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Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, and Joan of Arc:  
Medieval Perspectives on Gender and Authority

Presented to the faculty of Lycoming College in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for Departmental Honors in English

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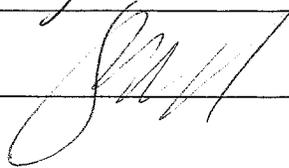
April 25, 2014

Approved by:









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I. Introduction

Exploring the interplay between gender and authority in the later medieval period is essential to understanding medieval individuals who appropriated aspects of the opposite gender. After outlining the medieval conceptions of gender and how masculine and feminine identities were created, a deeper review of medieval mysticism (a mainly feminine phenomenon) and medieval warfare (a mainly masculine phenomenon) will demonstrate how these ideas of gender were enacted and continued to evolve in everyday life. Gender roles were not static, as the chronological progression of monasticism and medieval mysticism, as well as the ideals of warfare, clearly illustrate. Authority was traditionally linked with masculinity, but women also created their own authoritative positions while still operating within the masculine paradigm. During the later medieval period, the fourteenth through the fifteenth centuries, men and women sometimes appropriated gender roles of the opposite sex in order to increase their authority with varying levels of success, as demonstrated by Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, and Joan of Arc.

II. Masculine Identities

The definitions of masculinity and femininity in the medieval period vary greatly from modern conceptions of gender. Indeed, gender as a social construct was not a consideration; even in Julian of Norwich's seemingly pro-women works, "gender roles were not, after all her [Julian's] primary concern" (Watson 33). Women considered themselves nuns first, then women – their femininity was an incidental part of their

identity, subsumed by their connection to a collective monastic identity (Johnson 229). Since the modern focus on gender inequality simply did not exist, the perceived differences between men and women were considered inherent. After all, human equality only existed before God in the medieval period (Karras, *Boys to Men* 8). Standard norms for men and women did exist, but men and women were not necessarily defined in opposition to each other. For instance, in some masculine circles, women simply did not influence the creation of a man's masculinity in a major way (Karras, *Boys to Men* 67). Still, gender was complex; not only did deviance from societal expectations of gender roles occur (Coon 467), but manhood and womanhood was defined differently in various contexts (Karras, *Boys to Men* 2). Gender norms existed within these contexts, creating an opportunity for deviance. Views of gender in the medieval period lacked modern convictions of gender equality, leading to distinctly medieval perceptions of masculinity that can be evaluated in three different contexts: the university, the knightly court, and the craftsmen's workshop.

Masculinity was defined as "proving oneself superior to other men" (Karras, *Boys to Men* 10). Women's involvement in this picture "received greater or lesser emphasis" (Karras, *Boys to Men* 11) depending on women's presence within the masculine world. Although anxiety over womanizing tendencies often causes scholars to focus on defining men as the *opposite* of women, the formation of a masculine identity proved to be much more complicated. Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon is the medieval scholar, as "he proved his manhood by his rationality, which distinguished him not only from women but also from beasts" (Karras, *Boys to Men* 67). Although medieval scholars were aware of women and took advantage of prostitutes (Karras, *Boys to Men* 80), women as

social equals simply were not present within the academic sphere. Within the intensely male world of the university, “even questions about feminine sexuality were turned into questions not about women themselves but about the nature of the divine” (Karras, *Boys to Men* 88), demonstrating a blatant disregard for women’s influence. Therefore, masculine identity in medieval universities did not focus on men in opposition to women, but rather on how one man measured up against another man.

Abelard’s castration graphically depicts this masculine dominance over the irrationality of human nature and other men, as well as the masculine expectation of dominance over women. Although our modern perception of gender often involves the physical nature of masculinity, Abelard’s writings demonstrate that medieval masculinity was far from simply physical; instead, the performance of intellect created masculinity (Irvine 102). Indeed, in fifteenth and sixteenth century *la querelle des femmes* (in defense of women) literature, comparing a woman to a man implied “parity of reason and intellect” (Swift 187). Furthermore, academic disputations were couched in terms of masculine combat (Karras, *Boys to Men* 90). Abelard’s case is particularly striking, however, because of his obvious concern over being feminized due to his lack of physical manliness: “How could I show my face in public [to fellow scholars and philosophers]?” (Abelard, *Letter* 47). This threat is clear, as medieval people assumed that circumcision in Jewish and Islamic men resulted in “a loss of virile sexual energy” (Kruger 22). However, Abelard’s reasoning skills were unparalleled, especially in his defense of his own manliness. In joining the monastery at St. Denis to use “the talent entrusted to me by God” through becoming “a true philosopher not of the world but of God” (Abelard, *Letter* 51), Abelard demonstrated his masculine authority and restored his virile

reputation: “every day before the Council sat, I spoke in public on the Catholic faith in accordance with what I had written, and all who heard me were full of praise both for my presentation and for my interpretation” (Abelard, *Letter* 59). Abelard was sometimes criticized by his fellow monks for retaining a secular perspective in his monastic writings (Abelard, *Letter* 53), as evident from his *Scito Teipsum* (*Ethics*, or *Know Thyself*), in which he discussed sexual temptation in frank terms: “And so it isn’t the lusting after a woman but the consenting to the lust that is the sin” (Abelard, *Ethics* 205). This logical elucidation served to give Abelard a masculine presence, even with his physical lack. This resulted in a “project[ion of] an Abelard so irreducibly male that even castration does not imperil his gender” (Wheeler 108). In the exclusively masculine world of medieval universities, a masculine identity was formed by a man’s dialectic performance and ability to reason in disputations against other men instead of his opposition to feminine characteristics.

A firm foundation in masculine Christian identity, grounded in female submission to male superiority, remained a persuasive ideology for Christian men that ultimately affected gender relationships between men and women in all contexts. The necessity of a Christian identity to medieval manhood is especially evident when conversion is considered, as Islamic and Jewish men were perceived to become more masculine and gain masculine authority after their conversion to Christianity (Kruger 27). Even knighthood was imbued with religious symbolism (Karras, *Boys to Men* 42), making a man’s dominant role in religion an essential part of manhood. Theological considerations also made up a large part of a medieval scholar’s curriculum. Medieval masculinity was defined by manly actions and activities with the purpose of dominating other men, an

ideal both bolstered by and created within a Christian perspective which emphasized men's authority and women's obedience.

Medieval knighthood still defined manhood in relation to dominance over other men, but on a physical rather than intellectual level. Women factored into a masculine identity because of their physical proximity to court life and the literary trope of courtly love. A revealing way to consider knightly manhood is to examine male cross-dressing in the undeniably male environment of jousting as recorded in Arthurian romances (Putter 283). For instance, at the tournament of Surluse, Lancelot “disgysed hymselff and putt upon his armour a maydyns garmente freysshely attyred” (Malory 399).<sup>1</sup> The fact that this phenomenon was not an uncommon literary theme illustrates its importance in communicating a medieval ideal, despite its rare appearance in reality. Women cross-dressers also existed, but they remained less problematic, as “a woman's aspiration to pass for a man was readily comprehensible to medieval people in terms of a natural desire for social elevation and self-improvement” (Putter 283). The advantages to looking masculine included protection from sexual assault, mobility, and access to arms (Crane 308), all of which demonstrated masculine authority. On the other hand, the damsel with the sword in *Le Morte D'Arthur* actively sought deliverance, again underscoring male authority: ““Thys swerde that I am gurte withal doth me grete sorrow and comberaunce, for I may nat be delyverde of thys swerde but by a knyght” (Malory 50).<sup>2</sup> Male cross-dressers, however, were distinct in that their masculinity was always clear regardless of dress; only this clarity allowed a humorous portrayal of a cross-dressing knight (Putter

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<sup>1</sup> “disguised himself and put upon [over] his armor a maiden's freshly [pure, sweet] attired garment” (all translations mine, unless otherwise noted)

<sup>2</sup> “this sword that I am girt with does [give] me great sorrow and difficulty, for I may not be delivered of this sword but by a knight”

293). This is demonstrated clearly in Lancelot's kidnapping of Sir Dinadan; not only did Sir Dinadan suspect Lancelot's disguise, but after Lancelot and other knights "put upon hym a womans garmente," Queen Guinevere "lowghe, that she fell downe – and so dede all that there was" (Malory 399).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, cross-dressing was an act of exorcising femininity, as the revelation of a true masculine identity represented the integral nature of being male (Putter 288). In this case, men were defined in opposition to women, demonstrating a deep concern regarding gender clarity. A truly masculine nature was as essential and unchangeable as Abelard's manliness; however, this inherent masculinity still had to be proven primarily through physical means in the context of knighthood.

Instead of focusing on reason and intellect, medieval knights considered violence "the fundamental measure of a man because it was a way of exerting dominance over men of one's own social stratum as well as over women and other social inferiors" (Karras, *Boys to Men* 21). By giving parameters and meaning to violence, knightly violence was contextualized, controlled, and accepted. Unlike in medieval universities, women were undeniably present for jousting and other knightly activities, which were ostensibly performed in order to gain the favor of noble women. A medieval knight's manliness relied not only on his physical prowess, but also on his ability to interact with ladies—love objects of chivalry—correctly (Powers 35). Although relationships with women were couched in terms of courtly love, women were viewed as commodities, as men's relationships with them were used to impress other men (Karras, *Boys to Men* 25). When Arthur planned to marry Guinevere, who he had "loved hir longe," she was sent to him along with one hundred knights that "pleasith me more than right grete rychesse"

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<sup>3</sup> "put upon him a woman's garment;" "laughed, then she fell down – and so did all that there was [all the rest]"

(Malory 63).<sup>4</sup> Although Arthur's love for Guinevere was stated repeatedly, his increase in political standing and manpower remained the focus. Indeed, men's relationships to other men were often more affectionate than those for women, as illustrated by the concept of brothers at arms (Karras, *Boys to Men* 63). Since women and other social inferiors were unable to participate in the masculine struggle for power, their subservience to masculine dominance was automatically assumed. Therefore, men were defined in opposition to other men of their same social class on the grounds of physical prowess and their abilities to accumulate honor and accolades (including women).

For medieval men, gender involved much more than physical anatomy, as demonstrated both by Abelard's lack of masculine anatomy and the feminization of cross-dressing knights. The markedly different dress of the clergy and knights, and the anxiety shown over crossing these boundaries, illustrates that dress was a very conscious aspect of gender performance (Coon 471). In discussing Joan of Arc in particular, Crane suggested that "part of the attraction of male attire was surely its associations with masculine authority" (308), indicating clearly that men's dress mirrored their statuses and positions within society as a whole. Even the concept of honor was gendered, as "to be dishonorable or dishonored [as a knight] was to be womanly" (Karras, *Boys to Men* 60). Men's interactions with other men and women involved a complex understanding that being masculine involved *acting* as a male. These actions were not always clear; after all, the route to masculinity in a university and through knighthood was very different, and even within these two specific areas, much variation existed. Nonetheless, acting and dressing as a man regardless of physical anatomy was the biggest determinant of medieval masculinity.

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<sup>4</sup> "loved her long;" "pleases me more than right [truly] great riches"

Although men “defined what a man should be and what a woman could never be” (Karras, *Boys to Men* 19) by engaging in masculine activities, not all men managed to maintain this stark difference with the ease of scholars, who were largely segregated from women, and knights, who had limited access to women beyond courtly formalities. Men who worked as craftsmen or merchants interacted with women daily and relied on their help to keep workshops running. Nonetheless, actually running workshops and gaining accolades for skilled labor was still consistently credited to men (Karras, *Boys to Men* 109). Craftsmen focused on proving themselves men, not boys, through “domination of others (including women, but mainly men) economically through ownership of an independent workshop” (Karras, *Boys to Men* 109). Men’s perceptions of each other relied mainly upon their places within the competitive masculine world, regardless of their involvement (or lack thereof) with women.

### III. Feminine Identities

The definition of medieval femininity is related to medieval masculinity, as women created independent, exclusively feminine spaces for themselves while operating within the masculine paradigm. Even though medieval women were more independent and autonomous than often assumed, they “still operated within constraints created by a patriarchal society” (Karras, *Boys to Men* 1). As the medieval period progressed, women’s exclusion was assumed more often, and some of the freedoms they maintained earlier (such as greater mobility) slipped away during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Karras, *Boys to Men* 153). Women were expected to obey men, but this submission was not seen as oppressive in the same way it is today. After all, this obedience was considered necessary because of feminine weakness (Wheeler 123). From

a masculine perspective, women's obedience to men served to protect women from their own natures. Indeed, even female authors such as Julian of Norwich accentuated their own weakness, an attribute clearly articulated when Julian of Norwich claimed "my herte was willfulle thereto" (*A Vision* 2.88).<sup>5</sup> In the same way, nuns' vows focused on marriage to God (inherently involving submission), while monks' vows focused on becoming more Christ-like (Johnson 63). Although women were viewed as naturally requiring a more submissive attitude than authoritative men, feminine weakness was also linked to exceptional strengths.

The feminine spirit was valued for its unique contributions to spirituality, as feminine weakness was also connected to greater emotional spiritual experiences. Women's spiritual writings tended to humanize the divine (Karras, *Boys to Men* 88), unlike the church's more distant, ethereal view. The misogynistic attitudes present in universities and the church continued to be perpetuated in part because so many male clergymen were also university scholars. However, "the very exclusion of women from the realm of priestly authority ironically endowed them with a new significance outside of it" (Coakley 2). Female monastics were often linked with effective faith (or affective piety), connection to the Spirit, and access to the immediate presence of God, three aspects of faith male clerics struggled to obtain (Coakley 3). Women were also revered for their dedication to prayer (Johnson 61). Indeed, male clerics who wrote hagiographies about spiritual women struggled to resolve their reverence for the depth of women's spiritual experience and their own control over these women (Coakley 2). These spiritual aspects of women, so admired by men because of their very inaccessibility, demonstrate that "it was precisely the women's closeness to Christ, paradoxically linked with their

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<sup>5</sup> "my heart was willful to [go] there"

supposed physical weakness and inferiority to men, that generated these powers” (Coakley 11). Feminine weakness seems like a negative trait, but women created their own spiritual niche where they could gain authority and respect through emotionality and weakness, not strength and intellectualism.

