

The Julian Lecture 2017

Stories Heard Through Anchorhold Walls



Godelinde Gertrude Perk

^[1] **Stories Heard Through Anchorhold Walls**

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Godelinde Perk has gained a PhD in English Literature from Umeå University, Sweden and her dissertation is titled *Julian, God, and the Art of Storytelling*. She says: 'Telling stories allows Julian to find more inclusive and hopeful ways of thinking about God and humanity, while these stories remain appealing, powerful narratives, whose significance and events never end. It becomes clear that God and Julian's joint storytelling form part of Christ's continuous maternal care for each individual, and of Julian's concern for her evercristen reader. Ultimately, I illuminate how Julian's storytelling allows her to lovingly enclose God, her evencristen reader, and herself into the anchorhold of her story'.

Godelinde is working on a new Dutch translation of Julian's revelations.

We all have books that we like to revisit, and stories that intrigue and puzzle us. In *A Revelation of Love*, Julian's second text, we find Julian likewise returning to a story over and over again and trying to make sense of it for almost many years. That narrative is the parable of the Lord and Servant. Close-reading the story in 1393, she expands it substantially, discovering new narrative details, new events, and the conclusion. All of these narrative elements draw upon earlier themes and inform the subsequent theological discussions.

Today I will therefore examine how Julian's storytelling and theology interact. By considering the storytellers, characters and plot, I will delve into and unpack how the parable informs and transforms Julian's theology, and how it allows her to propose inclusive, life-affirming ways of thinking about God, herself and humanity. The parable, I suggest, shows Julian thinking through not only what story she wants Revelation to tell; in the parable, Julian also grapples with how to tell the story of her visionary experience and her reflections. Moreover, as Julian invites readers to position themselves in her shoes, claiming to speak 'in the persone of my evencristen' ['on behalf of all my fellow Christians'],¹ I also explore how she involves her readers in her storytelling, and how it can speak to Julian's fellow Christians past and present. Ultimately, since the parable underpins the motherhood meditation, I illuminate how Julian makes her storytelling the means for God's maternal care, that is, how it embodies its own theology in the lives of its audience.

But before exploring Julian's storytelling, let us first briefly look at the parable itself and its key role in *A Revelation of Love*. Not found in *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, Julian's earlier text, the parable occupies the longest chapter in Revelation and a shorter one, chapter 51 and 52, making it one of the most extensive additions. Described as ^[3]'the centre of a labyrinth, a sacred space in which

pathways meet and intersect',² it appears in the text after fourteen revelations, and precedes Julian's exposition of the two levels of the human soul and her celebration of Christ's motherhood. Revelation refers to this 'shewing' as an 'example', an *exemplum*, a brief narrative illustration or simile used in medieval sermons or religious texts to explain a point.³ It may help to think of an *exemplum* as analogous to the family anecdotes that modern preachers tell in sermons. In its first telling, as a revelation shown by God in 1373, the story is rather short: a Lord sends a Servant on an errand; the servant falls painfully into a dell or hollow, getting severely hurt. The Lord promises to reward the servant in spite of this fall, and with a greater reward than if he had not fallen.⁴ In its brevity and in its plot, the parable in these early stages resembles the other *exempla* in Revelation, which often also consist an interaction between a character higher in rank according to the late-medieval social hierarchy, and a character lower in rank, with the character higher in rank freely bestowing unexpected honour upon the other character.

The parable of the Lord and Servant, according to Julian, is given in answer to her confusion, doubt and emotional turmoil about a contradiction she perceives in her visions. The visions show that God does not attribute any blame to sinners and sees them as sinless; Julian, however, knows herself and fellow human beings to be sinners, deserving blame and anger. Often Julian is pictured as serene, but Revelation allows Julian to be severely distressed and confused by this tension. Fearing God's presence will disappear before an answer is given, she 'cries inwardly with all [her] might'.⁵ Already announced earlier as being a response from God to these doubts, the parable is meant to answer these questions about sin and judgement, just as a sermon illustration clarifies a complex theological concept.

[4] **Spinning a Heavenly Yarn**

This rhetorical and pastoral function of this parable brings us to the first narrative feature of the parable to which I would like to draw your attention: its storytellers, and in particular, the importance of the interplay between God's storytelling and Julian's. I would like to argue that in the parable we see Julian testing and refining her earlier idea of God as ultimate agent, the 'doer', as she calls Him, behind all things. What can be noticed from the parable, which hints at that thinking through, is that this story requires Julian's narrative contribution to reveal its pivotal point and its conclusion, and consequently to fulfil its purpose. Naturally, the entire text is narrated by Julian, writing sometime in the beginning of the fifteenth century; however, in these chapters, visionary Julian, a character within the text, contributes noticeably to the narrative recounted by God.

