

Julian of Norwich: A female translator of the divine

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Abstract

The paper discusses two modern translations by women of a unique religious text which can be construed as a translation itself, as it is an account of mystical visions. The author is Dame Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth-century English mystic and anchoress, the title is *Shewings* [showings, or revelations]; the language is Middle English. The uniqueness of Julian's vision lies in its female character: Christ is perceived as a Mother, and this metaphor is developed by Julian in an elaborate way. The paper adopts an ethnolinguistic perspective; in particular, it applies the concept of linguistic worldview in the analysis of the original text and its translations. The aim is to describe the metaphor of God's maternity along with Julian's style as the linguistic expression of the author's worldview, and to take a parallel view of two translations (by Elisabeth Spearing and Mirabai Starr) into modern English. In other words, the modern translations are viewed as women's translations of a woman's translation of God's message as revealed to Julian. The analyses suggest that the translations differ largely in terms of strategies adopted and the resulting shifts in worldviews conveyed: from faithfulness to the original to a very modern recontextualization.

Keywords

linguistic worldview, translation by women, gender in translation, Julian of Norwich, God as Mother

1. Women as mediators and translators

Women have always been translators or, to use the feminine form of the word, translatresses. In their own environments, often limited to their homes, they have acted as mediators and messengers, negotiators or ‘buffers’ in misunderstandings and conflicts between family members. These roles seem to be inscribed, above all, in the stereotype of the mother, traditionally supposed to shield her child from the father’s wrath. Since translation is a kind of mediation too (Katan, 2009), it makes sense to claim that translation is women’s natural talent: women and translation naturally go hand in hand. This is, in a way, highlighted in Polish, my first language, which has two words for ‘translation’: *przekład* and *tłumaczenie*, the latter also meaning ‘explanation’.

Indeed, in the patriarchal world of Christianity, where until very recently women were expected to stay out of the public sphere and even in their homes to remain mostly silent, translational activity opened to female voices one of few spaces for personal expression. Though partly concealed in their translations, the voices of translatresses had chances of marking their presence as writers. By way of digression, the online dictionary WikiDiff¹ explains that “the difference between **translator** and **translatress** is that **translator** is a *person* who translates text, film or other material into a different natural language while **translatress** is a *woman* who translates” (WikiDiff, emphasis in bold type and italics is mine), which brings out the old notion of female inferiority. Still, it is the word *translatress* that Sherry Simon adopted as the term to refer to female translators in her seminal book *Gender in translation. cultural identity and the politics of transmission* ([1996] 2005), which begins with the remark:

Because they are necessarily “defective,” all translations are “reputed females.” In this neat equation, John Florio (1603) summarizes a heritage of double inferiority. Translators and women have historically been the weaker figures in their respective hierarchies: translators are handmaidens to authors, women inferior to men. (Simon, 2005, p. 1)

In the section entitled “Enter the translatress” of the book quoted above, Sherry Simon documents the work of some of the female translators in the history of humankind, noting their primary focus on the honourable activity of translating religious texts, which was one of few roles outside the family circle deemed appropriate for them. Women have been linked to translation mainly since the Renaissance. Translating was for them a way “to give themselves a public voice and to ensure themselves a place in the world of writing” (Robinson cited in Simon, 2005, p. 43), a way that “provided a camouflage for involvement in text production and an opportunity for some degree of creativity” while it “did not directly challenge male control of that culture.” (Krontiris cited in Simon, 2005, p. 43) Since religious topics were deemed acceptable, already during the Reformation women could, and did, resort to religious translation and thus made their voices heard, even if the works were published anonymously.

2. Mystical texts as translations, translations as retranlations

Whether or not a mystical experience occurs beyond language or in words, attempts to speak about it or write it down are also its translations, and mystics often report that language is too inadequate a tool to convey it in a satisfactory manner. Consequently, translations of verbal accounts of mystical experiences can be conceptualised as retranlations – and all of them are, by definition, fallible.

As William James noted in *The Varieties of religious experience. A Study in Human Nature*

¹ Unlike dictionaries with a long-established reputation, WikiDiff is a popular source which may contain unrefined definitions of concepts; they are, nevertheless, interesting to take into account as reflections of popular beliefs or worldviews.

(1977, pp. 367-368), a mystical experience bears four distinctive traits, two of which are its obligatory characteristics while the latter two are its usual qualities. First of all, it is ineffable, in the sense that language appears to be inadequate to describe it; secondly, it is noetic, i.e. experienced as a kind of given, infused knowledge or illumination. Thirdly, it is often transient and, lastly, it is passive on the part of the human being, who feels overwhelmed by a superior power.