The devaluation of women was a pervasive archetype that began in the early Middle Ages (c.600-900) and continued into the medieval universities of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Coon describes two coexisting models of gender during the early Middle Ages. In the one-sex model, the female body mirrored the perfect male body (Coon 470). The two-sex model contained two separate kinds of bodies (male and female); however, only the male body could emit semen, as women’s bodies were deemed too cold to heat semen properly (Coon 471). Both of these models considered men’s bodies superior. Men were also perceived as hot (associated with constancy), while women were viewed as cold (associated with inconstancy) (Coon 470). Feminine coldness was related to feminine weakness, while masculine strength was related to masculine heat. Variations on these views continued into the curriculums of fourteenth and fifteenth century universities: “The [Aristotelian] idea of a woman as a deformed man was expressed in terms of reproductive biology, and there were also biological reasons why women’s intellect was thought to be inferior to men’s” (Karras, *Boys to Men* 83). This kind of teaching perpetuated the view of women as members of the weaker and less authoritative sex, which originated early in medieval thought.

Nevertheless, the delineations between masculinity and femininity were not as clear as the models above suggested. For instance, Joan of Arc “occupies neither position in the gender binary, but contaminates both by combining them” (Crane 312). The

models above left no room for legitimate variations, despite the reality of gender ambiguity. Still, these ideas about women were widespread throughout medieval society, forcing women to find alternative methods of legitimization and authority. For instance, medieval women mystics like Julian of Norwich focused on personal experience instead of intellectual reasoning in their writings. Even the Wife of Bath's claim of experience *and* intellectual authority ultimately stressed women's personal experience over academic learning. In the Wife's famous defense of marriage, she stated, "if ther were no seed ysowe, / virginitee, thane whereof sholde it growe?" (3.71-72).<sup>6</sup> Although she demonstrated a clear knowledge of the Bible and an ability to argue theologically by showing that Paul simply "counseil[ed others] to virginitee" (3.82),<sup>7</sup> the Wife did not rely on intellectual prowess to perfect her argument. Instead, she relied on her common sense argument for the necessity of sex, grounded in everyday feminine experience. Even though gender models presented an authoritative masculine body and a submissive feminine body, women subverted this paradigm by acquiescing to the male insistence on intellectual superiority (despite the Wife of Bath's and Julian of Norwich's clear intellectual prowess) while *also* drawing on their unique experiences and claims as women in everyday life and the spiritual sphere.

Women were conceptualized as weaker and therefore lesser than their male counterparts, but this perception was not necessarily consistent with reality during the medieval period. Men may not have given women credit for their contributions to society, but their efforts made medieval life possible. For instance, most craftsmen would not have been able to operate without the help of their wives and daughters, and women

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<sup>6</sup> "if there were no seed sown, / virginity, then where of [from what] would it grow?"

<sup>7</sup> "counselled others to virginity"

sometimes played powerful roles within craft guilds (Powers 53). The influential ideal of courtly love, involving the lady as the object of chivalry and regularly embodied as a literary trope within medieval texts, did not exist in reality to the same extent as it was represented in literature (Powers 36). The idealization of gender roles and the reality of these same roles varied drastically, but medieval sources tend to mute or stereotype women's roles in society. After all, most sources surviving from the medieval period were written by male clergy or male aristocracy, both of which provide views biased towards an elite masculine perspective (Powers 9). In addition, even works written by women were almost always mediated by a scribe or other male authority (Summit 97). Even though women were defined in opposition to a more powerful masculine nature, they created their own identities within masculine parameters of feminine weakness through spiritual connections distinctive from those men could experience.

#### IV. Early Monasticism

The negotiation of gender identity was brought into stark relief when medieval people enacted gender in a particular area of medieval culture: monasticism. This discussion of monasticism and mysticism is the direct result of a *gendered* perspective, meaning that this brief history will focus on issues relating to gender in the development of mysticism during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Medieval mysticism evolved out of monasticism, largely because women's increasing exclusion from monastic authority caused women to seek new avenues of spiritual expression. Although a more negative view of female monastics was the norm by the thirteenth century, a welcoming symbiosis between men and women monastics continued to develop from the eleventh to the mid-twelfth centuries (Johnson 4). In discussing the Beguines, a German female religious

community (albeit still under male leadership) operational during the thirteenth century, Petroff explained that “male writers defended the holy women on the ground of the exemplary simplicity and purity of their life-style, the importance of their economic self-sufficiency, and the profound emotionality of their spiritual life” (54). Although these sentiments were expressed regarding a specific community of women toward the end of the ‘golden age’ of women’s monastic involvement, similar positive views were displayed during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as Coakley’s study of hagiographies indicates. Coakley demonstrates the crux of the issues that started to develop in the thirteenth century, as “not only do clerics typically appear displaying a sense of responsibility for close supervision of the women, but many also show a deep attraction toward the women’s holiness itself” (17). Although the deep emotionality of medieval women’s faith, deemed unattainable in the masculine clerical framework, made women a necessary component of monastic communities, clerics also struggled with the responsibilities women represented. After the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the beneficial cooperation between monastic men and women deteriorated not because women’s unique spiritual contributions were questioned, but because being responsible for monastic women became an encumbrance instead of an asset.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and sometimes into the thirteenth century, women maintained authority within monastic life by avenues other than spiritual activity. Monasteries maintained strong familial ties through allowing and even expecting visitation and contact between family members inside and outside of the monastery, thereby increasing women’s influence through their contacts with the outside world (Johnson 18). These ties also affected male monastics (Johnson 18), but this influence is

especially relevant to women since the thirteenth century movement toward cloistering nuns (which did not apply to male clergy) eventually shuttered these connections. Even in the thirteenth century, monastic and lay women supported each other through jointly created expressions of piety, secular support of religious practices, and exchanges of manuscripts (Mecham 585), creating a “satisfactory symbiosis” between lay and secular people (Johnson 118). For instance, those in the secular sector often provided funding or labor, such as embroidering a ritual cloth, for monastic projects (Mecham 588). These connections intertwined medieval women monastics with everyday laypeople, creating a rich and complex community that reached beyond the monastery walls. Indeed, the convent was incredibly important to women’s ability to display authority, as it was “the only institution in which a woman might direct the women and men under her care as a result of her election to power rather than owing solely to her birth” (Johnson 206). Women’s authority in medieval monasteries derived in part from their connections with the outside lay community, an aspect that started to disappear in the thirteenth century.

Gender equality in monasteries began a steady decline due to multiple factors in the thirteenth through the fourteenth centuries as the testing of authoritative boundaries (Coakley 215) developed into exclusively masculine and feminine dichotomies. Funding for women’s houses began to be cut at the same time women’s authoritative opportunities declined, leading to an even greater dependence on male monastics (Johnson 225).

Women needed male monastics to administer the sacraments (and were expected to pay them for their services), but the decrease of feminine authoritative power, necessitating greater masculine involvement, combined with lessening funding forced a substantial economic dependence on men (Johnson 225). Increased concerns over women’s ability to

sexually tempt men (Johnson 120) demonstrate an interesting subversion of Coon's masculine and feminine models. Although male bodies are deemed irreducibly superior in these models, men gave women's bodies great power through their fear of the feminine ability to coerce or weaken male authority and control. Even in monasteries, gender roles were not as unambiguous as they seemed. These factors created negative attitudes toward women within monastic circles in particular, ultimately eroding feminine authority. Nonetheless, "the secular environment was still friendly" toward nuns (Johnson 264), indicating that some feminine authority still existed. Since women were viewed as burdens economically and spiritually, active exclusion and discouragement of women's involvement became the norm for male clergy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The exclusion of women during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries escalated due to the evolution of mendicant orders and the simultaneous increase in cloistering. This phenomenon made women, already restricted from the community, obsolete (Johnson 252). As Dominicans and Franciscans became more and more popular choices for male clergy, women tried to participate by creating their own mendicant order in the tradition of the Franciscans with the creation of the Poor Clares. Although Petroff contends that the Poor Clares represented "a strong model for relationships with the community" (75), she also explains that two kinds of sisters, external and enclosed, existed (74). Lay sisters involved with the running of the monastery focused on the external aspects, while the sisters responsible for the spiritual aspect of the monastery became cloistered, forcing them to literally become shut out from society. The unique appeal of mendicant orders relied upon their public preaching and their immediacy in

society, but cloistered women simply could not compete (Johnson 257). In the end, although women did form mendicant communities, most ultimately became cloistered and all remained subject to “the supervision of the male religious orders” (Coakley 9). Enforced cloistering, especially when combined with highly active male mendicant orders, restricted (though never completely stifled) interactions with the secular world, resulting in a loss of women’s power because the relationship ties they sustained with the outside community continued to weaken substantially.

#### V. The Feminine Response: Medieval Mysticism

As women’s exclusion from traditional monasticism continued, women began to develop mysticism and anchoritic living in novel ways in an attempt to regain authority in the form of self-determination, or the ability to create an individual identity. In this model, authority was not necessarily related to domination, but to having a voice in the public sphere. Indeed, the attainment of authority or the lack thereof directly affected women’s legitimacy. Without authority, women could continue to be discounted; with authority, women’s voices—as distinct from those of their male counterparts—could be heard and considered. *The Oxford English Dictionary* shows that the modern term “authority” is derived from the Latin word “auctor,” which became the Old English word “auctoritē” (“Authority”). “Auctor” meant to originate or promote and was linked with authorship (“Author”), while “auctoritē” connoted power and official validation (“Auctorite”). Having the ability to create and disseminate ideas, then, is *essential* to gaining authority, as shown by medieval mysticism’s clear link to women’s writing. Since feminine authority in monastic contexts became increasingly limited, women sought other avenues of authoritative self-expression that ultimately resulted in

legitimacy once more. Extreme fasting, anchoritic living, and other such individualistic expressions of spirituality became dominated by women (Johnson 148), and interest in anchoritic living rose steadily from the twelfth century until its peak during the fourteenth century (Baker, “Anchoritic Living”148). Since male clerical frameworks either actively pushed women away or simply did not know how to find space for the depths of women’s spirituality in traditional hierarchies, women attempted to revert to their greatest natural spiritual strength—intense personal experiences of the divine.

*Ancrene Wisse*, an early thirteenth century medieval text written as a handbook specifically for women interested in the anchoritic life, represented an important milestone in the development of mysticism for women in particular. Although masculine recluses and their followers served as the catalyst for the development of monasticism (Georgianna 34), *Ancrene Wisse* made anchoritic living relevant once more by creating a more flexible inner rule that sought to “reconcile the traditional otherworldliness of solitary life [now unavailable due to the lack of wilderness spaces] with the new spiritual and practical conditions of twelfth century Europe” (Georgianna 37). *Ancrene Wisse* impacted women in particular because the author’s belief that “her [the anchoress’] inner, spiritual life and outer, worldly circumstances are inextricably bound” (Georgianna 32-33) represented an impulse directly *opposite* the spiritual segregation of cloistering, thereby giving women freedom to create their own spiritual niche. Although anchorites remained connected to the church physically (Mecham 610), interaction with the outside world was not only considered inevitable, but also beneficial, as the world represented a vehicle for a deeper, more personal experience of Christ. For instance, Christ himself is understood in an earthly way, as he is described “as a mon þe woheð, as a king þet luuede

a gentil poure leafdi of forrene londe, he sende his sonden biuoren”(Ancrene Wisse 7.70-71).<sup>8</sup> At the same time, this more positive view was tempered by viewing the anchoritic life as a “living death” with “penitential and ascetic” overtones that emphasized the spiritual dangers inherent in the outside world and the weakness of the human body against sin (Savage and Watson 16). Women’s involvement in mysticism or anchoritic living (two often connected phenomena) complemented women’s greatest attribute—intense, personal holiness—while at the same time releasing male clerics of female burdens.

However, a backlash against women’s authoritative, individual spirituality began during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Suspicions about holy women increased sharply, as evidenced by the use of terms such as “demons” and “witches” for women demonstrating spiritual sensitivities (Coakley 211-12). This negative view of women was reinforced and perhaps partially caused by the increasing prevalence of universities during this period (Karras, *Boys to Men* 72). The collective masculine social identities men formed in misogynistic communities such as universities considered women as the “social other” (Karras, “Masculine Identity Formation” 195), an attitude demonstrated by “the undereducation of nuns” as compared to monks during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Johnson 147). Women’s authority was largely bypassed not only in secular contexts (such as the medieval court and the workshop), but also in religious contexts outside of mysticism. Concerns about the spiritual necessity of women’s involvement in monasteries and growing resentment against the economic burdens they represented became stronger as the medieval period continued.

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<sup>8</sup> “as a man he wooed, as a king that loved a gentle [well-bred] poor lady of a foreign land, he sent his sons [brethren, envoys] before [ahead]”

Of course, women's roles within society were never clear-cut, and the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also produced literature supporting feminine authority (often expressed through mysticism) called "la querelle des femmes," a body of "imaginative literature written in defense of women" (Swift 2). The remarkable aspect of this literature lies in its authorship, as these works constitute masculine justifications regarding women's authoritative involvement. Since Christine de Pizan's clearly pro-women literature represents a "real woman's viewpoint," Swift maintains that many scholars erroneously assume masculine commentaries in praise of women are insincere (5). Nonetheless, these works demonstrate that not all men sought to delegitimize women. Coakley's research also illustrates the varying views of men regarding women and their roles in medieval religious life, as male clerics wrote positive hagiographies—some allowing more feminine authority than others—about the spiritual women they supported (1). However, men's control over women, as opposed to their former openness regarding women's authority over their own spirituality, became increasingly evident in later medieval hagiographies (Coakley 213). Negative views of women certainly increased during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, leading to an increased concern over specifically feminine modes of spirituality, but these views did not pass unchallenged (just as mystics did not simply disappear).