In its first telling, as a vision in 1373, this exemplum confounds both genre expectations and the expectations raised earlier by the text itself. In spite of being classified as an illustrative story, it does not clarify, like its contemporary readers would have expected an exemplum to do. Nor does it like Julian promised a few chapters earlier- resolve the perplexing and anxiety-causing conundrum. Shown 'full mistily', 'in a mysterious, veiled way,'⁶ the exemplum only increases Julian's confusion, in spite of being intended to diminish it:

[T]he marveyling of the example went never fro me, for methoght it was geven for anwere to my desyer. And yet culde I not take therein full understanding to my ees in that time.

[[M]y feeling of puzzlement at the parable never left me; for it seemed to me that had been given to me as an answer to what I yearned to know, and yet at that time I could not fully

*understand yet to my satisfaction.]*⁷

The parable, then, does not yet fulfil its purpose as an exemplum or a divine act of communication and comfort. For that, Julian's own narrating is required. Only in 1393 does she receive 'inward teaching',^[5] hermeneutic instructions with which to close-read the parable; she then creates her own interpretative apparatus, consisting of a list of questions, concerning how the Lord sits, the Servant stands and so on.⁸ Equipped with these, she expands the initial narrative by means of a blend of close-reading and story-telling that far surpasses an account of mental re-seeing, until it is almost six times the original size. In this manner, Julian co-narrates with God.

The details and events created in this manner help her in her quest for greater understanding. For instance, the Servant's standing close and to the left of the Lord lets her tease out of the parable the pivotal, transformative perception that the Servant signifies not only Adam but also Christ. Similarly, by co-narrating, she provides the tale with its promised grand finale, namely, the Lord honouring and rewarding the Servant, a happy end which the initial version lacks. I will return to these two elements shortly. For now, it suffices to note that they contribute significantly to the resolution, and that contemporary readers would have considered these two elements narratively important. That key insight and those final scenes would have been called the 'knotte', the gist or the conclusion;⁹ in the *Canterbury Tales*, the 'knotte' makes the tale worth telling, and causes it to exert an emotional pull.¹⁰ By enhancing the narrative appeal of the parable in this manner, Julian enlists her readers' help in her solving of the puzzle of the parable.

Both co-narrated expansions, moreover, allow the parable to achieve its purpose. Interpreting the Servant as Adam and Christ, Julian

grasps that, as she writes: 'oure fader may nor will no mare blame assigne to us than to his owne, derwurthy son, Jhesu Crist.' ['Our Father cannot attribute any more blame to us than to his own son, beloved Christ.']¹¹ Having given the parable its final, heavenly scenes, she concludes that every soul possesses a 'godly will' incapable of intending evil, which dwells in Christ and by which these souls are ^[6]connected to Christ.¹² In 1393, presumably, Julian's spiritual and cognitive anguish finally diminishes as a result, to a more or less satisfying degree. When relating this, however, she underlines that the parable was a collaborative venture: 'And it this I have now saide was my desyer in perty answered, and my gret fere somedele esed, by the lovely, gracious shewing of oure lorde God.' ['And in what I have just said, my wish was partly answered, and my great anxiety was somewhat eased by the loving gracious revelation of our good Lord.']¹³ By crediting God for the 'shewing', a term which she uses elsewhere in its sense of 'account',¹⁴ she collapses all her retellings and her effort into God's act of storytelling. According to Julian, then, God tells in her and through her. Yet, as implied by the parable not yet succeeding in comforting Julian in 1373, only when Julian attends closely to her own storytelling, and recognizes its sacramental quality, does the collaborative work of art speak.

The parable draws not only Julian, but also the reader into this collaborative storytelling. To use one of Julian's favourite verbs, it enfolds the reader in its narrating, revealing that *Revelation*, according to Julian, is co-narrated by God, herself and her fellow Christians. I have already mentioned her claim about speaking on the evencristen's behalf, in addition, she trusts her reader to continue completing Revelation in unity with her: 'This boke is... not yet performed, as to my sight. For charite we pray together, with Goddes werking. (Rev. 86. 1-3) [This book is not yet completed, as I see it. With God working within us, let us all pray to God for charity.]¹⁵

However, Revelation does not only describe this co-narratorial model; it also lets the parable effect, embody this model by means of its form, in the following manner. The parable both builds upon and implodes the earlier exempla, in which lords and kings likewise give surprise friends and servants with rewards and honors.¹⁶ Moreover, afterwards, in chapters following the parable, Julian repeatedly returns to the parable. She for instance presents Christ as ^[7]standing all alone, an image reminiscent of that of the Servant thinking himself all alone when fallen.¹⁷ In this way, Julian primes the reader to act like her and to keep revisiting and expanding the parable, thereby developing the story further. The text itself places us in Julian's shoes, making us complete the story along with her. The parable enfolds us in its storytelling. In this way, Julian makes storytelling sacramental: her words and the audience's words participate in the Divine Word.

