

# 12

## *Space and Enclosure in Julian of Norwich's A Revelation Of Love*

LAURA SAETVEIT MILES

A writer's domestic interior opens a window onto both author and text, reminding us that what we may at first perceive to be the timeless and universal truth of writing cannot be so neatly extricated from the complex particularities of its spatial and material origins.<sup>1</sup>

As much as a person is the product of her surroundings, her interiors and her movements, so a text is shaped by the space in which it was composed. We know, because she tells us, that Julian experienced her visions in May 1373 while resting in a sickbed. We do not know where she wrote her first account of those visions, the Short Text of *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, finished in the 1380s, perhaps later. By the time she was fifty she was enclosed in an anchorhold, and this is where we know she composed the Long Text, *A Revelation of Love*.<sup>2</sup> In the case of this second, longer text, the link between 'inner mind and inner dwelling'<sup>3</sup> is unavoidable: *A Revelation of Love* cannot be extricated from the space of the anchorhold in which it was written any more than Julian could have been once she was ritually enclosed in the 'domestic interior' of her cell. Yet for Julian the relationship between text and the 'theater of composition'<sup>4</sup> is complicated by the presence of another interior beyond inner mind and inner dwelling. Her divine visions, beginning with the core experience of May 1373, became their own experiential world which could be returned to in her mind and by means of her written accounts over the next forty-odd years, and they likewise contained within themselves distinct structures of interiority. The domestic interior of the anchorhold is thus joined by visionary space as a valuable pair of windows onto an author about whom we know so little.

Other essays in this Companion focus on the historical and social implications of Julian's enclosure in the anchorhold or on the meaning of the images

<sup>1</sup> Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them* (London, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The time-line of Julian's visions and writings is explained in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 1–4. All references to *A Vision* and *A Revelation* will be taken from this edition and will be cited by section/chapter and line number.

<sup>3</sup> Fuss, *Sense of an Interior*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

in the Long Text, which was composed within that setting; my own purpose, however, is to concentrate on the intersection of the two. This essay, therefore, will consider the Long Text as a product of the anchorhold and examine how it negotiates a tripartite system of enclosures: the physical space of the anchorhold, the visionary space of the revelation and the authorial space of the text. How do these three spaces create or influence each other? How can we better understand Julian's physical enclosure as an anchoress by means of the visions' enclosing images, and better understand the visions' enclosing images by means of her physical enclosure? In exploring these questions, this essay will evaluate Julian's physical relationship to her community as an anchoress, her theological relationship with God and mankind as expressed in the spatial images of her visions, the extent to which the effects of anchoritic enclosure are exhibited in the Long Text and, lastly, Julian's unique use of visionary space when compared to texts written by other medieval visionary women.<sup>5</sup> As I will demonstrate, an understanding of *A Revelation of Love* as a product of the anchorhold is crucial to a nuanced interpretation of the spatial imagery in Julian's visions, and the key to comprehending how she is able to include so warmly her fellow Christians – her 'evencristen', as she refers to them, those saved souls of humanity – within her theology.

When the anchoress was enclosed in her cell with the binding power of her vow and the words of the funeral rite, she entered a space not of this world.<sup>6</sup> Her new room was a transitional space between earth and heaven, between church and community, a private fortress which she could not leave, nor could anyone enter – except God. The anchoress replaced any former worldly duties such as child-bearing and house-keeping with an ascetic life of prayer and penance under the keen eye of Christ. Yet, though she was dead to the world, her cell's physical attachment to the main parish church meant that she was also paradoxically trapped at the bustling centre of the very world she had rejected. Unlike the nun who tended to seclude herself in a rural convent, the late-medieval anchoress was a true 'urban recluse'. As one Latin dictionary defines it, *reclusio qua quis ad vacandum Deo in cella se includit* ([reclusion is] the seclusion whereby someone encloses himself or herself in a cell in order to be free for God).<sup>7</sup> This freedom for God was a privilege which connected the anchoress even more intimately with her parishioners, as she was expected to use that divine access to bring a new sense of holiness to the heart of the community. She accepted the spiritual responsibilities of praying for their souls, providing counsel and serving as a model of extreme sanctity; in return, the community often supported her with bequests and gifts. Thus the anchorhold could have provided for the medieval