The differences between masculine and feminine medieval authorship are essential to understanding how the complex attitudes of medieval men and women were disseminated and considered, especially regarding women's emotive spirituality. Even during the medieval period, the question of whether meaningful differences existed between female authors and male authors writing for women remained ambiguous (Swift

183). After all, authorship was a collaborative process regardless of gender (Summit 91), and masculine intervention in women's writing in the form of scribes or other male authorities was a regular occurrence (Summit 97). Indeed, an extreme example of male control over female literacy can be seen in Heinrich of Nördlingen's directions to Margaret Ebner, a nun, about how to read a specific text (Beckman 80). For female writers, producing literature without male interference on some level may not have been possible. To confuse matters further, both male and female authors often negated their own authorship in religious works (Summit 96). Although women mystic's writings are frequently celebrated as demonstrating authority in an environment increasingly hostile to their involvement, the complexity of medieval authorship leaves this statement uncertain.

The difference between men's and women's religious texts further demonstrates the intricacy of medieval authorship. Mystical texts written by women focused on experience and were deemed authoritative if the mystical experience could be vicariously experienced by the reader (Beckman 62). Julian of Norwich operated within this paradigm, as her first work, *A Vision*, was a vivid recounting of her vision: "I sawe the rede blode trekyllle downe fro under the garlande alle hate, freshlye, plentifully, and lielye" (3.98-99).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, mystical texts could become akin to sacred objects with performative functions, working as a "living conduit for divine power" (Beckman 66). This kind of literature is directly associated with women mystics, as mystics and anchoresses like Julian of Norwich popularized the genre precisely because their authoritative powers were being excised in monastic contexts. In contrast, Richard Rolle, a male medieval mystic, retained an orthodox perspective in his writings (Hope Allen xlvii). Instead of detailing personal interactions or visions of Christ, as Julian of Norwich

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<sup>9</sup> "I saw the red blood trickle down from under the garland of all hate, freshly, plentifully, and lively."

did, Rolle focused on addressing Christ in a manner akin to a psalm: “Langyng es in me light, þat byndes me day and nyght/Til I hafe in sight, his face sa fayre and bryght” (Rolle 245-47).<sup>10</sup> Men relied on advanced learning, individual authority, or personal credentials in order to gain authority in their writings. However, women relied on personal experience instead of learning, authority from God, and appeals to humility (Beckman 63). These differences in men’s and women’s writings suggest not only gendered perspectives regarding the same issue, but also a respect for women’s literature that belies the negative undertones of some masculine perspectives.

A largely feminine mysticism movement, centered around personal experience, developed in response to women’s increasing exclusion from religious life. If viewed from a mainly masculine perspective, women were clearly becoming irrelevant; however, if viewed from a feminine perspective, mysticism and the legitimate writing that could occur within this movement demonstrated active opportunities for women to exercise authority. Just as some women continued to search for ways to retain authority, some men supported women’s search for individual expression. Ultimately, Swift’s suggestion of a possible “both...and” perspective which served “to disrupt expectation by promoting *non*-contradictory coexistence, by representing conduct that would conventionally be classified as masculine as something that is equally proper for a woman” (215) may be an apt explanation for the complex attitudes about the role of women, often expressed in the authorship and writing of the medieval period. As more negative attitudes towards women progressed, women reacted with the creation of medieval mysticism, thereby cementing a relevant and legitimate place for themselves through a new model of authority.

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<sup>10</sup> “Longing is in me light, that binds me day and night, / `Til I have in sight, his face so fair and bright”

## VI. Medieval Warfare

Just as women retained authority in the religious sphere by adapting to the religious environment with medieval mysticism, gendered aspects of medieval warfare also affected the authoritative abilities of men and women. Medieval warfare was “the quintessential masculine activity, through which manhood was demonstrated” (McLaughlin 194). However, having a public and recognized presence through military activity as a woman was possible “before the end of the eleventh century, [as] chroniclers generally noted the activities of women warriors with little comment” (McLaughlin 194). Although women warriors were not common even during the ‘golden age’ of their involvement, they were not considered a cause for alarm, either. By the fourteenth century, attitudes toward women and warfare had changed from a positive perspective to a more restrictive, negative perspective. Spirituality developed into an important conduit for feminine participation in warfare as women’s authority and involvement became increasingly challenged, as demonstrated by Joan of Arc and others. Women’s involvement in warfare from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries followed the trends outlined in feminine religious experience, as a negative shift occurred at the same time in both cases and resulted in women creating unique niches to retain authority.

The ‘golden age’ for women’s involvement in warfare lasted from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, in part because military organization was largely linked to the domestic sphere (McLaughlin 200-01). Examples of women involved in the military include Lady Isabel of Conches, who was praised for dressing as and riding with knights around 1100 (Bennett 165), and Boudica, who led Celtic armies in a revolt against Rome in the first century (Webster 86-89). During the late eleventh century at the end of the

First Crusade, crusaders attacked the large Jewish population at Worms, resulting in women joining in the final defense: “The women girded their loins with strength and slew their own sons and daughters, and then themselves” (Solomon Bar Simson 355). This demonstrates that even if women were not usually explicitly mentioned, they were present and participatory during warfare. In addition, women’s significance for warfare in a spiritual sense is evident from this passage, as the act of killing each other was not only used to deny the crusaders a victory, but was also considered a way to “merit eternal life” (Solomon Bar Simson 354). It was the women who were largely credited with this act, as “many men *also* mustered their strength and slaughtered their [families]” (Solomon Bar Simson 355; emphasis mine). In all of these cases, women fought alongside men they knew personally. A relatively cooperative relationship between men and women fighters existed before the thirteenth century, the pinnacle of the ‘golden age’ for women’s involvement in warfare.

Indeed, the ‘golden age’ of women warriors correlated with a formative period in England’s history. The Norman invasion of 1066 CE—perhaps “the single most cataclysmic event in English history”—radically altered the Romanized Anglo-Saxon continent that Boudica fought for (Millward and Hayes 143). Although the invasion “unified England for the first time in its history” under a French aristocracy (Millward and Hayes 143), England was far from homogeneous. French, Latin, and English all remained prominent in different circles, and by the end of the thirteenth century, the originally heavy-handed leadership of the French conquerors greatly lessened as English, not French, rulers became the norm (Millward and Hayes 146-47). England remained in a state of upheaval and change, as the profusion of dialectical differences during this period

makes clear (Millward and Hayes 208). McLaughlin's insistence that women fought in "the company of old acquaintances...[as part of] a military unit made up of men from their own household" (203) reflects this instability. Instead of nations fighting nations, regions fought regions. The common references to women Vikings during this earlier period (McLaughlin 197) illustrate the raids that continued to prevent England from attaining homogeneity. During the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, England's identity was still forming—and in the resulting chaos, women found places for themselves on the battlefield.

As the medieval period progressed, reactions towards women's participation in warfare became more negative (McLaughlin 195), following the same general trend noted in regards to women's religious expression. Women's involvement in warfare started to be seen not just as unusual, but as wrong (McLaughlin 200). For instance, although Joan of Arc was commended by Christine de Pisan for having "laid low your [King Charles VII's] enemies beneath your standard" (437), Johann Nider condemned Joan of Arc for "overstep[ping] the boundaries of her sex, which she did not conceal" in the fifteenth century (442). This uneasiness with women's presence in what was increasingly being seen as a masculine sphere correlates with the progressively status-laden and male-focused world of the court, eventually resulting in females being reduced to the margin of male pageantry. Still, women continued to appear in contexts of warfare, albeit less often than before (McLaughlin 196). Traditions of earlier female fighters such as the women named above were known, and the biblical story of Judith was rewritten in an Old English poem that celebrated her defeat of Holofernes, an oppressor of the Jews: "Then the Creator's maiden,/ with her braided locks, took a sharp sword,/ a hard weapon

in the storms of battle, and drew it from the sheath/ with her right hand” (77-80). Not only was Judith a fierce fighter who had to cut “the heathen hound energetically/another time” (109-10), but her killing was linked to divine favor, as she “won illustrious glory/in the battle just as God.../granted it when he gave her her victory” (122-24). Judith earned this favor through her overt spirituality; not only did she pray and ask for “your mercy” (92) as she killed Holofernes, but she had also “always possessed true faith” (6).

Although women’s participation in warfare was seen in a progressively more negative light from the thirteenth century onwards, women fighters did not completely disappear.

Of course, much of this readiness to fight was a matter of practicality and necessity. After all, medieval women in general were prepared to defend themselves and their homes during times of warfare, although not always in official capacities (McMillin 134). The difference between the involvement of men and women in warfare lies in the accumulation of glory and status. The glory and status accorded to men through warfare was a masculine prerogative that only intensified as the medieval period continued; therefore, women who gained the same kind of attention served as a threat to masculinity, limiting female involvement in warfare to peripheral or supporting roles.

Nonetheless, medieval women were involved in warfare more often than usually assumed, although they often acted as stand-ins for men. Women occasionally had to take charge in emergency situations (McLaughlin 196), especially since wives were given authority over the household while their husbands were away (Powers 43). The running of a household included ensuring a solid defense, either through active participation or the arrangement of a form of defense from others (Powers 45). Widows in particular were sometimes forced into a masculine role, as “in the absence of suitable male protectors

they might be obliged to fight to protect their children's interests" (McLaughlin 198). Women's involvement in warfare was a very practical matter. Although men used prowess in warfare as a way to measure themselves against other men, women were usually active militarily in order to defend themselves or their families. Women participants in warfare are anomalies, but studying outsiders and how far boundary lines can be extended provides much information about acceptable cultural behavior (McLaughlin 193). Although both men and women were involved militarily, men focused on attaining glory and status, particularly in relation to other men, while women generally focused upon defense in the absence of men.

The differing attitudes towards men and women in warfare are clearly demonstrated in women's involvement in military orders. Military orders prioritized religious duties over martial duties, thereby "placing the discussion of women in medieval military orders in the larger context of female monasticism" (Bom 1). Although men's participation in martial activities was expected alongside more spiritual duties, women did not participate in combat and were instead valued for their spiritual contributions (Bom 111). Although women were initially welcomed in most military orders, interest dwindled during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Bom 7), due largely to the same tensions experienced in other monastic houses regarding women's dependency and men feeling burdened (Bom 10). This phenomenon of gender division was reflected in monastic hospitals during the second half of the twelfth century to the thirteenth century, as women were expected to give physical care while men provided spiritual care (Johnson 53). Military orders often provided women more authoritative opportunities than some medieval hospitals, as physical and spiritual care was connected

differently due to the military focus. Even though only male monastics could administer the sacraments, making their spiritual roles more prominent, women's spiritual involvement in military orders remained strong. Direct participation in warfare may not have been open to women through military orders, but they retained a great amount of authority and influence nonetheless through a focus on female spirituality.

The Hospitallers, or The Order of St. John of Jerusalem, represent an exception to the rule, as "by the end of the thirteenth century, the order's military endeavors and its female membership were both well established" (Bom 43). Instead of excising women from their ranks, as many military orders did at the end of the thirteenth century (Bom 40), women continued to be actively recruited. The Hospitallers were founded as a hospital first, and this emphasis was continued even after the order was militarized (Bom 58). Roles for women and men, however, remained highly segregated: women professed charity through healing the sick (on a physical but also spiritual level), while men professed charity through military activities (Bom 114). Although military orders did not allow women to participate in warfare directly, women were freely associated with and sought after by orders explicitly devoted to martial matters. This involvement was limited, but the linking of women to military activities was nonetheless present.

Unlike the more passive involvement of women serving in military orders, some women functioned as leaders or figureheads in conflict. Men's reactions to women military leaders varied in part depending on whether the woman leader was on the winning or losing side. The English could easily delegitimize the French when led by a woman warrior such as Joan of Arc (DeVries 4), as praising women for masculine activities was seen as emasculating (Swift 196). This view of women's leadership as

effectively neutralizing the masculinity of the opposition is directly related to the masculine need for military prowess against other men as a way to determine social standing, a factor increasingly important in the later medieval period. On the other hand, the French (in this case, the eventual winners) legitimized Joan of Arc by directly connecting her to a feminine, spiritual identity (DeVries 12). The spiritual authority of Joan of Arc was emphasized when “the court recast old prophecies to fit her, and created and disseminated new ones” (J. Taylor 220). The feminine, mystical, and distinctly spiritual depiction of Joan of Arc by the French allowed her to lead French men without emasculating them, as her position was *outside* of the male competition for supremacy. Joan of Arc is certainly not the only revered military leader, as McLaughlin and others repeatedly demonstrated. The key to accepting women military leaders relied on defusing any perceived threat to masculine identity.

## VII. Case Studies Introduction

Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, and Joan of Arc operated within the contexts above, and by exploring each individual in chronological order as a case study, a greater understanding of how these ideals functioned during the medieval period is attainable. In order to explore how each of these individuals utilized ideas of gender, spirituality, and martial activity, two aspects will be evaluated: how each individual acted in ways typical of the opposite sex, and the relationship these gender attributions had to the ability or inability of maintaining authority. These case studies were deliberately chosen in order to investigate the spiritual and physical aspects of gender. This study is hardly exhaustive, but it will illuminate and clarify the first section, which highlighted the challenges medieval expressions of gendered spirituality and physicality offer.

Before examining Richard Rolle in detail, a brief overview of some of the basic issues and assumptions that characterize the study of masculine and feminine religious experience must be discussed. A lack of interest in distinctly male spirituality outside of clerical confines, caused by a number of factors (Cullum and Lewis 10), has led to an overemphasis on specifically women's spirituality in modern scholarship (Cullum 184). The striking differences between masculine and feminine spiritual experience that are traditionally assumed may simply be evidence of a serious lack in scholarship. After all, masculine and feminine religious experience is not easily pigeon-holed. Masculine religious experience is not only related to monastic life, just as women's experiences do not just involve mysticism. As Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, and even Joan of Arc illustrate, many different *kinds* of spirituality for both genders were the norm. As Weissenberg shows through the examples of a craftsman and a nobleman whose lives were commemorated in *vitae*, holy but secular men "fitted into a different model of holiness" (120). It is only within this paradigm, where secular and religious roles are assumed to be varied, that the full scope of medieval spiritual identity can be evaluated. The real question is not whether medieval men and women experienced spirituality at all, but whether the multiple ways of expressing the same kinds of spirituality or piety were fundamentally different because of gender. Although authors like Cullum suggest that men and women expressed the same kinds of spirituality differently (200), perhaps the reality is that shared spiritual experiences between medieval men and women outweighed the oft-perceived differences.