A Storytelling Partnership

Turning to Julian's theology, the co-narrating in the Parable inspires a new strand of thought in her understanding of God's presence in our (non-sinful) everyday actions. This strand is an even greater emphasis on the believer's awareness of this 'partnership', as she calls it. Naturally, already in Vision, and already before the Parable, Julian is deeply committed to stressing God's providential guidance and protection, perceiving Him as the true agent behind all events who concerns Himself with even the most animal aspects of human life.¹⁸ (Sins are non-events, according to Julian.)¹⁹ Likewise, in her reflection on prayer, Julian stresses God wants to make us his 'pertenner of his good wille and dede' 'partners in his good will and work.'²⁰

In the Motherhood meditation, found after the Parable, we find an understanding of sacramentality that is equally bodily as in the earlier reflections; yet it also attends more to the human participants and the human contribution than earlier reflections did:

For though it be so that oure bodely forthbringing be but little, lowe, and simple in regard of oure gostely forthbringing, yet it is he that doth it in the creatures by whom that it is done [...] This werking, with all that be fair and good, oure lord doth it in hem by whome it is done.

^[8]*Although the birth of our body may be only humble, lowly and simple in comparison with the birth of our soul, yet it is He that does it in the created beings by whom it is done [...] Such [parenting] actions with all that is fair and good, our Lord performs through those by whom they are done.²¹*

Julian's earlier interpretation of all actions as sacramental has become more specific and more interested in the unique actions and all participants. Similarly, when outlining why some believers for their own benefit need to fall into sin, she underlines that this fall needs to be recognized, in order to perceive both in the afterlife that Christ protects and loves the believer throughout.

The co-narrating in the parable, I suggest, prepares the reader to accept this new dimension in Julian's bold conceptualization of providence and sacramentality, inviting them to read it in the light of this joint storytelling. Julian's anguish before the parable being referred to as mental 'travel', 'suffering' but also 'the pains of childbirth', likewise points towards such priming.²² The text parallels how Christ's giving birth to human beings through human beings, and his giving birth to the divine words of the text by means of

Julian's storytelling labour. According to Julian, God is always acting in and through us, whether we pay heed to this or not. Like Julian also claims of prayer, God does not need our active involvement; we ourselves need it, for our own spiritual and emotional benefit. Only when seeing each good action as a partnership between God and us, an active participating in God's acting, does that action realize its full potential. That is, it then reveals itself to be one of the many ways by which mother Christ cares for us. To put it in storytelling terms, retelling the stories of our life to God opens our eyes to Christ's presence in our story.

[9] **A Personification of God's Perspective**

The parable of the Lord and Servant can tell us even more about the interaction between Julian's storytelling and her theology; with Julian's portrayal of Christ as a mother, we arrive at the topic of characters, and thereby to the characters in the parable, the second narrative feature I would like to look at today. Here I would like to claim that the character of the Servant personifies Julian's developing her understanding of human twofold nature. The Servant also embodies the resulting insight that human twofold nature images and originates from mother Christ, and forms both a reminder of and an opportunity of his care. Before turning to this interplay between the characterization in the Parable and Julian's theology, I should stress the following: although Julian does talk of the human soul as having 'a lower part' and a 'higher part', she is no dualist opposing body and soul. She does not equate these two parts with the body and the soul; moreover, in Revelation descriptions of activity of the soul always have physical overtones.²³

In the parable, Julian harnesses the Servant's character-ness, that is, his infinite potential for change and for uniting in him many material and mental characteristics, even contradictory ones. This openness allows for trying out multiple perspectives on God and humanity. At first, the servant represents Adam and Julian, an interpretation founded on how the Lord gazes at the Servant. Yet, when studying the Servant, Julian also notices 'many diverse properteys that might by no manner be derecte to singel Adam' ['many different characteristics could not be attributed to Adam alone].²⁴ These puzzling differences between Adam and the Servant prevent her from satisfactorily understanding the parable.²⁵ Nevertheless, when retelling and expanding the parable, she adds such characteristics. Instead of forming hermeneutic obstacles, they begin to brim over with narrative and theological significance. Doubling perspectives, levels of the vision, and characters, she provides her portrait of the slightly Adamic servant with even greater puzzling ^[10]tension and contradiction. Over the course of these retellings, these details begin to point towards the Servant signifying both Christ and Adam, as Nicholas Watson and Jaqueline Jenkins also recognize.²⁶ The phrase 'the wisdom of the servant', for instance, invites such an identification.²⁷ Similarly, the servant's short tunic 'a hand breadth below the knee' evokes the knee-length loin cloth worn by crucified Christ in a number of contemporary illuminated psalters'.²⁸

Here, *Revelation* not only engages its readers in its storytelling by puzzling them by means of the slightly contradictory and un-Adamic traits. The servant also differs confusingly from those in the previous exempla, who can all be easily recognized as representing humanity. Moreover, the lack of essentializing value judgement about the Servant's twofold traits and absence of symbolic gendering thereof would also likely have surprised contemporary readers. (So would the fact that Eve and the snake are nowhere to be found, of course.)

