union with their maker.

### III

#### Continuity in *Seinte Margarete* and *A Revelation of Love*

As we have seen, *Seinte Margarete* shows the power that women can wield within the space of the cell. It takes care to detail that this power is accessed through the God's love and mercy. The

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<sup>24</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 11

sign of the cross serves as a physical expression or vehicle of God's intercession and can act as a catalyst for spiritual growth. In *A Revelation of Love*, Julian of Norwich also positions the cross as catalyst for intense spiritual growth and revelation about the nature of existence. When Julian believes that she will succumb to her illness a clergyman places a cross in her sickroom to comfort her, just as the sign of the cross comforted Margaret upon her imprisonment. After Julian sets her eyes on the crucifix, she begins the process of her revelations:

After this my sight began to feyle. It waxid as darke aboute me in the chamber as if it had ben nyght, save in the of the crosse, wher in held a comon light, and I wiste not how. All that was beseid the crosse was ogye and ferfull to me as it had ben much occupied with fiendes. After this the over part of my bodie began to die so farforth that unneth I had anie feeling...And in this sodenly all my paine was taken from me, and I was hole, and namely, in the over parte of my bodie, as ever I was befor.<sup>25</sup>

Julian's sight failing except for the light emerging from the cross mirrors Margaret's experience in the darkness of the dragon's stomach from which she emerges with the power of cross. In both instances, there is a force of darkness and death contrasted with a force of light and life from the cross. Julian sees fearful fiends surrounding the crucifix. This is a miraculous vision described in terms of ugliness and dread, just like the dragon. Julian is so ill that her body is failing, and she truly believes that she will die. Instead, she is liberated from her pain and describes this in terms of wholeness and restoration. It is reminiscent of Margaret emerging from the dragon's stomach, whole and unharmed, due to God's intervention. After Margaret's victory she proceeds to death and martyrdom. Continuity with Margaret can be found in what she expresses directly after she is liberated from her bodily pain. She says that, "Then cam sodenly to my mynd that I should desyer...that my bodie might be fulfilled with mynd and feeling of his blessed passion."<sup>26</sup> It could be argued that Margaret's martyrdom is her desire to be filled with the mind and feeling of

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<sup>25</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp.7

<sup>26</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp.7

Christ's passion. His own passion and suffering give her strength throughout her own. His sacrifice has indebted her to him and she is not afraid to repay him in the exact same manner. In Julian's desire to be filled with the mind and feeling of Christ's passion we can see her yearning for the same experience. She has overcome bodily destruction but her first desire is to better understand Christ's suffering.

Margaret's desire for meaningful suffering in the name of the Lord<sup>27</sup> resonates with Julian's own desire for death. She writes, "I desyred to have all maner of paynes, bodily and ghostly ...for I would be purgied by the mercie of God...For I hoped that it might have ben to my a reward when I shuld have died, for I desyred to have ben soone with my God and maker."<sup>28</sup> For both women, the wish for bodily suffering is rooted in their desire to take part in an experience that will unify them with Christ. They see the common experience of bodily pain and even death as something with immense spiritual value and potential. While Margaret employed her torture to further convert people of the true faith, Julian sees her bodily suffering as a trial of purgation of the body and spirit in order to achieve unity with God through death. There is an awareness of penance as a sacrament or a process to forgiveness, purgatory as a physical place, and the ascension to heaven as a process with steps that must be achieved in order. This desire reveals Julian's pre-occupation with that penance features in her third prayer: "I conceived a mightie desyre to receive thre woundes in my life, that is to say, the wound of verie contricion, the wound of kind compassion, and the wound of willfull longing to God."<sup>29</sup> Through metaphor

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<sup>27</sup> "she...heard on every side how Christ's chosen ones were being put to death for the true faith; and eagerly longed, if it were God's will, that she might be one of the many people who bore and suffered so much for God," pp. 57

<sup>28</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 5

<sup>29</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 6

Julian is referencing the three stages of contemplative ascent: contrition, compassion, and longing for God.<sup>30</sup> Describing this in terms of wounding shows that Julian sees her pain and suffering, bodily and ghostly, as essential steps on her journey to God. They are elements of her personal and individual process of purgation and growth. In *Seinte Margarete*, God often answers Margaret's prayers and makes it so she cannot feel the pain of her tortures. This is a display of God's power and ability to subvert the pagan authority. Margaret's bodily pain has value to others; her pain, or lack thereof, becomes a spectacle of both pagan brutality and divine power. In Julian's case, her pain is a key aspect to her spiritual journey, and it must be felt and honored as a valuable experience to her inner self.