#### VIII. Richard Rolle

Richard Rolle (c. 1300-1349) is important to evaluate in order to understand

medieval gender because by living a hermitic life—which, in some aspects, remained strikingly similar to the life of a female mystic—Rolle chose an alternative to the generally male-dominated clergy and “rejected conventional forms of clerical masculinity” (Cullum 188). Rolle’s use of vernacular literature and his choice to live outside of clerical mandates represent a more feminine spiritual gender role. However, Rolle did not fully reject his masculinity, as evidenced by his Latin writings, which were written to a learned, clerical audience (Cullum 190). The first half of this study discussed this purely masculine, intellectual audience in the context of Abelard in particular. Regardless of these aspects, Richard Rolle fit the lay image of a saint, as “he fulfilled their [laypeople’s] needs and assisted them in real difficulties” (Rosamund Allen 19). Overall, Rolle preserved his masculine authority despite aspects of feminine spirituality being attributed to his vocation, as made clear by the popularity of his *Psalter*, which was still in use up to the Reformation (Hope Allen 3) and represents the only “spiritual commentary” written in English (Rosamund Allen 43). In addition, he inspired a cult following that endured around two hundred years after his death (Rosamund Allen 9) and his manuscripts were regularly circulated from 1483 to the seventeenth century (Rosamund Allen 61). Richard Rolle represents a paradox of spirituality and gender, because although he partially rejected a spiritually masculine gender role in favor of a more feminine spirituality, Rolle still maintained his authority and autonomy within the masculine world.

Some aspects of Richard Rolle’s religious vocation were distinctly masculine, despite the fact that he operated outside of clerical monasticism. This suggests that he was “drawing on a common language of masculinity that could be applied to both lay and

clerical men” (Fenton 76). Although he never received his degree and was therefore not considered a clergyman, Rolle did attend Oxford (Rosamund Allen 13), which gave him access to a common male monastic identity. By starting as a hermit, possibly transitioning into an anchorite (this transition remains somewhat unclear), and changing his patron and abode repeatedly (Hope Allen xvii-xlii), Rolle travelled more than the average female mystic. Anchorites of both genders were expected to remain stationary, while hermits were defined as self-sufficient solitaries who lived in relative isolation (Savage and Watson 15). However, “hermit” became a catchall for a wide variety of religious living, making the definitive aspects simply “the intention to live a holy life, and the wearing of a hermit’s habit” (Savage and Watson 15). Therefore, if Rolle *did* transition into an anchorite from a hermit, and *if* he continued to have frequent contact with and movement within the outside world as an anchorite, his anchoritic vocation proves unexpected. Mendicant orders flourished during Rolle’s vocation, making masculine mobility not altogether uncommon; however, Rolle did not expressly link himself with one of these orders. Still, his “Franciscan aversion to materialism, and...elements of Franciscan devotion in his writing” (Rosamund Allen 20) suggest a perhaps unconscious link with this type of religious living. Regardless of whether he officially became an anchorite or stayed a hermit, Rolle’s religious vocation seems unusually flexible. The monastic background and freedom of movement that characterized Rolle’s vocation is connected to his masculine authority.

Rolle’s Latin writings were also a mark of his masculine identity and linked him with clerical masculinity, which “was generally formed in relation to other masculinities, not in relation to women” (Cullum and Lewis 4). Indeed, in Rolle’s vernacular *Psalter*,

he stressed that his Latin works were written to a male, clerical audience and were more theologically nuanced than his English ones: “In this work I shall not be using learned expression but the easiest and commonest words in English...so that those who do not know Latin can acquire many Latin words from the English” (68). In addition, Rolle sometimes demonstrated misogynistic views toward women, such as when he “spoke of her great bosom as if it pleased me” (Rolle, *Fire of Love* 81). This view of women jibes with typically masculine views of femininity. Parts of Rolle’s religious views and vocation were unequivocally masculine, even if they were not characterized by a clerical focus.

Rolle’s choice to live as a hermit reflected masculine responses to clerical concerns. Living a hermitic life was linked to the exclusively masculine desert ideal of the fourth century, which stressed “protest against the softness of a Christian life unhampered by persecution” and “a demand for a more personal contact with spiritual forces” (Georgianna 34). Rolle connected himself with these tenets by living a comparatively ascetic life and seeking a closer relationship with God, but the separation between laypeople and the spiritually advanced few was not part of his vocation. Both Rolle and his feminine contemporaries received inspiration through the Desert Ideal. Rolle’s decision to live a hermitic life to concentrate upon these goals and “stand in my Savior’s presence” (*The Fire of Love* 46) represents a masculine prerogative, although he broadened this formerly exclusive perspective, just as women themselves did. By hearkening back to an earlier form of mysticism through the Desert Ideal, Rolle established his way of life as valid in a masculine context.

However, these masculine traits can be overstated. Rolle’s “irregular” choice to

become a hermit (Rosamund Allen 17) mirrors women's experiences in that both Rolle and women mystics sought new, different ways to express spirituality that did not involve conventional paths. Rolle's involvement in university education was certainly unique in a feminine context, but upper-class women did receive varying levels of tutoring.

Similarly, some spiritual women were highly mobile. Margery Kempe travelled often on pilgrimage, even as far as "the temple in Jerusalem" (*The Book* 194),<sup>11</sup> and anchoresses like Margaret Kirkby did occasionally change their cells under certain conditions (Rosamund Allen 20). Rolle's friendships with women, as demonstrated by the dedication of his vernacular works to particular women such as Margaret Kirkby, also call into question his assumed misogyny. Even in *The Fire of Love*, Rolle's most misogynistic moments are recorded along with female rebukes: "She said, 'What business is it of yours whether it [my bosom] is big or little?'" (81). His misogynistic attitude is certainly complex, as the ending of *The Form of Living* expresses a surprising level of tenderness and caring for Margaret: "Lo, Margaret, I haue shortly seid þe fourme of lyuyng, and how þou may cum to perfeccion, and to loue hym þat þou hast taken þe to" (894-96).<sup>12</sup> Although Rolle did retain his relationship with a masculine paradigm of religiosity in many ways, the sharp distinctions between masculine and feminine religious experience are somewhat arbitrary.

Indeed, some aspects of Rolle's religious vocation were markedly similar to distinctly feminine religious experience. Rolle's writings in the vernacular were quite prolific and "written largely for women" (Rosamund Allen 20). The vernacular works were generally simpler and less ornate than Rolle's Latin works, as writing for women

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<sup>11</sup> "the temple in Jersuaem"

<sup>12</sup> "Behold, Margaret, I have shortly said that form of living, and how that you may come to perfection, and to love him that [as] thou has taken thee to [taken it upon yourself to]"

required an easier to understand text because of a typically feminine lack of formalized learning (Rosamund Allen 35-37). In these vernacular manuscripts, Rolle focused less on advanced learning and more upon his individual spiritual experience (Higgs 180). In *The Form of Living*, Rolle openly criticizes the “foul stynkyng [of] pride” (32-33)<sup>13</sup> that an over-reliance upon learning can bring: “Sum men he taketh with errour...with synguler witte, whan he maketh ham wend þat þe thyng þat þei thynken or done is beste, and forþi tehi wol no consail haue of other þat ben bettere and connynge þan þei” (29-32).<sup>14</sup> This tendency to downplay learning in order to stress personal experience was widely used by female mystics like Julian of Norwich. For instance, Julian described herself as “a symple creature unlettyrde” (*A Vision* 4).<sup>15</sup> In addition, Rolle relied upon the Bible itself in his works, as opposed to authors commonly read in universities (Rosamund Allen 48). Rolle’s vernacular writing demonstrated a similar focus to that of female mystics in part because his vernacular audience consisted mainly of women interested in spirituality.

However, despite his unique focus upon women and laypeople and his avoidance of the clerical system, “it must be emphasized that Rolle himself remained orthodox [in his religious beliefs]” (Rosamund Allen 53). Instead of being anti-church, Rolle was pro-individual (Higgs 182). By focusing on “lay piety,” defined as “a movement...of lay persons who were intensely devout, yet who...practiced their devotion to God while living and working in the world” (Higgs 177), Rolle produced a vernacular, individual focus often lacking in more formal Latin works. Rolle’s intention in writing was not simply to share his experiences; instead, his works were fundamentally instructive. The

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<sup>13</sup> “the foul stink of pride”

<sup>14</sup> “Some men he takes with error...with singular wit, when he makes him think that the thing that he thinks or does is best, and for you he will not have the counsel of others that are better and more cunning than he”

<sup>15</sup> “a simple creature unlettered [unlearned]”

first sentence of *The Form of Living* demonstrates an authoritative, didactic tone meant to teach: “In euery sinful man and womman þat is bounden in dedely syn ben þre wrechednesse, þe which bryngeth ham vnto þe deth of helle” (1-2).<sup>16</sup> Although this sentence in particular does not instruct, the tone for the rest of the work is unmistakable. In comparison, the first sentence of Julian of Norwich’s *Showings* references her individual spiritual experiences: “This is a revelacion of love that Jhesu Christ, our endles blisse, made in xvi shewynges, of which the first is of his precious crowning of thornes” (1).<sup>17</sup> Rolle focused on spiritual application (in the context of his own spiritual experience), while Julian illuminated her personal experiences with God. This instructive quality shows that Rolle hoped his advice would be acted upon by others (Rosamund Allen 32). Similarly, “women’s mystical texts were authoritative...[if they] produce[d] the experience in them [readers]” (Beckman 62). Although Rolle’s works and Julian’s works represent different kinds of spiritual edification, both relied on replication by others for validation. Nonetheless, Rolle’s works demonstrate an orthodoxy and didacticism that many feminine religious texts, such as Julian of Norwich’s, do not.

Rolle’s attempt to bridge the gap between layperson and clergyman was at least partially a response to earlier clerical concerns. The different roles of laypeople and clergy became more pronounced by eleventh-century reforms, which focused on “a greater distinction... between the lives of the clergy and laity” (Mesley 94). However, the rigid separation of lay and clerical forces was impossible to maintain, and the two forces sometimes worked together. Although the Crusades were meant to function as a positive

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<sup>16</sup> “In every sinful man and woman that is bound in deadly sin their wretchedness [will] be, that which brings him unto the death of hell”

<sup>17</sup> “This is a revelation of love that Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in sixteen showings, of which the first is of his precious crown of thorns”

example of lay and clerical collaboration, clerical forces always retained the ultimate authority (Mesley 99). Rolle's use of both vernacular and Latin texts and his concern for laypeople demonstrate that he also sought to promote a constructive relationship between laypeople and clergy, but he lacked the distinct clerical authority usually deemed imperative for these relationships to work. Rolle's focus on the "renewal of the individual Christian" (Higgs 177) challenged the separation between layperson and clergy proposed by the church, as Rolle actively sought to provide a connection between lay and clerical spiritual experience.

Rolle's mystical experiences differed from women's in that the imagery he utilized was not "meant to correspond to literal sense-impression" (Rosamund Allen 27). He focused on four central aspects that sometimes manifested themselves in the context of a feast, representing union with God: the image of the open door, heat, song, and sweetness (Rosamund Allen 26). However, Rolle did not experience mysticism with the same kind of intimacy as Julian of Norwich, as she actually saw Christ: "In this same tyme that I saw this sight of the head bleidyng, our good Lord shewed a ghostly sight of his homely loving" (*Showings* 1.5).<sup>18</sup> She was also physically affected by her visions, as when contemplating Christ, "sodenly all my paine was taken from me" (*Showings* 3).<sup>19</sup> In contrast, Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion* utilizes similar language, but Rolle was imagining how Christ's death must have looked, not seeing a vision like Julian: "Glorious lord, this is how my mind is aroused by it: I see your blood flowing out of hands and feet" (Rolle 105). Although Rolle employed visionary language and clearly expressed a certain amount of mystic rapture, he did not have the same kind of direct visionary

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<sup>18</sup> "In this same time that I saw this sight [vision] of the head bleeding, our good Lord showed a ghostly [heavenly] sight [vision] of his homely loving"

<sup>19</sup> "suddenly all my pain was taken from me"

experiences as women like Julian of Norwich.

Although Rolle's combination of the feast-hall, an open door, heat, song, and sweetness was unique, some of the images were hardly novel. For instance, the image of the medieval feast was a common motif, as the tenth-century poem "Dream of the Rood" indicates: "where the Lord's people/are set in feasting, where there is unceasing bliss" (140-41). The hall, where feasting would take place, was considered "a masculine space" in that hospitality was "as much a religious as a social duty" (Cullum 194). Therefore, Rolle's use of feasting imagery may have also served to reinforce his masculinity. This view may have continued to build off of other typical metaphors, such as the well-known *Ancrene Wisse's* depiction of Christ as the distinctly earthly metaphor of a knight: "as a mon þe woheð, as a king þet luuede a gentil poure leafdi of feorrene londe" (*Ancrene Wisse* 7.61-62).<sup>20</sup> Paradoxically, a focus on imitating and venerating Christ was typically considered a woman's prerogative (Cullum 191), but Rolle definitely expressed a similar emphasis in *The Commandment*: "Thi loue is inseperabile when al þi þoghtes and willes ben gedered togeddre and festned holely in Ihesu Criste, so þat þou may no tyme foryet hym" (30-32).<sup>21</sup> Although Rolle's imagery was not manifested physically like many feminine mystical experiences, his combinations of images and foci represented a unique blend of masculine and feminine tradition.