<sup>5</sup> I explore several of these angles in 'Julian of Norwich and St Bridget of Sweden: Creating Intimate Space with God', in *The Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Place, Space and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cardiff, 2008), pp. 128–40. Some sentences have been adapted from that analysis, and I would like to thank University of Wales Press for permission to reuse this material.

<sup>6</sup> For detailed analysis beyond this brief overview, see Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York, 1987) and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Recluse in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Ducange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis* (Paris, 1842), vol. 5, p. 620; cited and translated by Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses*, p. 6.

holy woman a potentially liberating option of living symbiotically instead of antagonistically within society, of escaping from but not shirking humanity, and of enjoying the Church's sanction to follow Christ without fear.<sup>8</sup>

A helpful way of thinking about the complexities of the anchorhold space is to think of it as a paradigmatic example of Michel Foucault's 'heterotopia', an 'effectively enacted utopia' which adheres to five principles, of which the last three are particularly significant.<sup>9</sup> The first of these three principles, which states that 'the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible',<sup>10</sup> helps to explain how, within Julian's anchorhold in particular, there existed simultaneously a site for heaven on earth as well as a site of visionary (re-)experience that achieved an intimacy with God otherwise unreachable in this world. While, according to the next principle, a 'heterotopia begins to operate at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time',<sup>11</sup> the anchorhold similarly brings the anchoress out of marketplace time into her own 'heterochrony' of God-time: a mélange of liturgical schedule, personal time of life and death, and universal eschatological time. For Julian, we can also add to these the time of her vision and the time of writing.<sup>12</sup> And, according to Foucault's final principle, 'heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable,' but usually 'the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place'. Moreover (and, perhaps, most pertinently here), often 'the individual has to submit to rites and purifications'.<sup>13</sup> This 'system of opening and closing' highlights the anchorhold's unique contradiction of isolated yet centralized physical space coexisting with penetrable spiritual space, a contradiction brilliantly reconciled by a text which speaks with a truly heterotopic voice from within the anchorhold itself.

How Julian felt about this seeming paradox of physical isolation at the centre of society can be better understood when it is paralleled with another range of spatial paradoxes contained in her visions. Many of the most powerful images Julian presents in her texts invoke complex constructions of space as a theological medium for representing the relationship between the individual soul and the divine, between all of humanity and the divine, and between the individual soul and humanity. Far from simply static enclosures, however, these spatial images demonstrate the simultaneity of God's unknowable infinitude with the very measurable scale of human reality and the concrete world. The first such

<sup>8</sup> See Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 70–1.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, 1 (1986), pp. 22–7; p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26. For a discussion of Julian's use of the adverb *sodenly* and the conflated timescale of her visions, see Vincent Gillespie and Maggie Ross, 'The Apophatic Image: The Poetics of Effacement in Julian of Norwich', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium V*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 53–77, esp. p. 60–1.

<sup>12</sup> As Maurice Blanchot writes, 'to write is to surrender to the fascination of time's absence', when one approaches 'the essence of solitude', and thus 'to write is to enter into the affirmation of the solitude'. *The Space of Literature*, trans. and intro. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1982), pp. 30–3.

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 26.

spatial image is part of the First Revelation, and in the Long Text Julian describes it in this way:

And in this, he shewed a little thing the quantity of an haselnot, lying in the palme of my hand as me semide, and it was a rounde as any balle. I looked theran with the eye of my understanding, and thought: 'What may this be?' And it was answered generally thus: 'It is all that is made.' I marvayled how it might laste, for methought it might sodenly have fallen to nought for littenes.