On a more thematic level, *Seinte Margarete* complicates the character of the meek maiden by allowing Margaret to access divine power and perform miraculous physical feats. Margaret's defeat of the dragon is not only a physical manifestation of God's power but of God's life-giving nature. Margaret emerges from the belly of death and continues to live in order to better help her fellow Christians. Julian of Norwich employs the usage of visual size difference to express the power and nature of God. This resonates with the contrasting sizes of Margaret and the dragon and speaks to God's ability to imbue small beings with power and life. After Julian describes her ghostly sight of Christ's 'homely lovyng' he reveals another vision to her:

And in this he shewed a little thing, the quantitie of an haselnott, lying in the palme of my hand, as me semide, and it was as rounde as a balle. I looked theran with the eye of my understanding and thought, 'What may this be?' And it was answered generaelly thus: 'It is all that is made.' I marvayled how it might laste, for me thought it might soddenly have fallen to nawght for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: 'It lasteth and ever shall for God loveth it. And so hath all thing being by the love of God.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 6

<sup>31</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 9



Julian's vision plays on the difference in size between the small round object and the size of the hands that enclose it. She is astounded by the littleness of the object like the reader is astounded by the littleness of Margaret in the face of the dragon. The small object is identified as 'all that is made' and tiny enough to be held in Julian's hand. It creates a proportion of God and humanity that is hard to comprehend. The size difference is so extreme that Julian does not understand how the little thing continues to exist. The answer to her question is the same answer to Margaret's prayer: God's love. When death means to devour Margaret, she is released from its belly whole and unharmed. God's love enclosed her and its power extended her human life. Upon her death, God granted her eternal life. In the face of Julian's death God grants her revelation to help her understand that he could not gift her death. Because he made her and loves her and his love gives life. In order to further her understanding, the nature of all that is made is revealed to her as well, "In this little thing I saw iii properties. The first is that God made it; the second, that God loveth it; the thirde, that God keepeth it. But what beheld I, verely, the maker, the keeper, the lover."<sup>32</sup> Qualities are attributed to the object only through its relationship to God. It decenters humanity as a land filled with people and instead transforms it into a tiny object that exists because of God's love. Its smallness has value because it is what helps Julian comprehend the greatness of God's love and power in comparison to her entire world. Julian uses her understanding of the nature of the object to better understand God's nature. Because of this vision she sees God as the maker, the keeper, and the lover. Her way of understanding the nature of humanity and of God is cyclical; it mirrors the shape of the object. Her comprehension of the nature of the object feeds directly into her understanding of God. Similarly, Margaret is able to better see God when the dragon appears. The presence of the fiend only furthers her faith in its creator.

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<sup>32</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 9

To conclude this consideration of continuity between *Seinte Margarete* and *A Revelation of Love*, both texts will be situated in the context of their intended usage to the larger Christian community. Margaret and Julian share a hyper-awareness about their place in an entire collection of Christian people and strongly wish that their experiences will help other Christians further their faith. Margaret's final words before her beheading show an awareness that her martyrdom will be recorded and distributed as well as a protectiveness over the future Christian community:

'I beg and beseech you, who are my bliss and joy, that whoever writes a book on my life, or acquires it when written, or whoever has it most often in hand, or whoever reads it aloud or with good will listens to the reader, may all have their sins forgiven at once, ruler of heaven. Whoever build a chapel or church in my name, or provides for it any light or lamp, give him and grant him, Lord, the light of heaven. In the house where a woman in lying in labour, as soon as she recalls my name and my passion, Lord, make haste and help her and listen to her prayer; and may no deformed child be born in that house, neither lame nor hunchbacked, neither dumb nor deaf nor afflicted by the Devil. And whoever calls on my name aloud, gracious Lord, at the Last Judgement save him from death.'<sup>33</sup>