Ultimately, Rolle's choice to live outside clerical boundaries as a hermit while still supporting orthodox religious views maintained and even increased his authority in some instances. Although very popular with laypeople, as demonstrated by his cult status, Rolle remained semi-problematic for the church, despite his orthodox *Psalter*. After all,

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<sup>20</sup> "as a man he wooed, as a king that loved a gentle [well-bred] poor lady of a foreign land"

<sup>21</sup> "This love is inseparable when all the thoughts and wills [desires] [have] been gathered together and fastened wholly in Jesus Christ, so that you may not forget him [over] time"

he was never canonized (Rosamund Allen 9) and he had his share of enemies (Hope Allen xlii). For laypeople, Rolle's authority increased, whereas for clergymen, Rolle managed to maintain but perhaps not increase the authority he already had because he challenged gendered expectations of spiritual experience. Swift's "both...and" hypothesis could apply here, in that Rolle attempted "to disrupt expectation by promoting *non-contradictory coexistence*" (215). Rolle demonstrated his own ability to remain masculine while still embracing some feminine characteristics, preserving and in some cases increasing his authority.

Although it is worthwhile to consider whether Rolle would have maintained more authority as a cleric, his reasons for leaving the monastic system were precisely what earned him authority in a layperson's view. As the fourteenth century moved into the fifteenth century, the church increasingly became a career "secured...by education as spiritual formation" (Clark 169), leading to many unprofessed men living within monasteries for the "material benefits [and] the professional, clerical, and learned society" (Clark 179). Although this trend reached its peak in the fifteenth century, this kind of environment was becoming the norm during Richard Rolle's life. In *The Form of Living*, Rolle criticizes several sins in particular: relying too much on intelligence and its prestige, enjoying excessive pleasures, and living a life too restrictively ascetic in order to gain the attention of others (29-104). Monastic life increasingly fit into the first two categories in particular, while religiously-minded individuals who did not fit within the clerical paradigm often resorted to the third option. Indeed, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, written at the close of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century, describes a Monk who "of prikyng and of huntynge for the hare/was al his lust,

for no cost wolde he spare” (1.191-92)<sup>22</sup> and a Friar who was “a wantowne and a merye” with a reputation as a ladies man (1.208).<sup>23</sup> Richard Rolle appropriated some aspects of more feminine mystical experience but managed to maintain or even increase his authority, in part because he was as dissatisfied with the monastic clerical environment as women mystics themselves.

#### IX. Julian of Norwich

Julian of Norwich (c.1342-1416) participated in a masculine gender role by writing works for the public sphere; however, instead of writing in the more authoritative Latin, Julian wrote in her English vernacular. She gained authority by creating a distinct authorial identity as the first woman to write in English (Baker, “Introduction” ix). Her initial book is usually called the short text (*A Vision*), which she later greatly expanded into the long text (*Showings*) (Baker, “Introduction” ix). After experiencing the multiple religious visions and physical healing that inspired *A Vision*, she became an anchoress in 1394 in the Church of St. Julian at Norwich (Baker, “Introduction” ix). Her authority was widely known and respected, as “she was regarded in her own lifetime as a spiritual adviser, [as shown by] giving positive counsel to Margery Kempe” (Julian of Norwich, *A Vision*, “Introduction” 802). The context of Julian’s writings is set “within a tradition which associates devotion to Christ’s humanity primarily with women and which at the same time claims such devotion to be inferior to contemplations of the godhead, being suitable mainly for beginners” (Watson 6). Although Julian functioned within expected norms for women by writing about Christ’s humanity and identifying herself with feminine tropes, Julian challenged masculine-dictated norms through the content and

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<sup>22</sup> “of pricking [sexual connotations heavily implied] and of hunting for the hare / was all his lust, for no cost would he spare”

<sup>23</sup> “a wanton and a merry [man]”

focus of her writing while at the same time reinforcing her own femininity.

Julian stressed her unique spiritual experience as a woman by connecting herself with feminine tropes. In *A Vision*, Julian identified herself as the author: “Here is a visioun, shewed...to a devoute woman. And hir name es Julian, that is recluse atte Norwyche” (1-2).<sup>24</sup> She continued by describing her experience, claiming that she “desyrede thre graces be the gyfte of God” (5).<sup>25</sup> She did not assert any authority or superiority in interpretation. Richard Rolle also used the first person in his text, but the emphasis differed: “In the translation I follow the letter as much as I am able to, and where I cannot find an exactly equivalent English word, I follow the sense” (*Psalter* 68). Rolle stressed his authority and active involvement in creating the text by acknowledging and taking responsibility for the decisions he made regarding interpretation. However, Julian portrayed herself as a passive recipient of her writings, as “meaning is *given* to her” (Watson 18). Instead of presenting her vision and evaluating meaning by her own authority, Julian claimed in *Showings*, that “here fore was this lesson of love schewyd with alle that folowyth” (1.6).<sup>26</sup> The lesson was not of her making, but was *showed* to her by the ultimate authority: Christ. Julian of Norwich did not assert her personal credentials or authority in her writing like male authors such as Rolle, demonstrating a markedly feminine characteristic.

Christine de Pizan (c. 1364-c.1430) demonstrated a focus similar to Julian of Norwich, underscoring Julian’s participation in a feminine trope. She deemphasized masculine achievements by women in her works as “something utterly dispensable to female honor” (Swift 208), thereby emphasizing feminine qualities. For instance, in

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<sup>24</sup> “Here is a vision, shown...to a devout woman. And her name is Julian, that is a recluse at Norwich”

<sup>25</sup> “desired three graces by the gift of God”

<sup>26</sup> “here therefore is this lesson of love, shown with all that followed”

Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of the Ladies*, the female narrator is offered freedom from misogyny by the creation of the City of the Ladies, in which women who are characterized by "humility and kindness" are encouraged to enter, so that the City may "be an occasion for you to conduct yourselves honestly and with integrity and to be all the more virtuous and humble" (407). Instead of stressing opposition to typical masculine attitudes, the book advised "clear self-knowledge" (405) and encouraged women to be the best they could be within a feminine context at an individual, not societal, level. Julian of Norwich's lack of explicit challenges to masculine authority—portrayed through passivity, personal experience, and humility instead of learning and credentials—fit her into a distinctly feminine role opposite that of Rolle and similar to other female writers like Christine de Pizan.

Julian of Norwich's spiritual experience is also linked to femininity because of the physicality of her visions. Rolle's spiritual experiences lacked a distinctively physical aspect; he used mystical, highly imaginative language, but it was meant in a metaphorical instead of literal sense. Julian, however, described her visions as "bodily sight[s]" and stressed their vividness: "The grett droppes of blode felle downe fro under the garlonde lyke pelottes semyng as it had comynn oute of the veynes" (*Showings* 1.7).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, these manifestations affected her body physically, as "sodenly all my paine was taken from me, and I was as hole" (*Showings* 3).<sup>28</sup> Margery Kempe experienced a similar physical manifestation of her spiritual experiences. Especially "yf sche herd of owyr Lordys Passyon" (28.216-17),<sup>29</sup> she "cryed wodyr lowed. And the mor þat sche wolde

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<sup>27</sup> "bodily [physical] sights;" "The great drops of blood fell down from under the garland seeming like pellets [ie, referring to the drops of blood] as [if] it had [been] coming out of the veins"

<sup>28</sup> "suddenly all my pain was taken from me, and I was as whole"

<sup>29</sup> "if she heard of our Lord's Passion"

labowryn to kepe it in er to put it away, mech the mor schulde sche cryen and the mor louwder” (28.243-45).<sup>30</sup> Kempe’s passionate response to Christ’s suffering illustrates the general trend of women having “mystical and Eucharistic foci” centered on physical, arguably performative emotiveness (Cullum 200). By stressing the physical nature of her visions, Julian of Norwich linked herself with a feminine trope.

Julian of Norwich’s repeated assurance of her own humbleness in the context of education is also representative of a uniquely feminine spiritual experience. Julian described herself as “a symple creature unlettyrde” (*Showings* 2),<sup>31</sup> demonstrating reliance not upon formal education, but upon her own personal spiritual experiences: “This is a revelacion of love that Jhesu Christ, our endless blisse, made in xvi shewynges” (*Showings* 1).<sup>32</sup> Through this statement, Julian participated in the feminine tendency to downplay education in order to stress humbleness and weakness. Regardless of how much education Julian *claimed* she had, she was clearly highly educated, as “Julian’s *Showings* undoubtedly ranks as one of the most distinctive and successful of these efforts to express subtle and sophisticated theological concepts in the vernacular” (Baker, “Introduction” xix). Even though Julian was a learned woman with a firm grasp of complicated theological arguments, she displayed a distinctly feminine attribute by downplaying her own intelligence to highlight her experience.

However, Julian of Norwich’s clear education linked her with a more masculine experience of spirituality. Her works demonstrate an intricate understanding of theology and church history; for instance, in *Showings*, Julian stated that “in the new lawe he

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<sup>30</sup> “cryed wonderfully loud. And the more that she would labor to keep it in her [or] to put it away [stop it], much the more [all the more] should she cry and the more louder”

<sup>31</sup> “a simple creature unlearned”

<sup>32</sup> “This is a revelation of love that Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in sixteen showings”

[God] brought to my mynde first Magdaleyne, Peter and Paule, Thomas of Inde, Sent John of Beverly, and other also without number” (13.38).<sup>33</sup> Although not educated at a university like Rolle, Julian did make use of biblical and saintly examples, like Rolle himself did in his *Psalter* by quoting biblical passages: “the promise you made to David” (83). Watson describes Julian as one of the “privileged members” of an elite group, as women’s ability to access texts was far from universal (11). The education of both Julian and Rolle was above the norm. Women like Julian of Norwich actively worked to integrate themselves into a specifically feminine tradition by writing in the vernacular and stressing feminine characteristics. By working within a masculine paradigm, Julian challenged male conceptions of authority through her writing while creating parallels with masculine religious experience.

Even though Julian of Norwich’s writings build from other medieval texts, they are distinctly *unorthodox*, as they challenge and often override traditional expressions of spirituality. Like Rolle’s use of imagery in “The Dream of the Rood,” Julian borrowed ideas and tropes from earlier sources, although she often made them her own. The *Ancrene Wisse*, a text written specifically to women anchorites offering advice regarding living the anchoritic life, was written in the thirteenth century as “a reaction against the legalism” of the Benedictine Rule (Georgianna 15). Julian of Norwich must have at least been aware of *Ancrene Wisse* during her lifetime, as many similarities between the texts exist (Baker, “Anchoritic Literature” 158; Watson 19). For instance, *Ancrene Wisse* discussed a child being cured by a bath of blood: “Child þet hefde swuch uuel þet him bihofde beað of blod ear hit were ihealet, muchel þe moder luuede hit þe walde þis beað

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<sup>33</sup> “in the new law he [God] brought to my mind first Magdalene, Peter and Paul, Thomas of India, Saint John of Beverly, and others also without number”

him makien...His luue madeð us beað þrof” (*Ancrene Wisse* 7.155-60).<sup>34</sup> Julian uses a similar metaphor in *Showings*: “but mekely make we oure mone to oure derewurthy Mother, and he shall all besprynkly us in his precious blode, and make our soule softe and full mylde” (14.63).<sup>35</sup> Indeed, *Ancrene Wisse*’s more liberal views regarding aspects of anchoritic living, such as a focus on the importance of the outer world to the anchorite, may have appealed to Julian particularly. Julian of Norwich linked herself to earlier, authoritative sources by using similar tropes and metaphors.

However, unlike Rolle, Julian of Norwich actively challenged earlier orthodox ideals. Many of these unorthodox tendencies are clear from the same example used above: “but mekely make we oure mone to oure derewurthy Mother, and he shall all besprynkly us in his precious blode, and make our soule softe and full mylde” (Julian of Norwich, *Showings* 14.63).<sup>36</sup> Not only did Julian describe God as a Mother, but she lumped both genders together, obscuring the line between masculine and feminine identity. In the example from *Ancrene Wisse*, the mother imagery was strictly metaphorical; in Julian’s example, God’s identity and the Mother were bound together.

*Ancrene Wisse* also demonstrates a typical, misogynistic response to original sin:

Þes eappel, leoue suster, bitacneð alle þe [þing] þet lust falleð to, ant delit of sunne...O mine leoue sustren, as Eue haeuð monie dehtren þe folhið hare moder, þe ondswerieð o þisse wise!...Eue þi moder leop efter hire ehnen, from þe ehe to þe eappel, from þe eappel i Parais dun to þer eorðe, from þe eorðe to helle. Þer ha lei i prison fowr þusent zer ant mare, heo ant hire were ba, ant demde al hire ofsprung to leopen al efter hire to deað

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<sup>34</sup> “[If] the child has such sickness that he [needed] a bath of blood before he was healed, his mother [would] love him much if [she] made him take his bath...His love made us [take] a bath of blood”

<sup>35</sup> “but meekly we make our moans to our dear [and] worthy Mother, and he shall sprinkle all of us in his precious blood, and make our souls soft and fully mild”

<sup>36</sup> “but meekly we make our moans to our dear [and] worthy Mother, and he shall sprinkle all of us in his precious blood, and make our souls soft and fully mild”

wiðouten ende...Habbe þenne muche dred euch feble wummon, hwen þeo þ ewes riht ta  
iwraht wið Godes honden wes þurh a sihðe biswiken ant ibroht [forð] into brad sunne þet  
al þe world ouerspreadde. (*Ancrene Wisse* 2.68-86)<sup>37</sup>

No blame whatsoever is placed upon Adam for sinning. Instead, women are not only more susceptible to sin, but are wholly responsible for the damage sin caused to both genders. As Baker demonstrates, “through her [Julian’s] double reading of the tableau of the lord and servant...Julian rewrites the story of the Fall by...refus[ing] to blame Eve...Julian’s theodicy focuses on God’s overwhelming love for sinners rather than divine wrath” (“Introduction” xv). Comparing the last sentence of *Ancrene Wisse*’s example and this sentence from Julian’s *Showings* makes the differences clear: “For Jhesu is in all that shall be safe, and all that be savyd is in Jhesu, and all of the charyte of God” (14.51).<sup>38</sup> These examples demonstrate novel theological implications unique to Julian’s narratives.

