VISIONS, POWER, AND MARGERY KEMPE

Abstract: Texts including visionary English women of the Middle Ages range from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* to *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The visionary experience authorizes the female voice and grants the visionary the opportunity to exercise feminine influence on masculinist culture. Generally, in these texts dream theories and discourse on women are rhetorically combined to authorize the power of these women, whose power is then reflected back on the church or church entities with whom they are associated. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, however, offers a unique example of the rhetorical deployment of feminine power authorized by visionary access that does not function in service of the church and, instead, is fully retained by the woman. I will argue that the persistence of interest in dream theories creates a rhetorical continuity over time among texts empowering English dreaming and visionary women, but that power functions differently in the case of Margery Kempe when compared to her visionary predecessors. **Keywords:** St Hild, Whitby, Margery Kempe, St Leoba, Christina of Markyate, visions, prophetic dreams, female spirituality, anti-feminism discourse, my.

Resumen: Los textos medievales que incluyen inglesas visionarias van de la *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum* de Beda a *The Book of Margery Kempe*. La experiencia visionaria da autoridad a la voz femenina y garantiza a la visionaria la oportunidad de ejercer influencia femenia sobre la cultura machista. En general, en estos textos las teorías del sueño y los discursos sobre la mujer se combinan retóricamente para dar autoridad al poder de estas mujeres, cuyo poder se refleja en la iglesia o en las entidades eclesiásticas con las que se las asocia. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, sin embargo, ofrece un ejemplo único de despliegue retórico del poder femenino autorizado por el acceso visionario que no funciona al servicio de la iglesia sino que queda en poder de la mujer. Se argumentará que la persistencia del interés en las teorías del sueño crea una continuidad retórica en el tiempo entre los textos que dotan de poder a inglesas soñadoras y visionarias, pero que ese poder funciona de modo distinto en el caso de Margery Kempe si se la compara con las visionarioas que la precedieron. **Palabras clave:** Santa Hilda, Margery Kempe, Santa Leoba, Cristina de Markyate, visiones, sueños proféticos, espiritualidad femenina, discurso antifeminista, misoginia.

A GREAT DEAL OF RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON VISIONARY women of the later Middle Ages, including Margery Kempe, explores the impact of late medieval interest in "discernment of spirits" on the relative agency and power derived by these women from their visionary status.[1] Nancy Caciola, who locates the revival of discernment doctrine in the late twelfth

[1] For informative analysis of later medieval "discernment of spirits" doctrine and practice, see for example Caciola (2003), Elliott (2002), and Newman (1998). For specific application of this doctrine to the study of Margery Kempe, see Voaden (1999) and Beckwith (1992).

century, asserts that this doctrine was developed and refined in the later Middle Ages only after a long "decline of interest in the testing of spirits" (Caciola 2003: 8). Women's visions, however, were used to sanction female authority during the earlier Middle Ages, as well, though admittedly not in the numbers seen later. This sanction was partially made possible because of persistent interest in divine revelation through dreaming as well as the theories used to explain such dreaming from antiquity onward. In texts regarding English religious women of the early and high Middle Ages, dream discourse was strategically combined with discourse on the nature of women to authorize both female access to divine dreams and visions and the agency derived from this access by the visionary woman. I will demonstrate that *The Book of Margery Kempe* deploys rhetorical strategies dependent on dream theories in much the same way that they are deployed in earlier English texts, albeit with somewhat different results.[2] Because most women visionaries were either nuns or members of lay orders, their sanction ordinarily operated reciprocally: clerical authority produced texts authorizing the visionary woman whose divine inspiration then authorized some aspect of the church, perhaps a holy site, a particular order or abbey, or even a particular cleric. The visionary authority rhetorically established in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, however, is less reciprocal. Margery Kempe is able to and often does use her gift in service to individual clerics or particular sites, but the divine authority she derives from her visions, rather than augmenting clerical power, grants her an extraordinary degree of personal freedom from the masculinist authority of the church.

Visionary experiences, though distinguished qualitatively from dreams in some theories, are almost always accorded a place in medieval dream hierarchies; in essence, a vision is often theorized as

[2] I am using the term discourse in the Foucauldian sense of a set of authorized statements or paradigms that have some institutional or hegemonic force. I am using the term rhetoric to refer to the arrangement, juxtaposition, or merging of discourses that produces a persuasive effect in a text.

the highest form of dreaming. Caroline Walker Bynum asserts that medieval mystics, exegetes, and spiritual writers did not separate, "[i]ntellect, soul, and sensory faculties" or use a separate vocabulary for each. She maintains that "God was known with senses that were a fusion of all the human beings' capacities to experience. [T]hey and their hagiographers sometimes differed over whether a vision was seen with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the mind" (Bynum 1987a: 151). Theories and practices constituting the discourse of dreaming, however, demonstrate both the difficulty and importance of determining the exact nature of any particular dream or vision and tend to be based on an assumption of body/spirit dualism. Pagan dream theories, such the Macrobian system of five types ranging from the entirely bodily dream to the completely spiritual divine oracle, were known and understood throughout the Middle Ages and were echoed in well-known patristic writings.[3] In the *Dialogues,* for instance, Gregory the Great acknowledges the bodily nature of dreaming along with its transcendent possibilities (Zimmerman 1959: 261–262).[4] Likewise, medieval physicians differentiated between dreams of the body and soul (which might be useful for diagnosis) and significant dreams not involving the body, following a three tiered organizational scheme made up of the *somnium naturalia* "of purely physical origin," the *somnium animale* "caused by preoccupations of the waking mind," and the *somnium coeleste* given by God or other supernatural forces (Spearing 1976: 57–58).[5] Thus, in a variety of formulations dream

[3] For the complete classification system, see Macrobius (1952).

[4] Gregory's formulation accurately registers the ambiguity inherent in dream discourse: "It is important to realize [...] that dreams come to the soul in six ways. They are generated either by a full stomach or by an empty one, or by illusions, or by our thoughts combined with illusions, or by revelations, or by our thoughts combined with revelations."

[5] The vast body of pagan and Christian dream theories has been studied by numerous scholars. See, for example, Kruger (1992, 1999) and Lynch (1988). For discussions of the applicability of dream theory to medieval literature and religious experience, see Barr (2010).

theories reinforcing a body/spirit binary persisted throughout the Middle Ages. Even before the resurgence of interest in discernment of spirits, then, dream or visions were available tools for the authorization of women's power.

