ABSTRACT

JULIAN OF NORWICH: VOICING THE VERNACULAR

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Marquette University, 2015

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), the subject of my dissertation, was a Christian mystic whose writings, *Revelation of Love* and *A Book of Showings*, are the earliest surviving texts in the English language written by a woman. The question that has puzzled scholars is how could a woman of her time express her vision in such innovative and literary language? The reason scholars have puzzled over this for centuries is that women had been denied access to traditional education. Some scholars have answered this problem through close textual comparisons linking her text to those in the patristic tradition or through modern feminist theory. The result has been that each scholar has interpreted her text in narrow constructs linked to his or her own theories. Yet, wider forms of education can account for her innovative language. I argue that she drew from a rich reservoir of rhetorical models readily available to her in Norwich in oral discourse and visual art. To examine this concept, I analyze oral and visual rhetorics available to any medieval person during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The first chapter establishes Norwich as a vibrant cultural hub, filled with interconnected oral, visual and textual rhetoric. The second chapter examines orally available rhetoric in sermons, mystery plays (*N-Town Cycle*), and religious prayer books (*Ancrene Wisse*). The third chapter examines the visual rhetoric of the Passion in paintings, panels, sculpture, and manuscript marginalia. I examine the famous Despenser Retable, Norwich Cathedral’s St. Andrew’s Chapel and the Gorleston Psalter. The fourth chapter examines art portraying the Last Judgment, namely in depictions of the apocalypse in Norwich Cathedral, the Holkham Bible, the Wenhamston Doom and the Stanningfield Doom, and in marginalia in the Ormesby Psalter, the Luttrell Psalter, and the De Lisle Psalter. In each chapter, memory devices, *ars memoria*, are examined as medieval literacy tools connecting rhetorical forms. These forms give strong evidence for her rich language, allowing her to describe time and space in altered frameworks, produce detailed portraiture in words, and develop concepts of “Mother Jesus” and “Forgiving Lord.”