(*Revelation*, 5.6–11)

This 'little thing' is most easily comprehended by the human mind as something the size of a nut, a most small and quotidian object, and yet it operates on a boundless scale of metaphor: it is the seed and womb of a single plant or of all creation; it is her own enclosed anchorhold or the entire earth; it is Julian's single soul or that of all Christianity. Any assumptions of spatial reckoning based on reality are inverted in the world of the vision, where Julian is shown in a moment the world's simultaneous magnificence (as God's creation) and insignificance (in relation to God).<sup>14</sup> From this metaphor she learns that all of creation 'lasteth and ever shall, for God loveth it' (*Revelation*, 5.12). While the hazelnut image begins as a lesson in the smallness of the universe and the loving infinity of God, it then turns to challenge the basic premise of relative size itself: 'for till I am substantially oned to him I may never have full reste ne very blisse: that is to say, that I be so fastned to him that ther be right nought that is made betweene my God and me' (*Revelation*, 5.16–18). At this pinnacle of divine union, self and other collapse into each other and scale ceases to exist; space's 'sharp contradictions ... are assimilated and destroyed', Julian having 'transcended the contradictions', as the French theorist Gaston Bachelard would explain it.<sup>15</sup> Space is formed and then turned inside-out, because, ultimately, space becomes ineffective as a tool for expressing the mystical relations of self to God within the vision: it is not measurable closeness, but one-ness; not physical enclosure together, but inexpressible unity.

Focused stillness also marks the hazelnut scene and builds this sense of inexpressible unity through both image and rhetoric. The effective conflation of Julian's own fixed viewing with the vision's conception of vastness, both divine and earthly, echoes her own physical stillness while immobile in the sickbed or locked in the anchorhold. Bachelard explains generally how this type of conflation is possible:

Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed, immensity is the movement of motionless man.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Later Julian aptly describes this relationship: 'For wele I wot that heven and erth and alle that is made is mekille and large and fair and good. But the cause why it sheweth so litile to my sight was for I saw it in the presence of him that is the maker. For to a soul that seth the maker of all thing, all that is made semeth full litille' (*Revelation*, 8.9–12).

<sup>15</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, 1964), p. 190.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

Julian's motionlessness opens up an apophatic immensity within herself which refuses to be constrained by temporal boundaries – or even the very *thought* of size. As the 'exaltation of space goes beyond all frontiers',<sup>17</sup> so does the exaltation of the soul's union with God. To express this unity, however, Julian again and again returns to approachable spatial metaphors of enclosure and inclusion, metaphors which she ultimately transcends, as demonstrated in this example.

When Julian relates humanity to self and to God in her visionary space, Christ's incarnation becomes the key motif for a correspondence of the wider Church on earth with the divine. The Tenth Revelation is entirely devoted to the sight of the wound of Christ:

With a glad chere oure good lorde loked into his side and behelde, enjoyenge.  
And with his swete loking he led forth the understanding of his creature by the  
same wound into his sid, within. And ther he shwed a fair, delectable place, and  
large inow for alle mankinde that shalle be saved to rest in pees and in love.

*(Revelation, 24.1–4)*

God-made-man is essentially divinity brought down to earthly proportion, and Julian responds to this with a graceful reversal: Christ's human body now literally incorporates innumerable humanity. His human-scaled wound becomes a perpetual, divinely scaled womb in a way that enables her individual visionary experience to become 'large inow for alle mankinde'.<sup>18</sup> Though Julian is personally led into this divine interior, she willingly shares the space with her 'evencristen'. She is not alone with God; saved mankind accompanies her in both the salvific enclosing space of the vision and in the active reading experience of the text.