The dualistic association of the feminine with matter or body and the masculine with spirit or mind that prevailed, at least theoretically, throughout the Middle Ages is well-known. Defining woman as body rather than spirit and insisting that as daughters of Eve all women share the defects and weakness of their general mother, misogynistic writings passed essentially unaltered from century to century, in spite of the challenges to this paradigm posed by Christian doctrines of spiritual gender equality and by both legendary and living women who defied these stereotypes. When the body/spirit polarizations found in the discourses of misogyny and dream theory are combined, a unique rhetorical space is opened for the sanction of women's authority and agency. Both discourses depend upon theoretical polarizations that are inconsistent with lived experience, thereby creating a paradox: theoretically a woman is all body and should not have access to the divine dreams and visions that are reserved for those who are perfectly spiritual, but real women throughout the Middle Ages did, in fact, experience divine dreams and visions.[6] The texts produced about these women employ both discourses, but do so using rhetorical strategies that ultimately cancel out their inherent dualism. In the space opened by this paradox, we find a rhetorical joining of the female body and the spiritual power and authority of

[6] The word "real" here is, I recognize, deeply problematic. Cleopatra, for example, is a historically attested person, but the character constructed in Shakespeare is clearly a fiction. The abbess Hild, similarly, is historically attested, but the person named Hild in Bede's text, while certainly a construction, is not a fiction in the same way that Shakespeare's Cleopatra is. The women I call "real" here, then, are real in the sense that the texts in which they appear assume them to be real persons who lived real lives and whose real experiences are recounted by the text. Whatever skepticism I have regarding their textually constructed natures, their texts treat them as real in ways that works offering fictionalized accounts of "real" women like Cleopatra do not.

dreams and visions that ultimately creates a monistic, rather than dualistic, characterization of the visionary woman. Such unification allows feminine agency to coexist with masculine cultural dominance, which in turn allows for the reciprocal exchange of authorization. Rather than forcing women and significant dreams into a contentious body/spirit dichotomy that attempts to deny woman-as-body access to spiritual authority in the form of dreams and visions, English texts reporting the dreams and visions of women tend to affirm discursive constructions of woman-as-body even as they assert her spirituality and her consequent ability to derive and exercise the power of divine inspiration through dreams and visions. This unification of woman, spirituality, and dream-vision authority generally cooperates with and supports masculine clerical hegemony. Thus a polyvocal effect is created: the maculinist system still dominates, but rhetoric allowing for feminine materiality, spirituality, sanctity, and power operates openly, as well.[7]

Bede's early medieval account of the Anglo-Saxon abbess known as Hild offers the first English example of public authorization of visionary and dreaming women. His history of the English church is, among other things, an attempt to situate the late-coming, out-lying English firmly within the culture of Christendom.[8] The authorizing potential of dreams for women plays an important role in Bede's account of Abbess Hild, whom he describes as one of the most influential women of the early English church.[9]

[7] Brian Gastle's argument for the presence of feminine mercantile authority that is cooperative is not unlike the discursive cooperation I propose. He argues against a "holistic" or "reductive" paradigm and in favor of a more complex critique of masculine/feminine power relations (Gastle 2003).

[8] For a discussion of the importance of place to identity in Christendom, see Howe (2005).

[9] While I find evidence of Bede's genuine appreciation of Hild in these texts, others interpret them quite differently. Stephanie Hollis, for example, contends that "the admiration that some readers have seen reflected in Bede's portrait of Hild is to a high degree their own" (Hollis 1992: 246).

Although Bede does not report a specific dream experienced by Hild, herself, her life and death are both given significance through the dreams of women. In Book 4 Bede gives Hild great credit for her influence and importance in the church, and here he connects the authority of the abbess to divine revelation through dreams. Bede begins his account of Hild's life at the point of her death but soon establishes her noble credentials by mentioning that she is niece of one king and aunt of another. He explains that she spent many years in secular life before deciding to enter a convent and that it is only the intervention of Bishop Aiden that prevents her from joining her sister in a French monastery. At this point in his narration of Hild's early life, Bede has connected the abbess to secular and clerical masculine power, and he continues her story with a description of Hild's authority and influence over men of the church, noting that "We have in fact seen five from this monastery who afterwards became bishops, all of them men of singular merit and holiness; their names are: Bose, Aetla, Oftfor, John, and Wilfrid" (Colgrave 1969: 409).[10] According to Bede, these clerics have learned the virtues that make them fit for bishoprics from Hild herself; their ecclesiastical authority, then, is the product of their submission to the influence and teaching of a woman. Emphasizing Hild's influence once again, Bede declares that "All who knew Hild, the handmaiden of Christ and abbess, used to call her mother because of her outstanding devotion and grace" (Colgrave 1969: 411).[11] Hild's character, like her deeds, demonstrates that she merits the ecclesiastical authority invested in her both before and after the Romanization of the English church.

[10] *Denique quinque ex eodem monasterio postea episcopos uidimus, et hos omnes singularis meriti ac sanctitatis uiros, quorum haec sunt nomina: Bosa, Aetla, Oftfor, Ionhannes et Uilfrid* (Colgrave 1969: 408).

[11] *Non solum ergo praefata Christiancella et abbatissa Hild, quam omnew qui nouerant ob insigne pietates et gratiae matrem uocare consuerant* (Colgrave 1969: 410).

The carefully crafted genealogy, history, and praise that Bede provides for Hild might have been enough to sanction her power in the English church if she had been a man; however, Bede cements Hild's right to clerical authority with accounts of women's dreams and visions.[12] On the night Hild dies, Begu, a nun in a far off monastery, experiences a vision:

> As she was resting in the sisters' dormitory, she suddenly heard in the air the well-known sound of the bell with which they used to be aroused to their prayers or called together when one of them had been summoned from the world. On opening her eyes she seemed to see the roof of the house rolled back, while a light which poured in from above filled the whole place. As she watched the light intently, she saw the soul of the handmaiden of the Lord being borne to Heaven in the midst of that light, attended and guided by angels. (Colgrave 1969: 413)[13]

A similar vision is simultaneously experienced by a nun of Whitby. These well-timed, beatific visions are standard hagiographic fare, but their importance should not be discounted for that reason. In his description of the vision of Begu, Bede confirms her sanctity by asserting that she is holy and has been a virgin dedicated to God for over thirty years. He also calls attention to her physical body by pointing out that she is resting when the vision occurs,