In addition, Julian of Norwich chose to connect her experiences with a feminine, usually less respected perspective. In refuting women as “double,” or “by nature frail, fickle, changeable, “sliding,” [or] lying” (Watson 12), Julian emphasized her own femininity while at the same time downplaying the negative connotations of her sex. Just before Julian’s visions and healing, Julian believed she was about to die and focused upon heaven, as she “had set up my eyen” (*Showings* 3).<sup>39</sup> This linked her with the

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<sup>37</sup> “This apple, dear sister, symbolizes all the things that desire and the delight of sin turn to...O my dear sisters, Eve has many daughters who follow their mother, who answer in this way...Eve your mother leapt after he eyes, from the eye to the apple, from the apple in paradise down to the earth, from the earth to hell, where she lay in prison four thousand years and more, she and her husband both, and condemned all her offspring to leap to death without end...So let every woman fear greatly—seeing that she who had just then been wrought by the hands of God was betrayed through a single look, and brought into deep sin which spread over all the world” (“Ancrene Wisse” 67-68).

<sup>38</sup> “For Jesus is in all that shall be safe, and all that [ie, who will] be saved is in Jesus, and all of [by] the charity of God”

<sup>39</sup> “had set up my eyes [looked heavenward]”

masculine prerogative of venerating the godhead (Watson 4). However, although Julian had at first “trusted to come by the mercie of God” by focusing on heaven, her healing and corresponding visionary experiences did not occur until she looked down and “sett my eyen in the face of the crucyfixe” (*Showings* 3),<sup>40</sup> connecting her intense spirituality to the typically feminine focus on Christ. Watson suggests that in this moment, Julian “takes control of her own revelation” (4) and “when offered the opportunity to contemplate God as her male counterparts do, refuses it, choosing the less prestigious and distinctively female form of devotion” (7). According to Watson, Julian of Norwich engaged the trope of feminine doubleness and challenged a masculine understanding of spirituality.

However, Watson’s position is overstated; Julian was probably not consciously making this connection. After all, she did not want to lower her eyes to the crucifix; she only did so to pacify her priest (*Showings* 3). Initially, Julian linked herself with the negative stereotype of doubleness, as she stated that “God forbade that ye shulde saye...that I am a techere...For I am a woman – lewd, febylle, and freylle” (*A Vision* 6.211-12).<sup>41</sup> This response is most likely related to the same “humility *topos*” that pushed Julian to downplay her authorial capability (Baker, “Introduction” xi). Even though Julian probably did not view herself as a vanguard for feminine religious authority in the way Watson suggests, Julian does transcend this purely feminine focus by concentrating on the godhead later in her work: “And thus in oure makyng God almyghty is oure kyndly Fader, and God alle wysdom is oure kyndly Mother, with the love and the

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<sup>40</sup> “set my eyes on the face of the crucifix”

<sup>41</sup> “God forbade that you should say...that I am a teacher...For I am a woman – lewd, feeble, and frail”

goodnes of the Holy Gost, which is alle onne God, onne Lorde” (*Showings* 14.58).<sup>42</sup>

Julian’s earlier focus on the cross (symbolizing Jesus’ suffering) instead of heaven is linked to the pejoration of female spirituality. However, Julian’s ultimate preference for the cross should not immediately be connected to a conscious critique of masculine superiority, in the same way that Richard Rolle should not be viewed as a champion of women’s spirituality just because some similarities between masculine and feminine experience are evident. After all, as Cullum illustrates, it is premature to assume that masculine and feminine experience is diametrically opposed, as “there are clear parallels between the experiences of male and female devotees” (188). Although Julian of Norwich did stress her femininity and offered new theological considerations, it is important *not* to characterize her as an author who completely overrode the masculine paradigm she functioned within.

The complexities of Julian of Norwich’s writings and authorship demonstrate serious medieval concerns regarding feminine and masculine authority and how these authorities related to God, the ultimate authority. The *vita* of the Italian lay penitent Margaret of Cortona (d.1297), written by her confessor, the Franciscan friar Guinta Bevegnati, illustrated these anxieties, as “Guinta provided pastoral services to Margaret, and she served as a bearer of supernatural advice and direction to him” (Coakley 144). In this case, both partners benefitted from the arrangement. Nonetheless, “Guinta clearly presents Margaret as needing him” (Coakley 142), demonstrating the assertion of masculine authority. This is mirrored in the fact that the *vita*, which “focus[ed] on Margaret’s *inner* life” (Coakley 133) needed the approval of multiple male clerics before

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<sup>42</sup> “And thus in our making [ie, according to our perception] God almighty is our kindly Father, and God [in] all his wisdom our kindly Mother, with the love and goodness of the Holy Ghost, which is all one God, one Lord”

it was authorized (Coakley 132). Julian's writings operated within similar strictures. Her work was not nearly as popular as Rolle's in part because of the "repressive atmosphere of the fifteenth century" which made vernacular theological writing "politically dangerous" (Baker, "Introduction" xix). Julian's gender and the theological nuances she introduced certainly augmented this issue. Regardless of their popularity, Julian probably did not fully control her own writings; authorization and support by male clerics or patrons was necessary before her work could be taken seriously. Julian's insistence that "in all thing I beleve as holy chyrch prechyth and techyth...For in all thys blessed shewyng I behelde it as in God's mnyng" (*Showings* 1.9),<sup>43</sup> despite her clear unorthodoxy regarding certain key elements, demonstrates Julian's awareness of the need to operate within clerical confines. Although Julian of Norwich and Margaret of Cortona both found a place within the masculine clerical world by adhering to the demands of masculine authority, they also maintained their own voices.

At the same time, women's public roles are often severely underestimated, even if their works were censored or monitored. For instance, although Margaret of Cortona lived in a cell, she remained active within the city and even joined the Franciscan Order of Penitence (Coakley 131). Indeed, in her *vita*, her vocation was not depicted as "contemplative but active; he [Bevegnati] pictures her even as a kind of public figure... framed as an imitation of Christ" (Coakley 138). Part of this emphasis is related to the role of Franciscan friars in the community, but a similar stress is evident in Julian's case as well. Julian may have been a recluse, but Margery Kempe's visit illustrates that she had some kind of public interaction, either through her personal contact with the outside

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<sup>43</sup> "in all things I believe as the holy church preaches and teaches...For in all these blessed showings I beheld [saw] it as [with]in God's meaning"

world, or through knowledge of her writings. The experiences of all three of these women contrast with the typical assumptions regarding anchoritic living, as those who became anchorites died to the world (Georgianna 51). And yet, as previously shown, *Ancrene Wisse* stressed contact with the outside world, since “the anchoress cannot shut out the world altogether without also shutting out the possibility of loving Christ, who was, after all, a man” (Georgianna 50). Indeed, even Richard Rolle managed to maintain his title as hermit and perhaps anchorite while at the same time retaining his public presence. Despite being an anchoress and highlighting her femininity in her works, Julian of Norwich attained wide-spread public authority in her community and beyond, like Margaret of Cortona and Richard Rolle.

Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich operated within clerical boundaries, but they differed in regards to the details of their theology. Both remained connected to the church through patronage and the need for the sacraments; as a woman, Julian was unable to administer them herself. Rolle was in a similar situation because he never finished his education and became ordained. However, Julian’s theological focus differed from Rolle’s substantially, as her views were often not orthodox. Rolle attempted to form a connection between the lay membership and the clergy, often creating didactic works. Julian simply tried to relay her personal spiritual experiences and constantly downplayed her own authority, making a truly didactic work impossible. Although Rolle and Julian had similar religious vocations in many respects, the differences between them are directly linked to gender and authority.

Julian of Norwich ultimately gained authority by writing in the vernacular feminine tradition, although she operated within the masculine paradigm. Her religious

writings were radical because of their unorthodox nature; however, these views were balanced by an emphasis on feminine weakness and humility. Like Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich was never canonized. Rolle threatened church hierarchy because of his refusal to fully participate, but Julian's failure to attain canonization stemmed from her uniquely feminine and at the same time authoritative perspective. Both individuals refused to fit completely into the gendered categories normally assigned to medieval men and women. Julian and Rolle certainly experimented with gender expectations, as did Margaret of Cortona and Margery Kempe. Looking at these vocations illustrates not only a startling amount of variety, but a surprising number of consistent religious experiences, regardless of gender. In addition, continuity of ideas across genders is clear: Richard Rolle set a foundation based upon vernacular writing for laypeople, and Julian built upon this trend while offering a fresh feminine perspective. However, medieval gendered expectations may not have matched the evident diversity. Similarly, many women pastors are currently becoming mainstream, especially in certain denominations, but most still associate the word "pastor" with a male figure. Although Julian of Norwich gained authority, she remains uncanonized despite her renown in the medieval period and her current popularity. This failure to achieve recognition is due in part to the little modern scholars know of Julian's life beyond her works, as some proof of miraculous behavior must be verified. In her own time, however, Julian may not have received this recognition, unlike many who had similar vocations, in part because of her unorthodox religious views and the questioning of gendered roles in her works and life.

Could Julian of Norwich have increased her authority if she had ignored the masculine-dictated norms of feminine weakness and humility? This masculine paradigm

was a cultural construct that Julian identified herself and others within; therefore, trying to imagine Julian writing outside of this paradigm is ridiculous. Besides, Julian needed the approval of masculine clerics for her works to circulate. A better question is, how far could a woman like Julian push her own authority before she was rejected by the masculine paradigm? The clerical marriage debate that rocked the twelfth-century church illustrates this issue well; by denying clerics marriage, clerics were forced to ask whether masculine sexuality was central to manhood (Fenton 65). Instead of feminine weakness becoming a crisis point for women in the way masculine sexuality became for men, women like Julian chose to identify themselves with 'negative' feminine associations and make them honorable. Joan of Arc, another strong female individual like Julian of Norwich, challenged medieval conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and her ability to first obtain substantial authority only to ultimately lose it will illustrate just how far gender boundaries could be stretched.

## X. Joan of Arc

### *A. Introduction*

Joan of Arc (c.1412-c.1431) also demonstrates masculine and feminine components of spirituality, although she combines this aspect with more physical manifestations of femininity and masculinity as well. She emphasized her femininity through connecting it with her religious imperative, but she also stressed her associations with masculinity by being an active participant in warfare. Although she gained authority rapidly for a brief period, Joan of Arc experienced a swift decline which led to the ultimate loss of authority: death. Joan of Arc's loss of authority contrasts with Richard Rolle's and Julian of Norwich's successes in achieving authority, despite the fact that

Rolle and Julian both challenged gender norms to differing degrees. Although Joan of Arc ultimately failed to fit within the paradigm of medieval masculinity or femininity, analyzing when her considerable authority declined demonstrates that while gender norms in the medieval period allowed for greater levels of flexibility than usually assumed, as shown by Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich, too drastic a gender shift resulted in an overwhelmingly negative response.

As a peasant girl who grew up in Domrémy, France, Joan had a normal childhood marked only by a genuine piety: “[Joan] said moreover that her mother taught her the Paternoster, Ave Maria and Credo” (Barrett 39). When Joan was “about thirteen years, she had a voice from God to help her and guide her” (Barrett 156). This voice – the first of many voices (sometimes accompanied by visions) she would attribute to various angels – urged her to “raise the siege of Orleans” (Barrett 157). This military victory radically altered the English hold on France during the end of the Hundred Years War and led to Joan’s eventual crowning of the dauphin, or the heir apparent (C. Taylor xi). During this period, Joan dressed as a man and was extremely active in the French army, prompting some scholars like Kelly DeVries to insist that “Joan of Arc was a soldier, plain and simple” (*Joan of Arc* 3). In fact, her military exploits were so impressive that “many...expressed the opinion that the English would not attack the town of Louviers until Joan was dead” (J. Taylor 240). The details of Joan’s life come directly from the trial manuscripts orchestrated by her arch-enemies, the English, who captured her as a prisoner-of-war, rigged a biased trial, and eventually executed her for heresy at the age of eighteen or nineteen.

### *B. Joan of Arc’s Spiritual Identity*

Joan linked herself to the feminine mystic tradition—exemplified by women like Julian of Norwich—through her spirituality, despite that she was neither a mystic nor an anchoress. As already noted, women’s spirituality had become a mostly negative phenomenon by the fifteenth century, so Joan of Arc’s popularity represented a reflection of older views of medieval feminine spirituality. The title of Joan’s trial manuscript emphasizes her femininity: “Here Begin the Proceedings in Matter of Faith Against a Dead Woman, Jeanne, Commonly Known as The Maid” (Barrett 3). Joan explicitly identified herself as a virginal, innocent young girl; “the Maid” represented the epitome of purity. Her voices connected these elements explicitly by calling her “Jeanne the Maid, daughter of God” (Barrett 159). In addition, just like Julian, Joan downplayed her own significance in order to highlight God’s involvement and direction. Whenever the questioners at Joan’s trial pushed her to justify activities that seemed to challenge masculine ideals, Joan simply responded that “everything she did was at God’s command” (Barrett 162). Joan’s vocation was not about changing the status quo or questioning the masculine paradigm she and other women worked within; instead, her actions stemmed from her desire to follow her religious imperative to “raise the siege of Orléans and have Charles, whom she calls her king, crowned, and should drive out all the adversaries of the kingdom of France” (Barrett 156). By stressing her identify as a woman and acting with typical feminine humility, Joan of Arc aligned herself with the feminine mystic tradition.

Joan of Arc’s intimate voices and visions also parallel distinctly feminine spiritual experience. Julian’s visions affected her physically and were exceedingly vivid. Similarly, Joan “heard the voice [of St. Michael] on her right, towards the church, and

she seldom heard it without a light” (Barrett 156). Joan’s mystical experiences were both physical and internal. In fact, Joan “saw them [St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret] with her bodily eyes as well as she saw the assessors of the trial” (Barrett 158). Not only were Joan’s visions physical, but she was also bodily affected by the presence or absence of the angels who visited her: “And when St. Michael and the angels left her, she wept, and fain would have been taken with them” (Barrett 158). Joan’s visions and voices operated within the context of specifically feminine spirituality.