Many contemporary texts distrust characters that are 'double' in the sense of being twofold. In the fifteenth-century morality play *Mankind*, the titular character introduces himself with 'my name ys Mankynde/ I have my composycyon/Of a body and a soul, of condycyon contrarye' ['my name is Mankind/I have my composition/ of a body and a soul, of condition contrarious'.²⁹ Note that being twofold here implies a dualist conflict between body and soul. What is more, misogynistic works often ascribe doubleness in the sense of twofoldness and changeability to women, criticizing them for being double by nature and making them a sign of instability and mutability.³⁰ Resisting such thinking, *Revelation* ^[11] does not imply any division or conflict between the Servant's twofold characteristics, consequently baffling its reader to the same degree as the story baffles Julian. The reader consequently is turned into a character as well.³¹

Julian then turns her attention and interest in splitting off and uniting to the two-ness around which the parable revolves: the Lord and Servant themselves. The existence of the Servant in general puzzles her, but now this puzzling dividedness opens up unto a crucial, new identity for the Servant: Julian now includes Christ Incarnate in the Servant as well, making Fall and Incarnation a single event; according to Julian, from God's omnitemporal point-of-view, Adam's Fall and Christ's Incarnation happen simultaneously.

The character-ness of the Servant is crucial here: the identification of the Servant with Christ hinges upon characters' bodiliness and their ability to exceed models imposed on them. Being anthropomorphic constructs, they can be encompassing more elements than any abstract concept ever can. The Parable starts out as being shown double, one mode of which is 'gostly in bodily liknesse' ['spiritually but in bodily form'].³² As a result of the Lord and Servant displaying

'bodily form', Julian can mentally walk around her creations at leisure, seeing how they are positioned in relation to one another and discovering new details. The set of questions, moreover, which Julian announces she will examine the parable with, merely provides a first impulse for this investigation. Many of the details with which she enthusiastically fleshes out the characters are in fact not related to this list of topics, but rather organically developed from other characteristics.

The moment in the middle of the Parable, in which Julian perceives that the Servant comprehends Adam and Christ is central to Julian's storytelling and theology. I therefore would like to spend a few ^[12]minutes unpacking this scene. Having stated that all entities in her storyworld ultimately originate from the lord, Julian wonders where the Servant has come from. This question in turn affects her comprehension of the parable as a whole. Her description of her lack of understanding parallels the earlier moments before the parable and after its first appearance in 1373. Unlike in those, however, this wondering is prompted by the details with which she herself has enriched the initial anecdote-like tale. These details are the romance-like scenes of the Servant's quest for a treasure and of his gardening, Julian's co-narrating, in other words, contributes as much to her puzzlement as God's does.

At this point in the text, one of the most striking instances can be seen of Julian blurring boundaries between storytelling and interpretation, narrative and theology, and between tenor and vehicle. Within her narrative, within her storyworld, the Lord forms the only logically possible origin for the Servant, which adds yet one more trait to his character evocative of Christ. The allusions to incarnate Christ have now amassed enough hermeneutic significance to bring the narrative to the brink of a breakthrough. In that key

moment, this paradigm shift, Julian at once turns the Servant into a figure of Incarnate Christ makes the Servant originate from the Lord: she simultaneously provides an analysis and develops her narrative, and then interprets and expands each in the light of the other. The identification of the Servant with incarnate Christ contributes to her portrait of the Servant, but also to her understanding of incarnate Christ. Theology and narrative intertwine and cannot be prised apart, a poetics which is uniquely Julian.

The Spitting Image of Mother Christ

This pivotal insight, prompted by her own creative engagement, has important implications for her theology, in particular for her characterization of humanity: by fleshing out the character of the servant in such a manner allowing for several identities and shifting perspectives, she transforms her earlier conceptualization of human twofold nature and its relation to God into a more affirmative and ^[13]sacramental understanding. Characterizing the Servant differently, she also characterizes all of humanity differently.