12 Hollis notes that "evidence of divine sanction for a conversionary role appears to have been required chiefly by female saints" (1992: 253). Karkov argues, however, that visionary proof of sanctity was important regardless of gender. She asserts that Bede's account of Hild is like that of Aiden in its need to guarantee the holiness of the subject through the visions of others (1999: 129)

13 *Haec tunc in dormitorio sororum pausans, audiuit subito in aere notum campanae sonum, quo ad orations excitari uel conuocari solebant, cum quis eorum de saeculo fuisset euocatus; apertisque, ut sibi uidebatur, oculis aspexit, detecto domus culmine, fusam desuper lucem omnia repleuisse. Cui uidelicet luci dum sollicita intenderet, uidit animam praefatae Dei famulae in ipsa luce, comintantibus ac ducentibus angelis, ad caelum ferri* (Colgrave 1969: 412).

that she first hears a bell, and that she then opens her *physical* eyes to see the angels and Hild ascending to heaven. Her proven purity and piety along with her experience of a vision mark this nun as a spiritual being, but she is also marked as a body. Her vision and that of the nun of Whitby operate as proof of Hild's sanctity, already so decisively set forth in Bede's description of the abbess's life, and confirm that the power Hild wielded was divinely inspired and entirely appropriate, yet we are not permitted to forget that these visions amount to spiritual experiences originating in women's bodies. Bede's tale of the dream of Hild's mother makes this point much more dramatically. Having just asserted Hild's spiritual maternity, Bede turns immediately to the prophetic dream experienced by Hild's biological, therefore bodily, mother:

> This was bound to happen in fulfillment of the dream which her mother Breguswith had during the child's infancy. While her husband Hereric was living in exile under the British king Cerdic, where he was poisoned, Breguswith had a dream that he was suddenly taken away, and though she searched most earnestly for him, no trace of him could be found anywhere. But suddenly in the midst of her search, she found a most precious necklace under her garment and, as she gazed closely at it, it seemed to spread such a blaze of light that it filled all Britain with its gracious splendor. (Colgrave 1969: 411)[14]

This mother's dream prophesies Hild's note-worthy life and service to the church in a form that, like the visions of the nuns,

[14] *Oportebat namque inpleri somnium, quod mater Bregusuid in infantia eius uidit. Quae cum uir eius Hereric exularet sub rege Brettonum Cerdice, ubi ut uiveno periit, uidit per somnium, quasi subito sublatum eum quesierit cum omni diligentia, nullumque eius uspim uestigium apparuerit. Verum cum sollertissime illum quaesierit, extimplo se repperire sub ueste sua monile pretiosissimum, quod, dum attentius consideratet, tanti fulgore luminis refulgere uidebatur, ut omnes Brittaniae fines illius gratia spendoris impleret* (Colgrave 1969: 410).

is quite common in hagiography.[15] As with the nuns' visions above, however, we should not dismiss Breogoswith's dream as solely formulaic, for it also demonstrates a connection between the female body and divine revelation. Clearly, Breogoswith could not have been certain at the time she had the dream that it was, in fact, divine and prophetic, since the nature of such dreams can only be determined after the fact. Bede, however, writing retrospectively, is able to deploy all of the theoretical authority inherent in divinely inspired, prophetic dreams to justify Hild's clerical power. Moreover, Hild's extraordinary life functions as both the translation of and the fulfillment of her mother's dream. Although Hild is an infant at the time, the parturition imagery of the jewel "under her garment" that Breogoswith brings forth to light all Britain is unmistakable and demands that attention be paid to the corporeality of femininity; thus, Hild's just established spiritual maternity becomes imbricated in the physical maternity of Breogoswith's dream image. This maternal corporeality, though, is cast in a positive light, for rather than Eve's curse, Breogoswith's dream delivers a blessing that extends to the whole nation because

[15] Prophetic mother's dreams about their children predate the Christian era; Clytemnesta's dream of nursing serpents from Aeschylus's *Choephori*, for instance, prophesies her own death at the hands of her son Orestes. However, the model of the hagiographic mother dream is probably most closely connected to Monica's dream of Augustine from the *Confessions* 3.9.14. Moreira notes that the mother dream is a familiar trope of Merovingian hagiography and can either take the form of a prophetic dream similar to Breogoswith's or an *oraculum* in which an angel reveals the auspicious future of the child to the mother (2003: 635). Hollis argues that the hagiographic mother vision "owes its currency to Gabriel's annunciation to the mother of Christ" (1992: 253). I contend, however, that while the annunciation is the premier model of birth prophecy available to Christians, as it is not constructed as a dream or a vision but rather as an actual experience, it is a less appropriate model for the hagiographic trope than the dream of Monica.

the shining necklace is a figure of Hild, herself.[16] As both the jewel and the translation of the dream, Hild *embodies* the divine authority always already present in a prophetic dream, but she does so through her sanctity and through spiritual motherhood. Thus, the mother's dream that authorizes Hild's spiritual power while maintaining the connection between the feminine and the body indirectly authorizes bishops, male spiritual leaders of the church, as well. In this case the authority transferred to the dreamer according to dream theory is likewise transferred to the subject of the dream through the mother/daughter relationship and through their shared corporeality. The misogynistic connection between the body and the daughters of Eve cooperates with the authorizing potential of dream discourse to produce a text validating the woman, the two manifestations of the English church that she bridges, and historic English identity as a Roman Catholic nation.

The cooperation of dream discourse and anti-feminist discourse in this historical account is only made possible because the ambiguities of both allow Bede to combine their positive aspects without negating the cultural power exercised by each discourse as a whole. Calling attention to parturition indicates Bede's acknowledgement of the patristic "truth" about women: that they are reproductive bodies under a curse; Bede is aware, and knows that his audience is aware, that Hild is a female body, but she is also one of exemplary spirituality. As such, she reifies the transcendence of her mother's prophetic dream; thus, Hild is a repository of both flesh and spirit, combining binaries into a monistic whole. Moreover,

[16] Klein argues that the dream and the symbolic necklace are calculated to separate Hild's identity as abbess from "the material manifestations of her former secular status." She asserts that "the shining light of earthly riches is depicted as part of Hild's infancy and as wholly unnecessary to her later life, when she herself will become a living embodiment of a light so bright it can illuminate all of Britain." Klein does not address the image of parturition and maternity embedded in the dream (2006: 50–51).

the visions experienced at Hild's death by other women (who do not appear to share her aristocratic origins or special holiness but, like Hild, are simultaneously female bodies and spiritual beings) confirm the abbess's sanctity while also demonstrating the potential *un*remarkability of Hild's female spirituality.[17] Masculine hegemony is upheld; Hild, after all, can teach and guide bishops, although she can never be one, but female spirituality, purity, and power are also maintained in this historical account of a dreaming woman that is intended to reinforce England's place in the wider political and spiritual entity of Christendom.