Margaret begins her declaration broadly and becomes more specific. She makes a point to infuse her future hagiography with her influence at every level of access. Rather than confine her new-found power to pardon sins to those who write or read her life, she includes all who hear it and own it and touch it. Even the smallest act of belief or devotion, saying her name aloud at the Last Judgement, will prompt her care and protection. At the end of her statement she declares her connection to childbirth. Margaret's final declaration is extremely emblematic of the medieval culture that venerated her as the protector of pregnant women and patron saint of childbirth. The details of Margaret's hagiography may have held particular resonance with pregnant women. Beyond the image of emerging from the dragon's stomach, she is a sympathetic character who faces her trials bravely while still acknowledging her own fear and the possibility of death. These

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<sup>33</sup> *Seinte Margarete*, pp. 79

qualities, along with Margaret's willingness to endure physical torture, must have been comforting to pregnant women who knew they would face pain and potentially die in order to deliver their child. The physical presence of Margaret's hagiographies even held special value in medieval lying-rooms. Lying-rooms were rooms designated for childbirth. They were gendered, only permitting the pregnant woman and her female support system. They were only lit by candles and their windows covered which created a womb-like atmosphere.<sup>34</sup> Within these spaces copies of Margaret's *vita* were treated as both as objects of comfort and relics that held immense spiritual power. Prayer rolls or books were often placed on the body of the pregnant woman in order to protect her and her child during birth. *Seinte Margarete* situates Margaret's death as a loving sacrifice that she dedicates to all Christians that come after her.

Julian had similar goals for her own text and she carefully constructs it in a manner that she hopes will help her fellow Christians. Julian neutralizes her own subjectivity and authority by considering herself as a part of the Christian community.<sup>35</sup> She says that:

For verely it was nott shewde to me that God lovyth me better than the lest soule that is in grace. For I am suer ther be meny that never hath shewyng ne syght but of the comyn techyng of holy chyrch that love God better than I. For yf I looke syngulery to my selfe, I am ryght nought. But in generall I am, I hope, in onehede of cheryte with alle my evyn Cristen. For in thys oned stondyth the lyfe of all mankynd that shalle be savyd.<sup>36</sup>

Julian does esteem herself for receiving her visions. She simply receives them and tries to interpret and translate them to the best of her ability. She denies any kind of individualism and instead chooses to absorb herself into the rest of the Christian community. She is 'ryght nought'

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<sup>34</sup> Donohoe, Róisín. "Unbynde Her Anoone": The Lives of St. Margaret of Antioch and the Lying-in Space in Late Medieval England." In *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds*, edited by Victoria Blud, Diane Heath, and Einat Klafter, 139–56. University of London Press, 2019. pp. 142-3

<sup>35</sup> Anna Lewis, "A Picture of Christendom: The Creation of an Interpretive Community in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*." *Parergon*, Volume 26, Number 1 (2009): pp. 75-90.

<sup>36</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 16

when she is in a state of singularity but in ‘onehede of cheryte’ with her ‘evyn Cristen.’ Julian draws upon her own knowledge from her revelations and considers herself to be in oneness with what is made. She sees herself as one particle in the small object that resembles a hazelnut. Now that she is aware of her own nature in relation to God she chooses to share her awareness to the benefit of all Christians. Julian says, “For the shewyng I am nott good, but if I love God the better.”<sup>37</sup> This is what she hopes to achieve through her text. She would like to help her fellow Christians love God better by sharing the truths that were revealed to her. Julian does not attempt this solely through the explicit content of the text but through her own understanding of the revelations. When she writes:

All this was shewde by the partes, that is to sey, by bodyly syght, and by worde formyde in my understandyng, and by goostely syght. But the goostely syght I can nott ne may shew it as openly ne as fully as I would, but I trust in our Lord God almightie that he shall of his godnes and for iour love make yow to take it more ghostely and more sweetly then I can or may tell it.<sup>38</sup>

She is not only trying to convince her audience to trust in the truth of her vision. She admits that she is not able to translate her ghostly sight as accurately or openly as it was shown but she trusts God to help her audience understand. In doing so she is modeling to the reader how to accept the mystery of faith. There will always be elements of God and his nature that are beyond human understanding just as there will always be knowledge that can only be gained from experience rather than text. She is preparing them for the fact that there will never be an answer to all their questions until they are united with their maker. She is encouraging them to have faith in what is not seen, nonetheless. Like Margaret, Julian hopes that her text will aid the broader Christian community. When she assumed her life of spiritual martyrdom, confinement and contemplation,

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<sup>37</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 16

<sup>38</sup> Julian of Norwich, pp. 16

and composed a text that she hoped would help Christians, she performed her own version of Margaret's *vita*.

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