In chapters preceding the parable, Julian distinguishes a 'godly will' and an 'animal will' in the human soul.³⁴ The godly will only wills good and never assents to sin, but the animal will, as Patricia Dailey reads this passage, 'may, if it chooses, distance itself from the good.'³⁵ Julian also speaks of the soul as being like God in substance, that is, in its essence, but unlike God in condition through sin.³⁶ In essence, humanity resembles God, but in practice, in their fallen, twofold state, they are tragically unlike Him and divided from Him.

The parable, in contrast, constructs a new model, in which humanity in its entirety, in its dividedness is united in Christ:

And therefore whan I sey 'the sonne' it meneth the godhed, which is even with the fader; and whan I say 'the servant' it meneth Christes manhode, which is rightful Adam. By the nerehed of the servant is understand the sonne, and by the stonding on the left side is understond Adam. The lorde is God the father; the servant is the sonne Jesus Christ [...] Forthe rightful oning which was made in heven, Goddes sonne might not be separateth from Adam, for by Adam I understond all man.

Therefore when I say, 'the Son', it means the Godhead, which is equal with the Father, and when I say, 'the servant', it means Christ's humanity, which is truly Adam. By the nearness of the servant is understood the Son, and by the standing on the left side is understood Adam. [...] because of the true union which was made in heaven, God's son could not be apart from Adam, for by Adam I understand all humanity.³⁷

Julian first distinguishes Christ's divine nature and human nature, then unites them in the servant. The 'oning', as she would call it, seems ^[14]inspired by how-being a character - the Servant unites in him two 'characteristics', the standing on the left and the proximity. Moreover, collapsing her earlier observations about Adam-as-humanity into Christ's humanity, she makes fallen humanity inseparable from Christ fallen into Incarnation. That is, she includes humanity in Christ's hypostatic union. By doing so, the sinful human condition and the animal will also are included in that union. Just as the Lord sees only a single Servant, God perceives incarnate Christ in our humanity and Christ's fall into the Incarnation in our fall into Sin.

Such a divine perception would indeed preclude God attributing to us any blame, as Julian confidently articulates.

What is more, reading this in the light of the preceding parable scenes, Julian ascribes to God two perspectives on humanity, or two characterizations of humanity. In both, he sees us as sinless. Earlier in the parable, Julian emphasizes that the Lord continues to look approvingly on the fallen Servant, because he observes the Servant's good will, which is 'kept whole in God's sight' ['preserved intact in the sight of God'].³⁸ This resonates with the earlier description of humanity resembling God in their substance: God recognizes Himself in each human being. The second perspective is the one Julian sketches in the passage just cited: God recognizes Christ in each human being.

Revising her pre-parable assertions about the human soul, Julian then, in her discussion of the substance and the sensuality creates an original anthropology, which theorizes the Lord and the Servant.³⁹ Julian distinguishes two parts or levels in the human soul, 'substance', our human essence, and 'sensuality', our sensory being or our being in time and space, with all embodied and mental experiences that entails; it is a concept remarkably similar to today's concept of 'embodied consciousness'. Though other texts in her time use these terms to posit a body-soul dualism, Julian resists this, giving both 'substance' and 'sensuality' material and bodily overtones. According to Julian, the substance originates from God and dwells in God, and is only capable of good. The sensuality comes into being once the soul is breathed into the body; God dwells and also looks after in the sensuality.⁴⁰ Sinful actions take place in the sensuality only, which can choose to sin; sins, ^[15] moreover, harm the sensuality only.⁴¹ When now looking at the parable once more, we

can see that the Lord represents the substance, and the Servant the mixture of substance and sensuality that constitutes the human soul.

Turning back to the model, according to Julian, both substance and sensuality benefit from the Incarnation and are sites for God's mothering. First, human nature, in its doubleness, was created for Christ to take on.⁴² Secondly, one of the main achievements of Christ in the Incarnation is that he united substance and sensuality; Christ also continues to hold the human substance and sensuality together.⁴³ God the Trinity looks after the substance, and Christ after the sensuality.⁴⁴ Revelation creates, I suggest, a double Imago Dei, in other words, we are made doubly in mother God's likeness: in our substance, we resemble mother God the Trinity, in our mixture of substance and sensuality we are the spitting image of mother Christ.