Another early medieval text, Rudolf of Fulda's mid-ninth century *Life* of the Anglo-Saxon St. Leoba provides two interesting, if brief, examples of the authorizing power of real women's dreams. Rudolf relates that Leoba's mother Aebba experiences a prophetic dream similar to that experienced by Breogoswith. In this dream Aebba draws from her bosom a church bell that "rang merrily" (Rudolf 1995: 262). The dream is interpreted by Aebba's nurse, who explains that it signifies the coming birth of a daughter who is to be consecrated to God; consequently, as a young girl Leoba is handed over to Mother Tetta of Wimbourne and is raised in the double monastery there. As a young woman, Leoba dreams of a purple thread of enormous length issuing from her mouth, "as if it were coming from her very bowels" (Rudolf 1995: 263). An old nun interprets this dream as a prophecy that Leoba's wisdom and good deeds will benefit people in far off lands. The fulfillment of the prophecy is Boniface's appointment of Leoba to the abbacy of Bischofsheim in Germany, where she lives an exemplary and miraculous life. The spiritual authorization provided by these dreams as well as the link to parturition in Aebba's dream and the vivid physicality of Leoba's dream of the thread coming from her bowels (perhaps standing in for her womb) demonstrate the

[17] Prior to the Norman Conquest, it seems that holy women were much more common in English culture than in later periods. Anne Clark Bartlett notes the "dearth of late medieval insular holy women" (2010: 167).

same sort of conflation of the spiritual and the corporeal that I detect in Bede's narrative of Hild.[18] In Rudolf's account, Leoba's sanctity, like that of many saints, allows her to perform miracles in her lifetime and renders her grave a site of miracles as well. The monasteries and nunneries she founds, along with her grave, enjoy the sanction of her visionary and miraculous powers. The rhetorical combination of polarized discourses in her *Life* unifies the saint's female body and spiritual purity into an authorized construction that in turn authorizes the church sites and entities associated with her.

The unfinished *Life of Christina of Markyate* is a remarkable text in the hagiographic tradition that fairly teems with dreams and visions serving to authenticate both Christina's holiness and the authority she exercises, much as the dreams in Bede's narrative of Hild's life and Rudolph's *Life* of Leoba do for those women.[19] The purpose of this text does not serve wide national and missionary interests, but like most hagiographies, it aims to establish formal recognition of the extraordinary sanctity of the subject and to associate the power of that sanctity to a particular site, in this case St Albans, and those associated with it. Unlike most hagiographies, however, this text appears to have another, somewhat more personal aim: that of providing a defense against gossip about Christina and her questionable associations with men,

[18] (Rudolf of Fulda 1995). Some helpful resources for further study of Leoba as a woman dreamer include J. L. Nelson (1990), S. Hollis (1992), A. H. Olsen (1990), W. P. Hyland (2006).

[19] The historical person known as Christina of Markyate was originally named Theodora. The "Christina" in the *Life* is, of course, a textual construction, as is the "Theodora" of the *Life*. My topic is the manner in which dreams are used in the text to authorize the narrative construct "Christina," but it is vital to acknowledge that the narrative construct is made possible and necessitated by the power exercised by the historical individual, regardless of which name she used. For an argument against reading with the historical individual in mind, see Karras (1988) For a discussion of the constructed nature of both "Christina" and "Theodora" in the text, see Partner (2005).

especially her long term relationship with Geoffrey, abbot of Saint Albans, whom Christina instructs on how to run his monastery, on what services he might provide to King Stephen, and other matters of importance.[20] Hence, we find the authorizing power of dreams doing double duty—personal defense and spiritual sanction—in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*.

Composed during her lifetime by someone who knew her well, this text is a direct account of Christina's life from her own lips, and the writer enjoys both the opportunity to ask her questions and to access the accounts of others, such as her mother, who knew her well and were present for some of the narrated events.[21] Working in conjunction with the discursive ambiguities of anti-feminist discourse, the discourse of dreaming validates Christina as a divinely inspired, feminine, spiritual power exercised on and in the service of a system of masculine hegemony.[22] More than forty

[20] Partner offers a fascinating argument regarding the nature of this text as a personal defense of the relationship. She observes that the "narrative-constructing pressures make this a rather odd book: something like a defense attorney's counter-attack awkwardly laminated to a hagiographer's celebration" (2005: 127–128).

[21] The writer asserts, for example, that Christina's mother personally told him of the prenatal sign that the child was a chosen servant of God, that he is present when Christina's friend Helisen takes the veil, and that Christina "averred in my [the writer's] hearing" her intense desire to speak with the recluse Eadwin when she hoped he might be arranging help for her. (Talbot 1998: 35, 45, 87).

[22] Bynum argues that women who came into the church as adults tended to show a greater awareness of their inferior status and to be more male oriented. She asserts that most of Christina's "visions and prophecies were for the benefit of powerful males." While I agree that Christina's visions and dreams tend to uphold the power of men, I argue that they also effectively serve to uphold her power over these same men(Bynum 1987b: 134–135). Diane Watt's suggestion that Geoffrey is the recipient of the single direct address found in the text, in which the writer avers to his reader that Christina "revered you more than all the pastors under Christ" seems highly plausible and indicates that Christina did demonstrate a high degree of respect for Geoffrey even as she exerted her influence over him (2007: 34) The quotation is found on page 127 in the *Life*.

dreams and visionary experiences are recounted in the text, but one specific instance will suffice to demonstrate the importance of the authority of dreaming and the effective cooperation between dream discourse and discourse on women in the text.

As a child Christina devotes her life and virginity to Christ but she is forced to take extreme measures to defend her virginity throughout her life. A particularly difficult assault on her virginity is her parents' abusive insistence that she marry and consummate her marriage. Eventually Christina flees her parents' home and hides with various religious recluses so that she may more easily defend her virginity, although she does not take the veil and enter religious life herself for some time. Nancy F. Partner ably demonstrates the troubling eccentricity of Christina's insistence on remaining chaste without committing herself to a religious order that would both authorize and defend her choice (2005). Without the authority of religious orders to validate Christina's commitment to chastity in her younger years, the writer of her *Life* must depend instead on numerous reports of dreams and visions that bring divine sanction to Christina's unconventional behavior.