Visceral as the open and fleshly wound may be, Christ's humanity provides a place beyond measurement, a place that so challenges physical reality as to compel the reader to understand the theology behind the visualization. This same technique operates in a scene in Julian's Sixteenth Revelation, when Christ again leads her into a new showing:

And then oure good lorde opened my gostely eye and shewde me my soule in  
the middes of my harte. I saw the soule so large as it were an endlesse warde,  
and also as it were a blisful kingdom, and by the conditions that I saw therein  
I understoode that it is a wurshipfulle citte. In middes of that citte sitteth oure  
lorde Jhesu, very God and very man. (*Revelation, 68.1–5*)

In a stunning inversion of the wound's enclosure, now the human soul is infinitely expanded to 'an endlesse warde' and an entire kingdom wherein Christ sits in majesty. The space of the individual soul – just as intimate and personal as the wound in Christ's side – suddenly expands to fathomless dimensions. Not merely 'large', but *endlesse*, so incomprehensible as to enclose the Godhead. Like the hazelnut and the wound in Christ's side, the kingdom of the soul constitutes

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>18</sup> On images of pregnancy in Julian, see Maud Burnett McInerney, "'In the Meydens Womb': Julian of Norwich and the Poetics of Enclosure', in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York, 1996), pp. 157–82.

one of those 'enclosures in the text [which] paradoxically deliver the reader into a limitless landscape'.<sup>19</sup>

But is Julian's conflation of enclosure and expanse truly as paradoxical as it initially seems? Again, we can turn to Bachelard for an eloquent model of resolution: 'it is through their "immensity" that these two kinds of space – the space of intimacy and world space – blend. When human solitude deepens, then the two immensities touch and become identical'.<sup>20</sup> In Julian's texts, visionary spaces of enclosed intimacy with the divine – the life-sized hazelnut, the wound, the interior of the soul – simultaneously exist as spaces of immense 'world space', embracing all mankind, all her 'evencristen' with herself and the divine. In this way, Bachelard's idea of 'world space', a space that constitutes its own kind of inclusive universe apart from the everyday 'world', helps us to understand the space Julian creates in her visionary encounter. When Julian's solitude deepens, her visionary space is able to bear this astonishing blend of immensities. Intimacy with God does not require privacy of space in the visionary realm, because Julian is afforded a physical reality of privacy with God by means of the anchorhold, and in a related way, the sickbed. As long as the confines of the anchorhold ensure a space of continual intimacy with God, she does not need to retreat into closed-off visionary spaces to achieve this divine intimacy. Julian, focused and immobile in the sickbed or anchorhold, is not forced to struggle against her fellow Christians in order to validate her relationship with God. Instead she is centralized within and nurtured by her surrounding parish while simultaneously afforded a sense of spiritual privacy, a balance which enables humanity to become welcome in her visionary realm. The dynamic spaces of the visionary scenes discussed above exhibit this unusual theological inclusiveness; her movement into the wound in Christ's side, in particular, is depicted 'in such a way as to signify also a movement into the heart of the Church and the discovery of a union with her fellow Christians, effected through the mystical Christ in whom all are to be enclosed'.<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of what life Julian led before her anchoritic enclosure – whether wife, mother, nun or other – she experienced her visions in a fixed setting not unlike the anchorhold she would later inhabit.<sup>22</sup> McAvoy describes the relationship between the two spaces in the following terms:

[T]he sickroom becomes her figurative anchorhold; the inert body which houses her soul echoes its tomb-like walls and the only visible animation is that which emanates from the suspended crucifix before her. Thus, a homogeneity between Julian's worldly suffering in the sickroom and the otherworldly existence she will later embrace within the anchorhold is established even in the early stages of the Short Text.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Gillespie and Ross, 'The Apophatic Image', p. 60. Much of the preceding analysis complements their consideration of the apophatic image in Julian's visions.

<sup>20</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 203.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Abbot, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, this essay's approach would also support the security of a cloistered life before anchoritic enclosure; for the latest arguments that Julian had been a nun, see *Writings*, ed. Watson and Jenkins, pp. 4–5.