This unique conceptualization of the mutual indwelling of the soul and God daringly turns human dividedness and the Fall into a signifier of humanity's resemblance to God, of proximity instead of distance.⁴⁵ Earlier in *Revelation*, in the Julianic assertions already cited, human twofold nature implies a falling off from the original Divine Image; Julian's contemporaries likewise would have thought of the Fall as the Divine Image falling.⁴⁶ Over the course over the parable, in contrast, Adam's Fall and our own fall are metamorphosed into a likeness in which we resemble Christ to the full. The tension we experience between who we know God made us to be and the clumsy sinner we daily experience ourselves to be does not deface the Divine Image, the family resemblance between humanity and God: it reveals it. Accordingly, it is when we struggle, doubt, worry or feel far from God^[16] that we actually are closest to Him, just as the Lord is very close to the Servant when the latter has fallen. The puzzlement or confusion the parable inspires in the reader becomes, in retrospect, a mark of Christ's presence in the reading

process, inviting readers to see similar tensions or disappointments in their co-narrating of Revelation or life similarly as reminders of their family resemblance to Christ.

In terms of her motherhood theology, this portrait of the servant makes Julian alive to the narrative and salvific possibilities of the Fall and of human sensuality, and to the many opportunities these provide for Christ's mothering. The parable thus marks the beginning of her fascination with Christ's role as our sensual mother. The story of the Lord and Servant opens Julian's eyes to the fact that it is in human sensuality, in time and space, that the changes that place that make our fall into something felicitous.

Having revisited the Servant's Fall repeatedly in the parable, she also gives some scenes with mother Christ and the human Child resonances of it. In these later scenes, she is similarly intrigued by how the human character responds to his or her falling, and how he or she is comforted: 'When we fall, hastely he raiseth us by his lovely beclepinge and by his gracious touching.' If we fall, he quickly raises us up by lovingly calling us and touching us with grace.'⁴⁷ These scenes are likewise redolent of romance literature, but also of the earlier chapters of the motherhood meditation. In fact, she perceives the fallen state as most beneficial. Crafting one of her characteristic paradoxes, she writes 'I understode none higher stature in this life than childehode in febilnesse and failing of might and witte.' ['I understood that in this life we never reach any higher state than childhood, in our weakness and deficiency of strength and understanding.]⁴⁸ The child's weakness and failure of strength recall those of the servant; however, the Servant and his Fall have been overwritten with a child and childhood, a revision which demonstrates her fascination with how Christ cares for humanity in their everyday life, that is, in their sensuality.

In these scenes, she also skillfully intertwines the Servant's Fall and her understanding of the sacramental partnership between God and humanity which I discussed earlier. While stressing that Christ eternally ^[17]prevents believers from damnation, she declares 'it nedeth us to fall, and it nedeth us to see it.' ['We need to fall, and we need to see this.⁴⁹ The phrasing strongly resonates with her earlier account of prayer, and by extension her claim about Christ co-parenting and co-birthing 'in the created beings by whom it is done',⁵⁰ Falling, praying, parenting all turn out to be ultimately performed by Christ, who keeps us safe and heals us by means of them.

To Julian's mind, then, when we struggle, it is Christ who struggles in and through us. When we fall, Christ falls, and He is there to catch us. However, we need to attend closely to His participating in our lives to experience His comforting to the full. Like Julian's storytelling, Christ's salvific storytelling, his mothering, takes place in the sensuality. Only in time and space, and therefore inevitably falling, changing and feeling ourselves to be different from God, can we experience Christ's maternal care. The child in the motherhood meditation recounts it fall to the mother. Similarly, telling our doubts, struggles and sins to Christ, our stories of our fall, helps us perceive how he, to adapt a phrase from Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'mothers-forth' us and our lives.⁵¹

An Endless Story Without Beginning

The third and final narrative element I would like to consider is the plot of the parable. The parable, I suggest, helps Julian explore even further the implications of Christ's promise that 'Sin is behovely, but

all shalle be wele, alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thinge shall be well.' ['Sin is befitting, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.]⁵² She has already thought through this locution earlier and seen a vision of the great act that will make all well; she now turns her attention to what narrative logic governs the making all well in each life and in salvation history. Simply put, she wonders what story 'behovely' and 'shall' imply. The parable also shows Julian narrativizing God's leading of all events in this 'behovely' manner, and ^[18]in the process, both figuring and figuring out how He guides al even and to what conclusion.

Before exploring this, I would like to make a brief lexical comment about 'all shall be well'. Unlike the modern English 'shall', Middle English 'shalle' not only denotes futurity but also, and in fact more primarily so, necessity and obligation.⁵³ Alexandra Barratt helpfully translates 'all shall be well' as 'all things must, inevitably, come to good.'⁵⁴ God's making all well already has a quite a strong hint of the behovely about it.

What can be seen in the parable, is that Julian turns the servant's fall and his being comforted and rewarded into behovely events: they become, like sin and the making all well, events that are appropriate and befitting. The parable, to begin with, expressly invites a reading of the reward as behovely, making explicit the undertones of behovely it already possessed as an act of making all well: a particular lexical item in the parable itself resonates with Julian's earlier reflections. Having heard the Lord declare he will reward the servant for his Fall and suffering, Julian is granted a glimpse of the Lord's thinking, perceiving that the Servant being rewarded more than if he had not fallen, is 'what behoveth nedes be' ['[what] must needs be'].⁵⁵ The verb 'behoveth', 'to need, to be necessary'⁵⁶ of course immediately brings to mind Julian's most celebrated words.