The account of Christina and one of her keepers dramatically combines dream discourse with discourse on women. Christina spends four years in the care of the good hermit Roger, but after his death the archbishop of York sends Christina to live with a cleric who is also a man of high position. At the instigation of the devil, Christina and the cleric develop a burning lust for one another. The cleric behaves abominably, appearing naked before her and pleading with her to have sex with him. Christina "manfully" resists "the desires of her flesh," and through fasting and scourging she "tamed her lascivious body" (Talbot 1998: 115)Up to this point in the narrative, Christina's female body has figured prominently, but this passage draws great attention to the discourse of misogyny, as Christina becomes the temptress of the cleric, burns with the ravenous sexual desire that marks all women in this paradigm, and can only resist the demands of her female body

by becoming "manly" in her self-discipline.[23] Not surprisingly, however, Christina's relief comes from divine dreams. First the cleric is visited in a dream by Mary, who threatens him with eternal damnation if he does not leave Christina alone, and later Christina experiences a vision of Christ:

> Then the Son of the Virgin looked kindly down up on the low estate of His handmaid and granted her the consolation of an unheard-of grace. For in the guise of a small child He came to the arms of his sorely tried spouse and remained with her a whole day, not only being felt but also seen. So the maiden took Him in her hands, gave thanks, and pressed Him to her bosom. And with immeasurable delight she held Him at one moment to her virginal breast, at another she *felt His presence within hereven through the barrier of the flesh*. (Talbot 1998: 119)

This vision has many interpretive layers, including the Eucharistic echo of Luke 22:19 found in the phrase, "she took Him in her hands, gave thanks" and the unmistakable image of Christina and Christ mirroring the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus.[24] In the discourse of dream theory, this episode marks a true high point for Christina, for it is not only a waking vision, the pinnacle of transcendent experience, but it is also an *oraculum* in which she is visited not by a messenger of God nor by the mother of God, but by God himself in the person of Christ. One can hardly imagine a dream-vision experience that would be a stronger seal of authority for Christina. Moreover, her visionary power is delivered in cooperation with discourse on women. To counteract Christina's plunge into the lowest

[23] The sexualized feminization of the cleric in this account is worthy of further study, but space and time do not allow for the inclusion of that discussion here.

[24] "And taking bread, he gave thanks and brake and gave to them, saying: This is my body, which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of me" (*et accepto pane gratias egit et fregit et dedit eis dicens hoc est corpus meum quod pro vobis datur hoc facite in meam commemorationem*.) Luke 22:19, Douay-Rheims translation of Latin Vulgate.

reaches of physicality and depravity, this vision seals her virginity by spiritually impregnating her through Christ's penetration of "the barrier of the flesh" so that she can feel him "within her." In as physical a way as possible, Christina's vision identifies her with the Virgin Mary, who reigns as queen of heaven, spiritually embodies a perfect purity that is impossible for normal women to achieve, and exemplifies the greatest possible feminine authority. The Virgin, in fact, is the ultimate example of how the operation of misogynistic discourse cooperates with masculine hegemony to empower a woman. The extraordinary physical paradox that defines Mary—a virgin who is also a mother—is a simultaneously physical and spiritual mark of holiness and the source of her power as Queen of Heaven. As hagiography demands, Christina's unification of body and spirit is reiterated through the many divine dreams and visions that she continues to experience in the remainder of the text as well as through the dreams and visions sent to others by God to confirm that they should heed Christina's instruction. Thus, the rhetorical deployment of two polarized discourses in the text publically affirms the propriety of Christina's informal but considerable power over the church in the form of Geoffrey, the abbot of Saint Albans, without significantly disturbing the masculine power that authorizes her.

Christina's story is synchronous with the earliest signs of a rising interest in the discourse of discernment of spirits, and this discourse has been demonstrated to have developed alongside the burgeoning numbers of extraordinarily pious and often visionary women the late Middle Ages (Caciola 2003). Julian of Norwich is arguably the most influential and significant of the English female mystics, and it might seem imperative that I move next to an analysis of her text. However, after careful consideration of the rhetoric in Julian's text, I have chosen not to address the *Showings* in this setting. The *Showings* do not demonstrate the same sort of rhetorical fusion of dream theory and misogyny that I find

in the other texts examined here, and this is largely by design. Though there is little doubt that Julian was a real historical person, the dearth of information on her actual lived experience makes the information we have on Hild, for example, appear copious by comparison. Although Julian's deprecating references to her femininity demonstrate her awareness of the need for visionary authority to validate her message, unlike the other holy women treated in this paper she also strives toward a personal goal "to write herself out of her text," and she almost completely accomplishes this aim.[25] In this goal Margery Kempe is, of course, Julian's polar opposite. Indeed, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is a singularly personal account of a visionary woman. Her story offers a unique example of the deployment of feminine power authorized by visionary access that does not officially function in service of the church but, nevertheless, grants a great deal of authority and agency to the woman.

In my discussion of *The Book of Margery Kempe* I will follow the model developed by Lynn Staley of referring to the character in the text as Margery and to the narrator as Kempe.[26] Daughter of the mayor of King's Lynn, Margery is married to a prominent burgess and gives birth to fourteen children. After the difficult birth of her first child, Margery suffers a lengthy period of madness brought on by the stress of the birth and fear of damnation for an un-confessed, unnamed sin. After more than six months in this state, she experiences a vision in which Jesus appears to her and comforts her with assurances of his constant love and approval. She will continue to have visions and conversations with Christ, Mary, God, and saints for the rest of her life. Sometimes her holy conversations and dream-vision experiences are entirely internal, but others include visual and auditory elements. Along with these incidents, Margery describes other expressions of her extraordinary

[25] Barrett 1992: 10.