<sup>23</sup> McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, pp. 64–5.

Thus we can perceive some of the similarities and differences between the Short Text and the Long Text: while the visionary enclosures of the hazelnut, the wound and the soul as kingdom originate in *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* (and thus outside the anchorhold), their subtle revision in *A Revelation of Love* distinctly reflects the walls of the anchorhold within which they were revised. The Long Text passages which we have just examined contain some significant changes from their Short Text versions. Now based in the security of the anchorhold, Julian's later Long Text rewriting of these representative images adjusts visionary space to infinitely expand around 'alle mankinde that shalle be saved' – a crucial phrase not present in the Short Text – just as the specific description of the soul where Christ sits in majesty as an 'endlesse warde' is only found in the Long Text.<sup>24</sup> After her enclosure in the anchorhold, Julian and her 'evencristen' to whom she so frequently refers can be conflated within the same visionary space because her role as anchoress, physically authorized and contained by the Church, dissolves personal struggle with society. This resolution of the individual will with the communal will was as integral a part of the anchoritic endeavour as the anchoress's embracing of the hardships of withdrawal from that same community. In other words, it was the demanding work of the anchoress to consider enclosure as simultaneously a source of extreme emotionally and physically challenging asceticism and as a catalyst for inner peace.

Besides the three central images of the hazelnut, the wound and the soul as kingdom, the presence of the anchorhold exhibits itself throughout the Long Text by means of several other rhetorical manipulations of space. In *A Revelation*, mutual indwelling becomes the central means of comprehending the Trinity and its relationship to mankind. The extended interpretations in the Long Text of the Fourteenth Revelation include the following description of the Trinity:

And the depe wisdome of the trinite is our moder, in whom we are all beclosed.  
And the hye goodnesse of the trinite is our lord, and in him we are beclosed and he in us. We are beclosed in the fader, and we are beclosed in the son, and we are beclosed in the holy gost. And the fader is beclosed in us, the son is beclosed in us, and the holy gost is beclosed in us. (*Revelation*, 54.16–21)

Mother, lord, wisdom, goodness, trinity, father, son, holy ghost, us: with deft twists of *conversio* and *repetitio* Julian relates all of these together by building rhetorical enclosures only to instantly invert and re-enclose them, causing the mind to boggle. And so it should: these divine relationships are necessarily beyond human comprehension, but we can best understand their relation to mankind through comforting enclosures and encapsulating imagery that echo the concept of the womb, that archetypal heterotopic 'system of opening and closing'. Likewise, the knotty theological concept of the Incarnation and human 'sensual soule' receives the same rhetorical treatment, as when Julian details Christ's becoming man: 'for in that same time that God knit him to oure body in the maidens wombe, he toke oure sensual soule. In which taking – he us all

<sup>24</sup> See *Vision*, 13.1–9 and 22.1–9.

having beclosed in him – he oned it to oure substance' (*Revelation*, 57.35–8). Here Julian looks back to the connected interpretations of the First Revelation of the wound in Christ's side and the last revelation of the soul as kingdom with Christ sitting in majesty, when

plentifulously, fully, and swetely was this shewde; and it is spoken of in the furst, wher it saide: 'We be all in him beclosed.' And he is beclosed in us; and that is spoken of in the sixteenth shewing, where he seyth: 'He sitteth in our soule'.

(*Revelation*, 57.43–6)

Mutual indwelling of the soul and the unmade, unformed Godhead cannot be explained by metaphors bound by the rigidity of earthly space. By constantly layering, inverting and repeating images of enclosure Julian effectively convinces the reader of both the loving presence of an eternally enclosing divinity and the incomprehensibility of that presence.