There we find the adjectival form 'behovely', which denotes 'fitting, appropriate', 'requisite, necessary', but even 'beneficial'.⁵⁷ Denys Turner, in his book-length exploration of Julian's theology, understands the term 'behovely' to mean 'narrative fittingness'; the term, he argues, sums up how at the end of a narrative, in retrospect, all events seem fitting yet neither random nor necessary.

[19] He explains 'For even if everything in a narrative could have, logically, been otherwise, when we say of what does happen that its happening was behovely, it is because it was just right that it should happen so, and not otherwise, as if with a kind of narrative necessity.'⁵⁸ Applying this literary understanding back to the parable, 'behoveth' implies the narrative needs the servant to be rewarded instead of blamed; otherwise all events would not fit.⁵⁹

The parable does not only describe the reward as behovely, it also provides this event and the fall with such narrative necessity. The parable can therefore be read as dramatizing its own narrative understanding of providence. The servant's fall, in the first place, is both expected and unexpected. The parable is reminiscent of the earlier exempla, in which the characters signifying humanity experience a positive change, what Geoffrey Chaucer would call a change from 'wo to wele', from misery to well-being.⁶⁰ In these, the characters representing God showers the characters representing humanity with honour, gifts and love, leading to greater socio-economic and emotional well-being. Only in one of the narratives, that summing up the life of local saint St. John of Beverley, does the character experience a change from 'wele to wo' a fall into sin.⁶¹ When we encounter the parable for the first time, then, we do not yet know whether the servant will fall or not. After the Lord's generous promise, however, the Servant's fall seems befitting. By repeatedly retelling this sequence of events, Julian invites the reader

to continuously perceive the Servant's fall with the knowledge gained earlier, already looking at it from the conclusion: she thereby highlights its behoveliness.

The reward is also made behovely, but by means of a different storytelling strategy. After the Lord has announced his future recompensing of the Servant, the vision of the parable ends: 'And at ^[20]this point the shewing of the example vanished.'⁶² Unlike in the previous exempla, the rewarding is not shown, turning the final scene in the first telling into the penultimate one. The earlier exempla and the Lord's gracious promise all point toward a chance of this event happening in the storyworld future; it is not wholly contingent. Yet, since the story does not narrate this event, the reader does not know whether it will occur and whether it will actually form the conclusion of this tale: it is not logically necessary. Rather, it is behovely. Puzzled by the tale's incomplete peroration, the reader aches as much for the moment when the Lord comforts and rewards the Servant as Julian, the Servant and the Lord do; once more the story turns the readers into characters, wrapping itself around them.

Julian's subsequent re-tellings of the tale, moreover, do not include this announced event either. For the largest part of the chapter, she re-narrates and expands the story up to the Lord's words, making the narrative resemble a jigsaw puzzle that to the frustration of the person solving it - misses several crucial pieces in the middle that will reveal the gorgeous image promised on the box. Formally mirroring its first telling with its promise from the Lord, the many-layered Parable fortunately does finally conclude with a scene that depicts the Servant as Christ, or vice versa, being honoured beyond the reader's expectations.⁶³ The behoveliness we suspected all along is thus confirmed, and the completed narrative in which both central events, the servant's fall and the reward, fit. Thus, by means of its

narrativity, the parable constructs the behoveliness that itself ascribes to these events and dramatizes the behoveliness of sin and all being made well.

That longed-for final moment of the Parable, however, is revealed to be remarkably similar to its first moments. The Servant stands before the Lord once more. Similarly, like in the opening narration, the present tense is used, an omnitemporal contemporaneity intensified by the recurrent use of 'now', which conflates the reader's time and that of the parable. As if it were a fairytale, Julian has led the parable full circle back to its beginning.

The transformative reward, furthermore, also turns out to be the Servant's re-union with the Lord, an insight that provides Julian's ^[21]theology with a new theme: God makes all well not only by keeping all even cristen safe in the present, but also by ultimately uniting all within him once more, marking a new beginning. This eschatology is already prefigured in the vision of Christ's side wound, which will enclose in the future 'alle mankind that shalle be saved to rest in pees and love' ['all mankind that will be saved to rest there in peace and in love.']⁶⁴ The servant's return opens the way for a conceptualization of the end of time that is characteristically Julian. Julian fittingly concludes her Motherhood meditation by asserting that, now and in the end, all will return to and into mother God, 'Thus I understode that all his blessed children which be come out of him by kinde, shall be brought again into him by peace.' ['And so I understood that all his blessed children who have come forth from him by nature shall be brought back within him by grace.']⁶⁵ Just as Julian leads the reader back to where the parable began, Christ leads humanity back to where they themselves began.