[26] See Staley (1994) for the explanation of this convention.

piety such as her infamous bouts of loud weeping.[27] After many years of marriage, Margery persuades (bribes) her husband to agree to a chaste marriage, but she often calls upon her identity as a married woman for personal defense. Frequently travelling alone, Margery suffers the abuse of some who do not appreciate her style of piety and others who suspect her of heresy, and on several occasions she is examined by officials on charges of Lollardy.[28] Margery has a great deal of difficulty getting her story written because she is illiterate and requires a scribe; however, after many years and multiple attempts, she finally persuades a priest to write the story of her life as she dictates it to him.[29]

Because she describes so many dreams and visions, we see that Kempe takes advantage of the authorizing power of the discourse of dream-visions to support her pious self-image and to influence readers' perception of her text. The authorizing power of Margery's dreams and visions, then, functions on two levels. For the historical woman telling her story, they provide private, personal assurance of God's approval and embolden her performances of public piety and her resistance to masculine control. At the same time, their narration is a textual attempt to publically justify her status as a religious authority for the audience of the text, much as the narratives of other female mystics present dreams and visions that authorize the spirituality and power of these women and their associated church entities.

[27] Much of Margery's life seems to have been a performance of the sorts of affective piety encouraged by the likes of Nicholas Love, Richard Rolle, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, though it would be naïve to treat the widely divergent practices represented by the authors of various mystical texts as a homogenous group. For more on these and other medieval mystics see chapter five in Beer (1992), Ghosh (2002), Hanna (2004), Putter (2004) For more on the Book as performance, see Christie (2002).

[28] For more on the Lollard movement, see Aston (1984) and Ghosh (2002).

[29] Anthony Goodman (1978) discusses the chapters in which the priest explains how he finally comes to believe in Margery's piety and spiritual insight.

Dream discourse, of course, is a tricky thing to deploy in the service of female authority, and it seems to become trickier in the later Middle Ages because of the centuries-old suspicion in dream theories that meaningful and even prophetic dreams may come from Satan as easily as they may come from God. In the unprotected state of sleep, a person lacking the greatest possible spiritual purity, which women by their nature lack, can be deceived by the devil and pass on this deception in the guise of divine revelation through dreaming. We see confirmation of this suspicion at work in Middle English depictions of the dream of Pilate's wife, where Procula is either the dupe of Satan or his accomplice in trying to thwart the crucifixion of Christ and with it the salvation of mankind. The scribe of Kempe's book acknowledges these disturbing deceptive possibilities in his long proem, noting that Margery has worried a great deal over whether her spiritual experiences are diabolical or divine in origin:

> Than had this creatur mech drede for illusyons and deceytys of hyr gostly enmys. Than went sche be the byddyng of the Holy Gost to many worshepful clerkys, bothe archebysshopys and bysshoppys, doctowrs of dyvynyté and bachelers also. Sche spak also wyth many ankrys and schewed hem hyr maner of levyng and swech grace as the Holy Gost of hys goodnesse wrowt in hyr mende and in hyr sowle as her wytt wold serven hyr to expressyn it. And thei alle that sche schewed hyr secretys unto seyd sche was mech bownde to loven ower Lord for the grace that he schewyd unto hyr and cownseld hyr to folwyn hyr mevynggys and hyr steringgys and trustly belevyn it weren of the Holy Gost and of noon evyl spyryt. (Staley 1996: 18–19)

This concern reflects a generally accepted wariness regarding transcendent experiences, especially those of women, and can be easily accounted for by discernment of spirits doctrine. It is important to note, however, that the fear of diabolical deception through dreams and visions, while certainly a vital part of this later medieval doctrine, was a significant feature of dream theories

throughout the Middle Ages.[30] The assurances of "worshepful clerkys" along with those of "many ankrys," Julian of Norwich among them, provide authorization from church hierarchy as well as from other mystics that the moving and stirrings she describes, including her visions of Christ, are indeed from the Holy Ghost. Dispelling the possibility that Margery is simply another dangerously deceived and deceptive daughter of Eve, Kempe and the scribe establish that the dreams and visions that will follow in the text are properly identified, and that those presented as divinely inspired do, in fact, transfer that divine authority to the woman who reports them. Firmly making this assertion in the first few pages of the text, Kempe and the scribe assure the reader that the visionary woman has heavenly authorization for her deviations from traditional social roles, her instruction and chastisement of men—including highly ranked churchmen—and her defiance of anti-feminist conventions.[31] The discourse of dream theory, then, is used in conjunction with traditional masculinist authority structures to pre-authorize both Margery and her text in the minds of readers.[32]

Establishing Margery as a reliable evaluator of her dream-vision origins so early in the book is vital because the first dream she narrates is, in fact, diabolical in origin. Suffering from madness following the difficult delivery of her first child and the failure of her confessor to allow her to complete her confession and receive

[30] In *De Genesi*, for example, Augustine points out that in "corporeal vision as well as [...] the images of corporeal objects revealed in the spirit, good spirits instruct men and evil spirits deceive them" (Kruger 1992: 45), and in the *Dialogues* Gregory notes, that one should be "very reluctant to put one's faith in dreams, since it is hard to tell from what source they come" (Zimmerman 1959: 261).

[31] Margery's deviation from traditional social roles includes, according to Staley, the sense that gender roles do not apply to her because of her intimate relationship with Jesus (Staley 1994).

[32] Voaden (1999) makes a very similar argument with a difference of emphasis in her book.

absolution for a long-standing un-confessed sin, Margery reports being tormented by harrowingly devilish dreams or visions:

> And in this tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, develys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys of fyr as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in, sumtyme rampyng at hyr, sumtyme thretyng her, sumtym pullyng hyr and halyng hir bothe nygth and day duryng the forseyd tyme. And also the develys cryed upon hir wyth greet thretyngys and bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendam, hir feyth, and denyin hir God, hys modyr, and alle the seyntys in hevyn, hyr goode werkys and alle good vertues, hir fadyr, hyr modyr, and alle hire frendys. And so sche dede. (Staley 1996: 22)

It is vital to note that Margery's madness is a direct result of her confessor's failure to shrive her properly, not simply evidence of post-partum depression, and this madness is deeply rooted in feelings of guilt and condemnation that predate the birth of her child. Most who choose to speculate extrapolate from other statements Margery gives that the unnamed sin is sexual in nature, and this theory implies an association with misogynistic concepts of women as sexually insatiable. Even if we choose not to conjecture on the nature of Margery's secret sin, however, we can easily establish the discourse of misogyny as an integral part of her oppressive guilt. She has, after all, just endured months of illness during pregnancy and a torturous delivery, both of which are considered the physical half of the curse of Eve that all women share, the other half being, of course, subservience to men. Thus, the diabolical visions that Margery suffers in her madness are closely tied to feminine corporeality and permeability, female guilt for the fall, and Margery's personal share in both.