Enclosure as a concept expands in Julian's remarkably fluid and elastic text to accept a vast range of metaphor: enclosure is the single seed, the hazelnut, the individual human womb, soul, Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Ghost; it is also the anchorhold, the Church, all mankind, all creation. In this stretch, however, enclosure does not break apart or fail as a concept. Instead, enclosure succeeds in suggesting both intimacy and community, both individuality and commonality, within the communion of the Christian faith.

The Long Text also reveals itself syntactically as a product of the anchorhold in its subtle erosion of strict distinctions between Julian as an individual and Christianity as a collective. Rather than project a distanced, exclusive construction of the authorial self, Julian instead uses the text to blend her own identity with that of her fellow Christians. Just as the anchorhold centres her within the community so does Julian centre herself among her 'evencristen' within the vision and presents her revelations as a message for all mankind. She expresses her stance of self-effacing charity by employing the same linguistic structures of enclosure that define the relationship between God and man within this passage from the Long Text (and also present in the Short Text):

For if I looke singulery to myselfe, I am right nought. But in general I am, I hope, in onehede of cherite with alle my evencristen. For in this onehede stondeth the life of alle mankind that shalle be saved [...] For in man is God, and in God is alle'. (*Revelation*, 9.6–9, 13)

However, this 'onehede of charite', established in the Short Text, is taken to the next level in the Long Text, when Julian later proclaims that the showings themselves demand 'alle mankind' as an audience:

And this shewing I toke singularly to myselfe. But by alle the gracious comfort that foloweth, as ye shalle see, I was lerned to take it to alle min evencristen, alle in generalle and nothing in speciale [...] *by me alone is understande alle*'.

(*Revelation*, 37.3–7; my emphasis)

'By me alone is understande alle' functions as a kind of commandment to the reader for how to read her words, and the force of this simple phrase reshapes

the entire Long Text. We have already seen how Julian prefers to write of ‘oure soule’ and ‘oure good lorde’, but in the Long Text this use of the first-person plural gains momentum: she consistently removes the terms ‘me’, ‘mine’, ‘myselfe’ or any such self-designating phrases that would connote a singular identity (thirty-two examples in all are omitted from the Long Text).<sup>25</sup> Even in the passage above she uses ‘me’ to point the reader towards an understanding of its replacement by the word ‘alle’. These minor changes accumulate to form a startling reflection of the empowering effect of anchoritic enclosure. No longer is Julian concerned with clearly defining herself as an individual within the text apart from the wider Christian communion once she is individually secured within the anchorhold by that community. In fact, she goes out of her way to bring society into her authorial and visionary space through deliberate syntactic choices.

Those recurring minor changes do not negate or degrade Julian’s presence in the text but primarily serve to positively include saved humanity. That the emendations made in the Long Text actually reflect Julian’s more secure sense of self within the anchorhold is confirmed by one of the most significant extractions, a longer passage from Section 6 of the Short Text. She worries that her showings would suggest to the reader that she wrongfully seeks more than woman’s share: ‘botte God forbede that ye shulde saye or take it that I am a techere. For I meene nought so, no I mente nevere so. For I am a woman, lewed, febille, and freytle’ (*Vision*, 6.35–7). Julian’s concern, of course, is fully warranted, considering the intolerance she could well have faced in the world, although she seriously questions why that should be so: ‘Botte for I am a woman shulde I therfore leve that I shulde nought telle yowe the goodenes of God, since that I sawe in that same time that it is his wille that it be knawen?’ (*Vision*, 6.40–2). By taking the vow of an anchoress Julian answers her own question. Embraced by the Church, exalted for her holiness, set above the storm of gendered prejudice, she portrays her textual self as leaving that sinister insecurity and all its cultural baggage at the door. This pivotal omission from the Long Text reveals a mind, as Virginia Woolf would describe it, that has ‘consumed all impediments and become incandescent’.<sup>26</sup> In *A Revelation of Love* we discover a polished, self-assured text in which the writer is not preoccupied by any desire ‘to make the world the witness of some hardship of grievance’ and, as a result, her ‘poetry flows from [her] free and unimpeded’.<sup>27</sup> The anchorhold provides Julian with ‘a room of her own’, a quiet room for devotional intimacy with God, the time and space to contemplate her visions, the reliable support of the community and enough privacy to heal any grievance against society’s potential hostility towards her gift.<sup>28</sup> Thus her

<sup>25</sup> The new ‘synoptic’ edition by Watson and Jenkins offers one of the easiest ways of tracking these minor changes.