Joan also stressed her adherence to the church and her lack of desire for authority, as did Julian of Norwich. Julian was quick to assure her readers that she was not attempting to teach or question church doctrine; in the same way, Joan “believes in the Christian faith, and in the articles of this faith, although she reports no sign sufficient to know them by” (Barrett 201). Joan and Julian were radical in the expression of their faith, but they countered this by at least verbally labeling themselves as faithful church members. In addition, Joan considered herself “a poor maid, knowing nothing of riding or fighting” (Barrett 43), despite the testimony of others that she rode a horse easily, used gunpowder weapons expertly, and could use a lance with as much skill as a man (DeVries, *Joan of Arc* 56). Instead of emphasizing qualities others generally considered masculine, Joan instead stressed her femininity. Antoine Dufour, a fifteenth-century French writer who wrote *Vies des femmes célèbres*, examined the story of Triaria, who followed her husband into battle. He stated that although Triaria became “woman in body and man in spirit” during this time, her role in the army was legitimized because of her plan to return to a womanly role (Swift 205). Not only did Joan downplay her masculine qualities, but she, too, professed a desire to return home and return to her original role:

“Give me a woman's dress to go to my mother's house, and I will take it” (Barrett 135). Joan stressed her humility and desire to remain a woman repeatedly, as did Julian of Norwich and Triaria.

A more gender-neutral aspect of Joan of Arc's religious experience is connected to common hagiographical tropes seen in many *vitae* or religious writings: the performance of miracles and the power of prayer. As Joan of Arc became more popular, especially among laypeople and those of the lower class, tales of possible miraculous activity became prominent. For instance, at Joan's trial, she was asked about whether she was involved with resurrecting a three-year-old boy from the dead through “pray[ing to] God and the Blessed Virgin to give life to the babe” (Barrett 82). After being baptized, the boy died and was buried in consecrated ground, but the event was still all the more miraculous because “three days had passed...with no sign of life in the child, which was as black as her coat” (Barrett 83). This miracle was clearly linked to Joan's earnest prayers. Part of this reliance on prayer stems from the earlier medieval veneration of women's prayers in particular, but the powerful effect of prayer was certainly not relegated to women's experience only.

Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich also demonstrate the importance of miraculous events and prayer in the creation of an individual spiritual identity. Richard Rolle developed a following in part because of similar events, such as when he stopped a seizure of the anchoress Margaret Kirkby and “promised her that she would never suffer another such attack while he was alive” (Rosamund Allen 10). She only suffered one other attack her entire life – and incidentally, the attack occurred exactly when Rolle died (Rosamund Allen 10). Julian of Norwich's healing from her own sickness was certainly

miraculous, as she “wenyd nought tylle have lyffede tylle daye” (*A Vision* 2.50).<sup>44</sup> Both also stressed the necessity of prayer. Richard Rolle refused to move at the request of his patron while praying, as he was concerned over “disturb[ing] his deep devotions” (Rosamund Allen 14). Similarly, Julian prayed for guidance during her sickness, asking ““Goode Lorde, maye my lyevyng be no langere to thy worshippe?”” (*A Vision* 2.59).<sup>45</sup> Joan of Arc participated in largely feminine spiritual tropes, although the performance of miracles and prayer were also connected to masculine, hermitic experience.

Joan of Arc’s concern for lay people is also linked with both Julian and Rolle. The trial manuscript emphasizes Joan’s effect on the public: “she answered that many came to see her gladly, but they kissed her hands as little as she could help; but the poor folk gladly came to her, for she did them no unkindness, but helped them as much as she could” (Barrett 81). Joan’s popularity was so great that townspeople asked her to be the godparent of children, tried to kiss her hands and feet, and asked for her help in performing miracles (Barrett 81-82). By the time she became recognized as the savior of Orléans, Joan had reached cult status (as did Rolle and Julian). A prophecy had been circulating that “said that out of this wood would come a maid who should work miracles” (Barrett 54). Joan “put no faith in that,” (Barrett 54), but this claim and others continued to circulate. Rolle and Joan (and Julian to a lesser extent) expressed great concern for the lay population, demonstrating a different focus brought about by their spiritual convictions that resulted in great public influence.

In addition, Rolle, Julian, and Joan all claimed to work within and respect church strictures, even though they challenged aspects of church expectations. Rolle’s living

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<sup>44</sup> “would not think [she would] have lived until the day”

<sup>45</sup> ““Good Lord, may my living be no longer to your worship [ie, is my life no longer an expression of your worship]?””

choices emphasized a rejection of typical church hierarchy while Julian's sometimes radical writing remained tempered by her repeated claims of humility and submission to the church. Joan also stressed her desire to remain faithful to the church: "She answered that her replies should be seen and examined by the clergy, and then she should be told if there were anything contrary to the Christian faith...if there were any evil against Christian faith...she would not wish to sustain it" (Barrett 118). At the same time, however, she viewed her heavenly voices as having greater authority than the clergy; when her English questioners tried to force her to swear obedience to the decisions of their particular church council, she replied, "'I will not give you any further answer for the present'" (Barrett 118). Instead, she claimed that "Everything I have said or done is in the hand of God, and I commit myself to Him. And I certify to you that I would do or say nothing against the Christian faith; and, if I had...I would not uphold it, but would cast it out" (Barrett 120). Joan still maintained a great respect for the church, as "she declared she greatly desired to hear Mass and receive Communion" (Barrett 294). Julian in particular suggested a novel perspective through her reliance on her personal mystic experience. Joan demonstrated a similar strategy, as she, too, relied on her direct connection with God instead of intermediaries like the clergy.

Rosamund Allen claims that Rolle sometimes seems arrogant in his writings because of the persuasive nature of the texts, "but [it was] an arrogance on God's behalf, not his own" (51). Joan demonstrated this same attitude. Instead of constantly stressing her humility and feminine weakness like Julian, Joan's answers at her trial demonstrate a quick temper, a forthright assertiveness, and an assurance of her own credibility. For instance, Joan's questioners repeatedly pushed her to swear what she perceived as an

unfair oath. Joan responded by swearing only partially; when they continued to try and force her, Joan said, ““I have sworn enough, twice”” (Barrett 225). Joan’s challenge to the English church council questioning her was more assertive than that of Julian or Rolle, despite the fact that she lacked formal education, a key component of Julian and Rolle’s authority. Indeed, she dictated her letters and only knew how to sign her name. Although they challenged the church through different avenues, all three participated in claiming their authority independently of the church.

### *C. Joan of Arc’s Military Identity*

While some aspects of Joan’s spirituality correlated with Richard Rolle’s experiences, the masculine traits she appropriated despite her gender were expressed mainly through her participation on the battlefield. As shown earlier, women’s involvement in warfare is underestimated; nonetheless, by the fifteenth century, women’s involvement in warfare was rare. Therefore, Joan’s participation in warfare on any level stretched gender boundaries. Although the social views already discussed were part of this change, the Hundred Years’ War itself remains paramount to understanding the negative views expressed towards warrior women from the fourteenth century onward. The Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453) represented a new kind of war for the English: nation against nation, instead of region against region or landowner against landowner. Although the Norman invasion (1066) consisted of the French nation fighting against an Anglo-Saxon nation, the Hundred Years’ War was the first war England fought against another foreign power (the French) as a unified, specifically *English* force. Indeed, midway through this conflict in 1362, “English became the official language of legal proceedings [instead of French]” (Millward and Hayes 147), demonstrating the

discarding of a French identity in favor of an English one. This more global view of war squeezed out feminine participation, as people no longer fought for regional interests, but for a single *national* identity.

Joan of Arc found opportunities to fight in the Hundred Years' War despite the decrease in women's participation by connecting herself with the more intimate fighting style of the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. According to McLaughlin, an influx of mercenary soldiers during this period supposedly pushed women from the battlefield, as women could no longer rely on men they knew to legitimize their presence (204). However, mercenary bands called the Free Companies actually offered Joan of Arc room to create connections. Joan of Arc herself shared characteristics with the leaders of Free Companies, such as her ability to lead soldiers dedicated specifically to her leadership and her veneration by these soldiers after her death (DeVries, *A Woman* 4). Low-ranking leaders (as opposed to nobility) rose in popularity; La Hire, a celebrated but lowborn military leader who supported Joan of Arc, is a prime example (DeVries, *Joan of Arc* 55). These men earned their reputations and their men's loyalty instead of being born into leadership. By fitting herself into the model of a low-born commander of mercenary troops, Joan of Arc created an identity men were willing to follow. This forced Joan to rely on personal connections with men like the Duke of Alençon and Le Hire in a manner reminiscent of women fighters from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. In addition to the opportunities offered Joan of Arc through mercenary bands, France lacked central, organized authority and was on the verge of losing the Hundred Years' War. As DeVries states, "If anything should have discouraged her, the state of France in 1429 should have" (*Joan of Arc* 29). Other more traditional avenues of leadership were exhausted. Instead of

allowing herself to be shut out from warfare, Joan of Arc took advantage of the upheaval surrounding this period and formed close connections with her men, earning herself a place of leadership.

Indeed, Joan of Arc was considered primarily a soldier by her compatriots. As Juliet Taylor points out, being “pious and religious...is not the same as being holy,” and “historical sources do not glorify her as a holy woman but as a leader and warrior” (239). Although Juliet Taylor’s view is overstated, it cannot be denied that Joan of Arc’s identity as a military figure was paramount. Her roles varied, but all were explicitly linked to military activity. She worked as a strategist off the battlefield (DeVries, *Joan of Arc* 132) as well as a commander personally leading men to battle (DeVries, *Joan of Arc* 82). In addition, Joan held both a sword and a standard, although “she much preferred her standard to her sword” (Barrett 63). Even though she wore a sword, Joan asserted that “she herself bore the standard, when attacking the enemy, so as not to kill any one; she never has killed any one” (Barrett 63). However, Joan was wounded multiple times in battle (J. Taylor 221), demonstrating her participation, and she did claim that one of her swords “was a good weapon for fighting, excellent for giving hard clouts and buffets” (Barrett 63). Also, she worked herself into such a rage about a delay in the siege of Paris that “she broke the blade of her famous sword of St. Catherine when she attacked some camp followers” (222). Joan may have claimed to hate bloodshed, but her enthusiasm for fighting and her references to using weaponry demonstrate her proficiency as a military leader. Indeed, Joan herself acknowledged her role in warfare when she dictated “I am commander of the armies” in a letter to the French (DeVries, *Joan of Arc* 69). Joan of Arc attributed male characteristics to her spiritual identity by acting as an authoritative

military leader.

*D. Joan of Arc's Combination of Masculine and Feminine Identities*

Joan's military success remained directly dependent on her more feminine, spiritual identity. Joan of Arc scholars often polarize Joan by choosing to stress either her military or spiritual identity, but these arguments fail to take into account that Joan of Arc's masculine military exploits would not have been possible without her feminine spirituality. By emphasizing her femininity and her religious imperative from God, Joan gave herself authority that most women could not attain. The fanatical devotion of the soldiers who followed Joan of Arc was not only due to her military expertise but to her unique ability to reward "her soldiers not with booty, but with spiritual riches [salvation]" (DeVries, *A Woman* 12). Indeed, the "elevated moral tone" Joan set for the army (DeVries, *A Woman* 11) only raised French fervor; French military success correlated with an increased religiosity, or a return to morality. Without these positive signs, Joan's authority would not have gained the same kind of status. Joan of Arc's femininity and religious imperative shaped her identity as a soldier, making these two identities impossible to consider in isolation.

The connection between Joan of Arc's masculine, military characteristics and more feminine spiritual features is best exemplified by the fact that her men did not view her with carnal desire, as they would other women (DeVries, *Joan of Arc* 35). This view was unusual. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Tegean girl who wounded the Calydonian boar had a distinctly different effect on the men: "When Meleager saw her, in a flash/His heart leapt high...and deep/He drank love's flame" (8.327-29). Indeed, some of the men attributed her winning of Meleager's prize to "your [the girl's] dotting donor" (8.439),

implying that her feminine beauty, not her hunting prowess, earned her Meleager's favor. Judith also relied upon her feminine appearance, as she is described as "this woman of elfin beauty" (14) and used this beauty to seduce Holofernes, then to kill him. However, in Joan of Arc's case, her beauty was irrelevant to her femininity *or* masculinity. As a virgin, Joan was "unpolluted by sex and uncontained as yet by marriage," freeing her for a leadership role (Crane 306). Because her femininity remained characterized by her spiritual mission and her masculinity was contextualized inside this perceived feminine identity, Joan of Arc effectively blended feminine and masculine gender characteristics and expectations, creating a radical authority not reliant on gendered concerns.

Joan of Arc's vocation is remarkable, but combining clerical and secular authority was not unheard of. As the earlier example of the Crusades illustrated, secular authorities and clerical authorities sometimes worked in tandem to achieve goals, although clerical authorities were always supposed to trump secular ones. Joan of Arc went a step further, as she formed a combined identity with both secular and spiritual authority. People other than Joan lived a spiritual life while retaining a secular role. For instance, Weissenberg compares two *vitae* of married men, one a craftsman and the other a nobleman, and states "they maintained their social and emotive roles as husbands, although not as fathers...[and continued] performing their secular, social duties with care and commitment" (115). Margery Kempe is another example, as she underwent a "spiritual journey from wife and mother to religious mystic and pilgrim" (Kempe, Introduction 809). Kempe put aside her wifely duties when she became a pilgrim, as "sche toke hir leve at hir husband" (26.7),<sup>46</sup> but her worldly experiences continued to impact her vocation. In the same way, Joan put aside everyday expectations, such as when she

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<sup>46</sup> "she took her leave of her husband"

disobeyed her parents during “the incident at Toul, in the action for marriage” (Barrett 158). Joan’s vocation required her virginity, as keeping “her oath and promise to Our Lord” required the “safe[-keeping of] her virginity of body and of soul” (Barrett 197). Combining secular and clerical authority in one identity was possible, but sacrificing some aspects of secular identity (thereby highlighting the greater influence of clerical authority) was considered necessary to express truly righteous living. Joan of Arc’s claims to authority in both spiritual and martial senses caused serious concern over gender boundaries, but her unique combination of these elements allowed her actually to *attain* authority instead of lose it.