The redemption that Margery experiences, however, also comes in the form of a vision, but this experience is divine in origin and content:

> as sche lay aloone and hir kepars wer fro hir, owyr mercyful Lord Crist Jhesu, evyr to be trostyd, worshypd be hys name, nevyr forsakyng hys servawnt in tyme of nede, aperyd to

> hys creatur, whych had forsakyn hym, in lyknesse of a man, most semly, most bewtyuows, and most amyable that evyr mygth be seen wyth mannys eye, clad in a mantyl of purpyl sylke, syttyng upon hir beddys syde, lokyng upon hir wyth so blyssyd a chere that sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyritys, seyd to hir thes wordys: "Dowtyr, why hast thow forsakyn me, and I forsoke nevyr the?" And anoon, as he had seyd thes wordys, sche saw veryly how the eyr openyd as brygth as ony levyn, and he stey up into the eyr, not rygth hastyli and qwykly, but fayr and esly that sche mygth wel beholdyn hym in the eyr tyl it was closyd ageyn. (Staley 1996: 23)

This type of vision is theoretically only granted to the most perfectly spiritual persons, for it is both a waking vision and an *oraculum* from God himself in the person of Christ. We should observe that the message that Christ brings to Margery is not for the benefit or admonition of either the world or the church, nor is it a confirmation of a seal of virginity, spiritual or bodily, that might elevate the woman to a place of authority within the church. It is purely for her personal comfort and includes an important assurance that even during her devilish torments and, perhaps more significantly, even though she still has not confessed the unnamed sin, Jesus has been with her. His appearance to her as a beautiful man dressed in kingly splendor is also noteworthy because in many of her visions and conversations Margery's relationship with Jesus is romantic and somewhat erotic in nature. This sort of romanticized relationship with Jesus is reported by many of Margery's visionary contemporaries, but the fact that it is conventional does not rob it of rhetorical power. Margery's attraction to the love and amiability of Christ is always supplemented by a sense of physical attraction that endows both Margery's spirituality and the transcendence of the divine with an inescapable corporeal component. Had the readers not been assured that sanctioned masculine authorities have already determined that Margery does have access to divine transcendence, they might easily wonder whether this vision, and indeed those that follow, were not as diabolical as the first. In fact, they could

be understood to be tricks of the devil designed to delude Margery into believing that she has been forgiven of her secret sin without benefit of clerical mediation and that she has divine authorization to ignore and defy masculine religious and secular authority when in fact she does not. Because the text has already identified Margery as a reliable, inspired dreamer and interpreter, though, this first vision of Christ, like all of her subsequent dreams, visions, and conversations with holy figures, can be accepted as truly divine and as authorization both for the unconventional and heterodox behavior in which the character engages as well as for any potential theological or instructional value the text may hold. Margery's physical participation in the curse of Eve, exaggerated by her susceptibility to demonic attack, is not, however, erased by Christ's uncritical acceptance of her. Instead, the vision joins spirituality to Margery's corporeality, and the two discourses work in cooperation to confirm the authority of both character and text. Even so, masculine hegemony is maintained because orthodox, masculine clerical power has provided the foundational sanction for all that follows.

Margery's examinations for heresy are clustered in the year 1417, the same year in which John Oldcastle was burned for Lollardy.[33] Although discourses of orthodoxy and heresy and of clerical conduct are prominent throughout this section of Margery's text, anti-feminist discourse drives many of the accusations made against her.[34] The steward of Leicester, one of the first officials to examine Margery, takes her into a private room and attempts to rape her, or to frighten her enough to believe that he will, before demanding that Margery reveal to him "whethyr thu hast this speche of God er of the devyl, er ellys thu schalt gon to preson." When Margery

[33] Claire Cross (1978) discusses the presence and activity of women in the Lollard movement.

[34] For a fascinating discussion of the rhetoric of Margery's examinations, see Beer (1992) and Shklar (1995).

refuses to answer him, he struggles with her again until she admits that "sche had hyr speche and hir dalyawns of the Holy Gost and not of hir owyn cunyng." The attempted rape, of course, calls attention to Margery as a female body, while the question of whether she is acting through divine or diabolical inspiration highlights the fear that women are easily deceived. The steward succinctly sums up the problematic nature of misogynist discourse with his words of dismissal: "'Eythyr thu art a ryth good woman er ellys a ryth wikked woman" (Staley 1996: 115). Similarly, in Margery's first examination before the archbishop of York, standard misogynistic injunctions against women's speech are brought to bear, and Margery first answers with an allusion to Luke 11:27, in which a woman publically speaks a blessing on the Virgin, as evidence that women are given the right to public speech in the Bible.[35] Immediately, a second cleric reads the injunction of Paul against women's preaching from I Timothy, which Margery answers with the assertion that she does not go into the pulpit and only engages in holy conversation.[36] Thus, the discourse of misogyny asserting the wickedness of woman, her required subservience, and her enforced silence is used against Margery, but she resists these attacks through assertion of her spiritual communion with God, biblical authority, and a quibble. As the archbishop prepares to put her out of the town, he requires that she have a male escort:

> Than a good sad man of the Erchebischopys meny askyd hys Lord what he wolde gevyn hym and he schulde ledyn hir. The Erchebischop proferyd hym five shillings and the man askyd a

[35] And it came to pass, as he spoke these things, a certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck ("factum est autem cum haec diceret extollens vocem quaedam mulier de turba dixit illi beatus venter qui te portavit et ubera quae suxisti"). Luke 11:27. (Latin text from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible).

[36] But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence ("docere autem mulieri non permitto neque dominari in virum sed esse in silentio"). I Timothy 2:12.

> nobyl. The Erchebischop, answeryng, seyd, "I wil not waryn so mech on hir body." (Staley 1996: 128)

Here, through the archbishop's bartering over the value of Margery's body, we see that the prevailing discourse on woman ends by defining her in material terms of exchange value, reinforcing the polarity of spirit/matter dualism and limiting the feminine to the realm of the corporeal.