To conclude, I will turn to the concluding scenes of *Revelation*, which in fact only reveal its startling endlessness and 'beginninglessness'. Not only the parable, but the whole of *Revelation* envelops the reader in this leading through behovely events to a new infinite beginning. In this way, it formally images God's ordering and arranging of events as unpacked by Julian earlier, in Boethius-like meditation on divine providence, growing out the vision of God in a point.⁶⁶ There, she posits that from God's omnitemporal perspective, in salvation history and each human life there is no 'aventure', chance or accident.⁶⁷ The term 'aventure' also indicates an unpredictable narrative without causal linkage.⁶⁸ God guides all events to the pre-ordained end, making them all happen in the pre-ordained 'properte and order', manner and order; 'properte', feature, is also used to refer to the parable details.⁶⁹ 'From God's perspective, then, human history is a narrative with a meaningful ^[22]plot; to Julian, it is analogous to the parable and by extension to her text in general.

When turning to the form of *Revelation*, we can see that unlike the earlier Julian's text, *Revelation*, does not recount the visions in chronological order, just as the parable does not show the promised conclusion immediately. Instead, the vision with which the text ends is not Julian's last vision. *Revelation* itself carefully dates the revelations and points out the passing of time between the first showing of the parable and the instructions, and between the 1373 revelations and the revelation of their meaning. Contemporary readers moreover must have noticed that the visions are not told in chronological order: the rubric to chapter 51, probably written by a scribe, states that 'And God will be abidyn. For it was nere twente yeres after, ere she fully understode this example.' ['God wishes to be waited to for, because it was nearly twenty years later before she fully understood the parable.']⁷⁰ Highlighting its own arranging of events, it makes an expression of love its final event. Julian's work,

then, mirrors salvation history, which Julian calls 'all [Godes] workes', a term which also in her time could refer to a literary composition.⁷¹ God's narrative, after all also ends in love, according to the vision of the miraculous action which will make all well, a vision only found in *Revelation*. When co-narrating or reading *Revelation*, then, the reader experiences the guiding of all events towards the love of which *Revelation* tells: *Revelation* incarnates its own theology and visions.

However, Julian is more interested in beginnings and in beginninglessness than endings, inviting us to endlessly re-read and re-tell her text, and to allow ourselves to be enfolded by it. The chronologically last vision, the instruction to study the parable again, generates a whole new perspective on the earlier visions. Both the parable, and the motherhood meditation which it underpins, cross-reference the earlier revelation. One passage in the Motherhood meditation, for instance, sends the reader back to the first Revelation [23] and then forward to the sixteenth Revelation.⁷² It thereby wraps the reader in the matter of the text and in the Divine Word, the text becoming the means for Christ's enfolding humanity in himself. *Revelation* thus effects the holding oneself within God's love recommended in its last chapter.⁷³

To a modern reader, such enclosing may seem somewhat claustrophobic. However, Julian's storytelling and her understanding thereof are rather like the hazelnut in the first Revelation.⁷⁴ With each re-telling, with each close investigation of a detail, Julian and the reader uncover a new event, detail, or complete narrative that runs over with significance. I have always thought Julian's understanding of what texts and stories do reminiscent of Mr. Tumnus's description of Aslan's country in *The Last Battle*: 'the further up, and further in you go, the bigger everything gets. The inside is larger than the

outside.⁷⁵ Our stories, then, are not fragments; they are like the hazelnut, small but fully formed and containing a far larger world, or like smaller circle containing a bigger circle. According to Julian, our storytelling participates in God's storytelling, with our narrating foreshadowing God's ultimate narrating at the end of time, which of course is not a conclusion at all, but the moment we, in Julian's words, see God, who is 'the love wherein he made us...in which love we have our beginning'.⁷⁶

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32. Rev: 51.4; *Revelations of Divine Love*. p. 106.
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 37. Rev: 51. 178-182, 185-187; *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 112.
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 42. Rev: 58. 3. *Revelations of Divine Love*.
 43. Rev: 57. 14-21; 58. 1-14. *Revelations of Divine Love*.
 44. Rev: 61. 8, 9, *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 132
 45. The theme of mutual indwelling in itself is quite common in medieval mystical texts; Julian's uniqueness lies in her Trinitarian development of this theme and its incorporation in her Motherhood theology and Neoplatonic understanding of Creation.
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lecture, and Charley Roc of Leeds University, for alerting me to the contingency of the parable details.

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