<sup>26</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (San Diego, 1929; repr. with foreword by Mary Gordon, 1981), p. 59: ‘the mind of the artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent’, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, p. 56–7.

<sup>28</sup> We might wonder if Woolf would have reconsidered her famous statement that ‘to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room ... was out of the question, even to the beginning of the nineteenth century’ had she been aware of Julian and the medieval anchoritic tradition (*A Room of One’s Own*, p. 52).

identity and her body merge with that of the parish church.<sup>29</sup> Although it might not have been possible while active in the world, as a woman dead to the world she becomes spiritually alive to it and a productive part of the union of Christ with humanity. Just as her body was sealed within the physical boundaries of the parish church, so was her own soul inextricably bonded with the unified soul of the mystical Church of her 'evencristen', a particularly incarnational realization, of course. In Julian's fully developed theology she emulates that of St Paul in Ephesians 2:14–17:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in his flesh [...] that he might make the two in himself into one new man, making peace; And might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, killing the enmities in himself.<sup>30</sup>

The cross, for Julian, is as real as the wood of her anchorhold's door, locking her in the heart of humanity and locking humanity in her heart.

We have seen how Julian's anchoritic enclosure offered a new and privileged proximity to God which enabled her to warmly welcome humanity into her visionary space of 'intimate immensity'. With one foot in the grave, as it were, she is also one step closer to heaven, a blissful expanse that unfolded within her small cell. As Goscelin of St Bertin reminds his anchoress in his *Liber confortatorius*, 'Sed cella mea quam angusta est, dicas. At celi regia amplissima est' ('Yet my cell is so narrow, you may say. But how open is the kingdom of heaven!')<sup>31</sup> Now that God is Julian's sole authority figure, with even the parish priest locked outside in the shadow of the divine, she truly shares in the creative freedom envisioned by Woolf: 'Indeed my aunt's legacy unveiled the sky to me, and substituted for the large and imposing figure of a gentleman, which Milton recommended for my perpetual adoration, a view of the open sky'.<sup>32</sup> Woolf was supported by the reliable income of her aunt's legacy just as Julian was supported by her parish, so that both women could afford to step outside of their usual social obligations and inhabit a new space of productive self-sufficiency: for Woolf, the 'open sky' of writing as a woman, for Julian the 'open sky' of the kingdom of heaven.

The significance of this privileged view shared by Julian and elucidated by Woolf is brought into crisp relief when we turn to the challenging situations of other medieval visionary women such as St Bridget of Sweden and Margery Kempe, two holy women who did not have a room of their own like Julian's anchorhold.<sup>33</sup> If a holy woman dwelled not under the open sky of heaven but in the shadow of society day and night leading the unregulated life of the laity, did she seek enclosed private space with the divine within the interior of the

<sup>29</sup> Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses*, describes European anchoresses as 'recluses living in the heart of the community, whose identity all but merged with that of the parish church', p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Abbott also cites this passage in *Autobiography and Theology*, p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> Goscelin of St Bertin, *Liber confortatorius*, ed. C. H. Talbot, *Analecta monastica: Studia Anselmiana* xxxvii (Rome, 1955), p. 77 (my translation).