In the midst of these trials, Margery enjoys numerous spiritual conversations with Christ. Imprisoned, this time in the town of Beverley, she hears him call to her audibly:

> The seyd creatur, lying in hir bed the next nyth folwyng, herd wyth hir bodily erys a lowde voys clepyng, "Margery." Wyth that voys sche woke, gretly aferyd, and, lying stille in sylens, sche mad hir preyerys as devowtly as sche cowde for the tyme. And sone owr merciful Lord ovyral present, comfortyng hys unworthy servawnt, seyd unto hir, "Dowtyr, it is mor plesyng unto me that thu suffyr despitys and scornys, schamys and reprevys, wrongys and disesys than yif thin hed wer smet of thre tymes on the day every day in sevyn yer. And therfor, dowtyr, fere the nowt what any man can seyn onto the, but in myn goodnes and in thy sorwys that thu hast suffryd therin hast thu gret cawse to joyn, for, whan thu comyst hom into hevyn, than schal every sorwe turnyn the to joye." (Staley 1996: 130-131)

Whether this visionary experience actually has a visual element is difficult to say because Margery does not define what "owr merciful Lord ovyral present" means in clear sensory terms, but she does makes a point of distinguishing this episode from others in the same section of the book in which Jesus has spoken in her soul rather than audibly.[37] Margery has been subjected by the masculinist clerical system to the oppressive application of the discourse of misogyny that ultimately reduces her to a mere body; nevertheless, here Kempe insists on the physical reality of

[37] For example, in York she "sat in a chirche of Yorke, owr Lord Jhesu Crist seyd in hir sowle, 'Dowtyr, ther is meche tribulacyon to thewarde'" (Staley 1996: 120).

this spiritual vision. All of Margery's supernatural conversations highlight her possession of a highly developed spiritual nature (in spite of misogynist assertions to the contrary), but this one is clearly characterized as both spiritual and corporeal, and the juxtaposition of this particular visionary account with the anti-feminist degradation of her examinations for heresy functions to revise rather than to elide the power of discursive ties between the feminine and the body. Instead of allowing misogynistic discourse to polarize and marginalize her, Kempe deploys it in cooperation with the authorizing power of dream discourse to integrate spirit and body.[38] In this way, on the diegetic level Margery effectively authorizes both her resistance to masculine control and her rebuke of the system trying to impose it on her, while Kempe's rhetorical combination of the two discourses extradiegetically reiterates the propriety of the message of her text and its authority.

Like her predecessors Hild, Christina, and Leoba, Margery Kempe is a visionary woman who is able to exercise power that should not, theoretically, be available to her. Unlike these other English visionaries, however, Margery Kempe is and remains vocationally separate from the patristic system of the Church, and her sanction does not have the same reciprocal effect with masculine hegemony that we see in their texts—even if her gift is sometimes used in aid of its representatives.[39] For example, on the insistence of a certain monk, Margery reveals his secret sins and prompts him to

[38] For a discussion of the conflation of other binaries such as the active and contemplative lives or the mystical body and the social body in the Book, see Fredell (1996). For a view of the *Book* as a collaboration between Margery and the scribe that bridges the masculine/feminine divide, see Harding (1993).

[39] Jessica Barr argues that Margery holds affirmation and resistance to ecclesiastical authority in productive tension that requires "constant negotiation" (2010: 210). As I do, Barr asserts that dream theory is an important aspect in the authorization of visionary women; however, she examines the visionary text cross-generically, contextualizing it in terms of the literary dream vision rather than in terms of historical continuity of rhetoric and discourse.

repentance, after which he becomes a better man (Staley, 1996, pp. 39–40). Afterwards, the monk is "made suppriowr of the place," but this is because of his reformation, not due to his association with Margery. Margery, however, does get a good meal and some gold as thanks for her assistance. Another example of the use of Margery's visionary gift in regard to a communal, church-centric event occurs when parishioners of the church of St. Nicholas, established as a chapel of the parish church of St. Margaret, seek papal permission for a baptismal font in their church. Margery "had be revelacyon that thei schuld not have it" and prayed boldly that they would lose the dispute (Staley 1996: 68). Here we might read a reciprocal distribution of power from the authorized visionary to the church that sanctions her, as it does seem that her visionary power buttresses the claims of the site she prefers. However, Kempe characterizes the dispute as being about "gold anow" (both the money the St. Nicholas parishioners have put into winning their suit as well as the money to be accrued from offerings given in association with rites) rather than the spiritual superiority of St. Margaret's. Margery vision here is less about spiritually authorizing St. Margaret's and more about keeping undisturbed the profits associated with it and with the Trinity guild, which had a chapel in the church and of which she was a member (Beckwith 1993: 106). In addition, Margery is a singularly independent member of her own parish, especially because she refuses to stay put. As Sarah Beckwith observes, "What upsets [her fellow parishioners] most [...] is the fact that she goes on pilgrimages when she has no money to support herself, that she gives away other people's money, and that she wanders about on her own all across the country and in other people's countries, as well" (1993: 101). Margery's atypical connection to her parish, her frequent trips in search of additional, outside spiritual insight and counsel, and her many pilgrimages prevent her from establishing a firm identification with any single church entity or site. Thus, the visionary authority made possible by the rhetorical combination of discourses remains largely limited

to advancing Margery's interests, both material and spiritual, and to freeing her from strict obedience to the masculinist system of the church.

The Book of Margery Kempe, then, demonstrates rhetorical similarities in its use of dream discourse and discourse on women with the texts of earlier English visionary women, and I argue that this rhetorical continuity shows the continued importance of dream theory across the Middle Ages in the authorization of women, even after the resurgence of a doctrine of discernment of spirits. Why Margery's visionary authorization does not cooperate with and reauthorize an entity of the church as does that of her predecessors is a question worthy of further study. One possible explanation is that Margery's unsealed body is somehow unacceptable as a source of sanction, but Hild, too, had been married, and other mother-saints such as St. Bridget, one of Margery's models, make this argument untenable. Perhaps anxiety over the "rapid proliferation of female claims to divine inspiration" that Caciola partly credits for the increased focus on discerning spirits in the late Middle Ages is also reflected in Margery's failure to fully embrace or be fully embraced by a clerical entity with whom she might enter into a reciprocal power-sharing relationship (Caciola 2003: 16).It is certain that Margery's visionary authority was subjected to a different level of scrutiny from that of her predecessors becauseshe lived in a time when the discernment of spirits doctrine, which includes many of the same anxieties and ambiguities found in dream theories, had fully developed. Nevertheless, analysis of this text in light of its rhetorical similarities to earlier English medieval texts suggests to me that dream theories played an independent and very important, though often unacknowledged, part in the sanction of female authority in England throughout the Middle Ages, regardless of whether that authority functioned reciprocally with hegemonic systems, and that rhetorical manipulation of the discursive intersection of dream theory and misogyny remained a

viable tool working in conjunction with discernment doctrine for establishing feminine authority in these texts.

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