#### *E. Joan of Arc’s Authorial Decline and Loss*

Joan of Arc’s authority remained strong at first, but her decline proved rapid and ultimately fatal, despite the fact that her character was largely unchanged. The moment marking Joan’s loss of authority was her capture by the Burgundians. Her trial began soon after the Burgundians sold her to the English, and her death soon followed. As a French leader, Joan retained her authority largely because she created a new, unique identity that took her outside the masculine gender paradigm. Her concern was not for glory and personal reputation, but for pursuing “God’s will” (Barrett 163). The men who fought under her standard were included in this glorious vocation. However, Joan represented the opposite for the English army. The English viewed Joan’s repeated victories as reducing masculine prowess: “For Bedford [an English enemy of Joan of Arc], the matter [Joan of Arc’s military ability] was personal, an emasculating challenge to his leadership, skill, and the fortune he had amassed in France” (J. Taylor 225). Once in English hands, Joan stood little chance of surviving since she represented a direct

threat to masculine hierarchy.

This is reflected in the extremely biased trial Joan endured. She was burned at the stake for being “relapsed, excommunicate, and heretic” (Barrett 358) after being questioned by “sixty skilled politicians, lawyers, [and] ambassadors, trained in all the complexities of legal questioning” (C. Taylor x). As Juliet Taylor states, “A specific, English-controlled church court executed Joan for political and military reasons, although it couched its decision in religious language” (218). The trial was so irregular that some judges refused to participate, and one lawyer even deemed it invalid (J. Taylor 233). Nonetheless, Joan was convicted of heresy—even though in France she was renowned for her extreme holiness. Discrediting Joan of Arc’s actions was impossible without demeaning Joan’s *religious* mission, underscoring the importance of understanding her identity as both a soldier and a spiritualist. In condemning her, the English focused on Joan’s masculine activity, as her male dress was inappropriate due to her obvious *femininity*. For the English, Joan of Arc had to die, regardless of her innocence or guilt, as her military authority undermined the English cause both in a political and gendered sense.

The French failed to rescue Joan of Arc, largely because her unparalleled authority had become troublesome for the French monarchy as well as for the English. Although Charles VII did inquire about Joan’s circumstances and promised vengeance for her death if the English carried out the threatened sentence (Champion 389), his efforts amounted to little more than political posturing. La Hire and Dunois, two of Joan’s close friends, attempted to help her more directly by going to Rouen, where the trial was held, and harrying the English (Champion 389). However, a concerted effort to

rescue Joan or raise ransom money was not sponsored by the French monarchy. For Charles VII, having Joan executed by the enemy may have been a convenient way to have her authority transferred back to him. Although Joan had expressed longing for home, she “began to dress as a knight and courtier” as her honors and accolades increased, even when off the battlefield or not in court (Crane 308). Had she really planned to return to Domrémy? Or was she wholly embracing her novel roles? The French ultimately did not rescue Joan of Arc because her authority was quickly becoming problematic.

Joan of Arc pushed gender boundaries to an unprecedented level, and this aspect of her vocation was one of the major reasons she died. Her unique combination of masculine and feminine authority actually built her reputation at first, but her continued confidence in her role eventually became too presumptuous for either the French or the English courts. Putter illustrated that instances of cross-dressing knights were only funny because they were clearly comical and not factual (291). In contrast, Joan of Arc actualized the crossing of a gender boundary in a tangible, visible way. Indeed, Putter even states that for a medieval audience “the naked sword is (or should be) the exclusive property of men” (291). Joan clearly challenged this masculine prerogative by using weaponry. At the same time, Joan did not discard her femininity in order to highlight her masculinity. She created a new kind of identity that Crane sees as best symbolized by her preference for her standard, which demonstrated “her refusal to succumb uncritically to the conventional model of the masculine warrior” (308). Joan of Arc’s death resulted in part from a refusal to fully conform to the norms of masculine or feminine identity.

The challenge Joan of Arc presented to medieval understandings of gender and

authority is clearly demonstrated in the connections drawn between Joan's masculine clothing and spirituality during her trial. Joan's choice to wear masculine clothing caused her enemies to question her spiritual claims (Crane 300). For Joan, this choice "was fulfilling the commands of God as they had been revealed to her" (Barrett 160), as masculine attire was necessary for her vocation and an expression of her mission. She also may have retained masculine clothing when in an English prison undergoing her trial, despite being offered women's clothing, for other reasons such as protection against rape (Crane 302). However, Joan's accusers called her male dress a "blaspheme against God [in that] you [Joan] are given to idolatry and worship yourself and your clothes" (Barrett 332). Joan's resolute decision to remain in male attire reinforced her accusers' negative views of Joan's femininity. Male knights could occasionally cross-dress in a comical manner because their own masculinity was overwhelmingly evident (Putter 293). In the same way, Joan's femininity was overwhelmingly evident, despite her cross-dressing, resulting in Joan's rejection of "feminine roles while continuing to identify herself as a woman" (Crane 310). In this case, Joan's cross-dressing lacked any comedic value, as she refused to denounce this part of her appearance. Joan confused medieval views of gender by dressing and sometimes acting as a man but remaining conspicuously feminine, all the while claiming a level of authority usually attributed to men.

Joan of Arc's death signaled a dismissal of her authority, making her experience different from that of Rolle or Julian. By killing Joan, the English sought to eradicate the political issues and gender confusion that Joan represented. Joan's death was ultimately due to a myriad of political and religious issues, but Joan's gender non-conformity certainly aggravated these concerns. Joan of Arc and Na Prous Boneta challenged gender

roles in similar ways, and both faced execution. Na Prous Boneta, a French Spiritual Franciscan who was burned at the stake in 1325 (Petroff 276-77), asserted that “he who does not believe in the words of Na Prous shall die an eternal death”(289) because God “gave her the Holy Spirit” (288). She even believed that “Christ gave him [the pope] this more terrifying name, that is, Antichrist” (287). Like Na Prous, Joan claimed authority through her voices, superseding that of the church. Na Prous Boneta began as a mystic who “saw Jesus Christ in the form of a man as well as in his divinity” (284). She was not burned because of her individual mystical visions, but because she challenged official church doctrine and practices, in part by asserting feminine authority. Beckman provides yet another example of a woman who failed to retain her authority; Margaret Porete was also burned at the stake in 1310 for “the producing and distributing of her [mystical] works” (66). Joan of Arc, Na Prous Boneta, and Margaret Porete threatened medieval understandings of gender; as Coon makes clear, the most dangerous place for either sex is between masculinity and femininity (Coon 470). The deaths of these women underscore their threat to masculine authority.

This concern over the place of women’s authority as related to masculine authority—demonstrated by the deaths of Joan of Arc and Na Prous Boneta, among others—was unique to the fifteenth-century medieval period. For both Joan and Na Prous Boneta, their deaths related to a *feminine* concern, as the inappropriateness of their spirituality on a gendered level was at stake. Older accounts of warrior women do not demonstrate this same focus. Like Joan of Arc, Camilla, a “hard-riding warrior queen” (11.678) in Virgil’s *The Aeneid*, was revered for her commitment to virginity and warfare and was a fearsome warrior who killed many of her enemies. The male military

commander who served alongside her did not express concern over her actions but actively sought her help: “Plan your battle as my co-commander” (11.706). When her death occurred later in the passage, Camilla was not renounced for participating in a masculine role; instead, her evident femininity became her downfall. She chased after an enemy wearing “luxurious Trojan gear” (11.1060) and “she rode on/Through a whole scattered squadron, recklessly,/In a girl’s love of finery” (11.1064-66). This foolish chase led to her death, as the beautiful items distracted her. For Virgil’s audience, men’s ability in war was clearly shown to be superior to Camilla’s. Indeed, when she died, “the fight became more savage” (11.1135). However, instead of emphasizing how wrong her masculine qualities were, Virgil accentuated how Camilla’s feminine qualities simply were not suitable for war. The fifteenth-century concern over women with masculine aspects or attitudes posing a threat to masculine authority represented a distinctly late medieval emphasis.

Joan of Arc ultimately fulfilled fifteenth-century anxiety regarding gender and authority during a period when concerns about women’s roles were at their highest. When combined with the political issues surrounding Joan’s trial, her early death was inevitable. Her attempt to appropriate male gender roles ultimately failed, but her early success demonstrated the possibility of pushing these boundaries. After all, Dufour examined women’s stories such as Triaria’s during the fifteenth century and suggested that if women were given the same training as men, they could have performed men’s roles better (Swift 217). Indeed, Dufour’s writings open up the possibility of women “surpass[ing] the expectations of either sex” (Swift 220). Even Christine de Pizan participated in this gender assessment, as she linked Joan of Arc to Esther, Judith,

Deborah, Moses, Joshua, and Gideon in her *Ditié De Jehanne D'Arc* (438). Medieval concerns over gender boundaries were actively explored, but the perspectives of Dufour and Christine de Pizan were far from universally accepted. Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich also operated within this context by testing gender boundaries to a lesser extent than Joan of Arc.

#### *F. Conclusion*

Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, and Joan of Arc have much in common. All three appropriated aspects of the opposite gender, although the final outcomes of these attempts to gain authority differed. Joan's similarities to Richard and Julian illustrate an important consideration: masculine and feminine spirituality often overlapped. Although Joan's spirituality is generally considered her feminine side due to her more overtly masculine side, her spirituality shared links with Rolle *and* Julian. Although Rolle and Julian expressed their gender ambiguities in less visible ways, all three struggled with the same issue of holding onto authority while remaining inside gender expectations. These three individuals, who spanned the thirteenth century through the fifteenth century, illustrate a continual anxiety over gender and its relationship to authority. Moreover, they demonstrate that these anxieties were so acute because masculine and feminine experience ultimately contained plentiful *similarities*, making distinctions difficult.

Still, out of the three case studies examined, Joan of Arc is the only one who eventually attained canonization (J. Taylor 217). Her authority has survived intact in a greater way than either Richard Rolle's or Julian of Norwich's, despite her radical nature. Although this is certainly related to the extent of Joan's spirituality and the compelling nature of her mission, this reversal of outcomes is related to other factors. Of course,

Coakley justly emphasizes that a lack of canonization does not equate to a lack of veneration; indeed, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, veneration increased as canonization decreased (8). The steady popularity of Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich attests to this statement. In addition, Joan's canonization is certainly related to more modern political concerns; as Juliet Taylor asks, "Is it a coincidence that Joan was canonized in 1920, fifty years after her beatification process had begun and two years after World War I had ended?" (240). Joan of Arc's current resurgence of authority and popularity is linked to a more modern view of gender and nationality. At the same time, however, Joan of Arc's mission was ultimately gender-neutral. She fought for a purely nationalistic cause and often "dismiss[ed] her dress as a minor issue" (Crane 301), despite the fact that her cross-dressing remained symbolic of the masculine authority she threatened. Even directly after Joan's death, many of the spectators expressed remorse (J. Taylor 236), indicating that the conclusions reached at Joan's trial were not universal. Joan of Arc ultimately failed to retain her authority (unlike Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich) because according to the male medieval authority figures presiding at her trial, her masculine attributions challenged their own authority. Nonetheless, Joan's own reaction to the condemnation levied against her and the attitudes of sympathetic Frenchmen and Englishmen demonstrate that even during the restrictive fifteenth century, Joan's attempt to reevaluate gender binaries was heard but not accepted.

## XI. Conclusion

Although normative gender roles in the medieval period were propagated, masculine and feminine boundaries of behavior were somewhat flexible. Even within one paradigm, much variation existed, as can be seen in the different contexts in which men

proved their manhood. Although they still operated within an overarching masculine paradigm, women carved out places of authority for themselves by subverting masculine expectations of women's involvement in spirituality and warfare. At the same time, women made their involvement distinctly feminine through different methods and foci. Men also flirted with feminine gender roles, as the cross-dressing knights show, and some men, such as Richard Rolle, appropriated feminine gender roles just as women did with medieval mysticism. The testing of gender boundaries was often related to a search for a greater level of legitimacy and public acknowledgement, as evidenced by the medieval individuals who increased their authority through appropriating masculine or feminine gender roles. At the same time, "female mystical authors were not always authoritative for their readings, performances, and writings" (Beckman 66), indicating that gender boundaries could only be tested so far.

Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, and Joan of Arc are three individuals who appropriated aspects of the opposite sex and either gained or lost authority through this appropriation. Richard Rolle refused to work within the male, hierarchical paradigm assigned medieval men; at the same time, some aspects of his vocation were strikingly similar to more feminine modes of spirituality. Julian of Norwich used the standard tropes of female writers, but her authority as a writer demonstrates a male trait. Both individuals maintained their authority during their lifetimes and beyond but were not canonized. Joan of Arc worked within a mainly feminine spirituality (although some aspects are also linked to masculine elements) while at the same time appropriating a distinctly masculine role through participating directly in warfare. Although she maintained authority temporarily, Joan of Arc ultimately lost her authority when she was

burned at the stake. Nonetheless, she is the only case study to be canonized. Joan of Arc's failure demonstrates that despite the fluidity between gender experiences, pushing boundaries too far remained unacceptable because of the perceived challenge to masculine authority. Medieval men and women experimented with performing gender in an effort to achieve authority with varying levels of success, demonstrating that medieval expressions of masculinity and femininity often contained more similarities than normally assumed, along differences more nuanced than stark. Appropriating some aspects of the opposite gender often led to greater authority, but if utilizing opposite gender roles involved claiming too much authority, thereby putting increased pressure upon social norms, such actions could lead to the loss of authority through de-legitimization and death.

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