<sup>32</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> I explore this comparison between St. Bridget and Julian at greater length in my essay 'Creating Intimate Space with God' (see n. 5 above).

vision? How does this inverse connection between domestic space and visionary space displayed in Julian's life and writings exhibit itself in the writings of other visionary women? Margery Kempe embattled society at almost every turn of her busy life in the world. In her visionary realm, she develops an intensely intimate and individual relationship with Christ and the holy family, one that protects her from society with the strength of physical walls; Jesus says to her in a vision, 'Why art thou a-ferd whil I am wyth þe? I am as mythy to kepyn þe her in the felde as in þe strengest chirche in alle þis worlde'.<sup>34</sup> Like Margery, St Bridget of Sweden lived a life of struggle in the world; she, also, denies the wider Christian community a presence in her visionary world, so that in the vision it is only her and God. Christ tells her how her new allegorical 'house' with her bridegroom encloses them together alone, even with a lock that must have 'a kei to vndo it with, þe whilke sall be one hertli desire to be with God', so that they can achieve an intimate mutual indwelling wherein 'þe husband and þe wife – þat menes God and þe saule – alloneli sall have þis kei, þat God may haue fre entre to delite himselfe in þe virtuse of þe saule, and þe saule to com to God when it likes'.<sup>35</sup> Bridget concedes that this divine intimacy is reachable by each individual soul, but her visionary space never expands to accommodate the collective inclusion of 'all mankind that is to be saved' which is so highly developed by Julian.<sup>36</sup>

Julian's inclusive theology departs from the influential twelfth- and thirteenth-century anchoritic guidance texts that she would most likely have read, such as the anonymous *Ancrene Wisse* or Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum*; in these texts humanity is not a spiritual responsibility but rather a distraction outside a window whose curtains should be defensively drawn.<sup>37</sup> Margery Kempe's account of her meeting with Julian, who is depicted as an accessible, kind and patient advisor, more accurately reflects the fourteenth-century shift in anchoritic practice as promoted in Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, where he urges the anchoress to give audience to her visitors as if 'an angel of hevene wolde come and speke with thee [...], soo redi and so buxom be thou in wille for to speke with thyne even Cristene whanne he cometh to thee'.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, Julian's ready willingness to speak to her 'evenchristen' resulted in this surviving first-hand record of the experience of an anchoress – not via a

<sup>34</sup> Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS o.s. 212 (Oxford, 1940; repr. 1997), ch. 42, p. 101. Virginia Ragin has written a fascinating study on Margery and space: 'Real and Imaged Bodies in Architectural Space: The Setting for Margery Kempe's Book', in *Women's Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church*, ed. Sarah Stanbury and Virginia Chieffo Ragin (Albany, 2005), pp. 105–40.

<sup>35</sup> Bridget of Sweden, *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden*, ed. Roger Ellis. EETS o.s. 291 (London, 1987), p. 189 (26–38).

<sup>36</sup> It is important to remember that this type of analysis of visions in no way subjectively judges them 'good' or 'bad', or more importantly, negates the belief that these visions were sacred revelations sent by God.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, pp. 20–1 (Part Two) of *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 402, with variants from other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millett. EETS o.s. 325 (London, 2005); also pp. 4–5 (cap. 4) of *Aelred of Rievaulx's De Institutione Inclusarum*, ed. John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, EETS o.s. 287 (London 1984).

<sup>38</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ch. 18, pp. 42–3; Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo, 2000), Book 1, ch. 83, p. 124.

male mentor or a passing visitor – and *A Revelation of Love* clearly testifies to the potential for transformative, empowering rewards of a balanced anchoritic enclosure. We should listen to her voice echoing the space of the anchorhold. It might be difficult in today's world to understand the desire to be permanently 'imprisoned' in such a way, but it is helpful to remember that, at least for Julian, in that single cell flourished 'a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled'.<sup>39</sup> In exchange for Julian's enclosure, the reader in the world is invited to partake of the eternal heterotopia of the visionary text and its perfect, meticulous, loving enclosures with the divine.

<sup>39</sup> As Foucault identifies it, a 'heterotopia of compensation': 'Of Other Spaces', p. 27.