When envisaged as a translation of infused knowledge, the verbal record of a mystical experience can be seen as its echo encoded in a medium which is different from the original. Doubts as to the precision of that medium are voiced, among others, by George Steiner:

Here we flounder in deep waters. If a text is 'revealed', if its initial encoding is then transferred into a mundane and fallible sign system, that of secular and post-Adamic speech, to what truth functions, to what correspondent faithfulness can any translation aspire? Is there not a covert but intractable 'contradiction of categories' (to use Aristotelian terms) in the mere notion of the translation of a revealed text? (Steiner, 1993, p. xiii)

This thread is taken up by Reuven Tsur, in whose view writing down a mystical experience means an attempt to preserve "a nonconceptual state of mind emerging from a stretch of conceptual language", i.e. to transfer "perceived qualities from reality to some semiotic system, or from one semiotic system to another" (Tsur, 2003, p. 7).

3. Julian of Norwich's *Shewings*: translation into language and the question of linguistic worldview

Let us focus on one such example that encompasses all of the characteristics mentioned above: an account of a mystical experience written down by a woman as a book entitled *Shewings* [showings, or revelations], authored by a fourteenth-century English mystic known as Dame Julian of Norwich. Born into a wealthy family, at the age of 30 she fell gravely ill and, while seemingly dying, she had several visions of Jesus and conversations with him. Little more is known about her, only that, after the visions, she became an anchoress, spending the rest of her life immured in a cell or a set of cells adjacent to the church of St Julian in Norwich. It is not obvious whether she was a consecrated nun or a secular anchoress, or whether she had been married before. In the long period devoted to solitary worship of God, she was revered by her contemporaries, who sought and valued her advice. She left behind a large volume, or, to be more precise, two volumes of spiritual visions, one shorter (known as the Short Text) and one longer (the Long Text) – the latter containing not only visions but her meditations on them. It is also not certain whether she wrote herself or dictated her book to a scribe; what has survived until today are one manuscript of the Short Text and three of the Long Text, with all extant copies produced later than Julian's time, due to which they differ slightly in their linguistic features (see, for instance, Spearing, 1998, p. xxxvii). The contemporary English-speaking reader needs an intralingual translation to fully comprehend the book since the original, written in Middle English, is not readily accessible. There are several translations into modern English.

The characteristics of Julian's writing have been outlined with great sensitivity to style by Elisabeth Spearing, one of Julian's modern translators (Spearing, 1998, pp. xxxviii-xli). I will therefore follow her stylistic diagnosis below, while in the remaining part of this study I will attempt to trace some of those characteristics in the translations. Some of the features highlighted by Spearing are:

- female imagery, especially Julian's crucial concept of Jesus as a mother;
- spoken, colloquial style; vernacular English vocabulary with a noticeable avoidance of

words of Latin origin, which may be a reflection of Julian's oral account (and of the possibility that she may have dictated her text);

- specific syntax, characterised by very long and complex sentences, consisting of many clauses and conjunctions as well as scarce punctuation, due to which Julian's text resembled the rhythm of speech;
- scarce paragraphing (the original has very long stretches of text; a division into shorter paragraphs has been done by translators into modern English);
- frequent repetition of certain key words expressing important concepts, especially those referring to God: 'grace', 'gracious', 'graciously'; 'homely'; 'kind';
- chapter headings (which may have been added by scribes rather than provided by Julian herself).

As aptly noted by Elisabeth Spearing, Julian's original text reveals "the sound of a woman's speaking voice" rather than the tone of "a Victorian bishop" (Spearing 1998, p. xxxviii). This remark leads me to considerations of language as an interpretation of reality and the theory of linguistic worldview. Stemming from the thought of the philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt on the one hand, and the American anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf on the other, it is now being developed mainly by Slavic linguists. Among them, Polish cognitive ethnolinguistics deserves special attention due to its broad research methodology that enables comprehensive analyses of worldviews embedded in languages (see, for instance, Bartmiński, 2012 and Głaz, 2019, or the recent, English editions of the Polish journal *Etnolingwistyka* [*Ethnolinguistics*]). Within the cognitive ethnolinguistic approach, a worldview can be traced in a given language as a system (including its lexis and grammatical categories), in texts produced in that language as well as in 'co-linguistic' data, such as cultural phenomena that accompany that language (a concise account of the methodology is given e.g. in Gicala, 2021).

In this study I draw on the concept of linguistic worldview and its research methodology and adapt it to literary translation. I contend that individual texts can be treated as unique linguistic worldviews, detectable against a broader worldview contained in the language in which those texts are created. Furthermore, I conceptualise translations as reconstructions of those individual worldviews, drawing from the larger resources of a given target language with its standard worldview reflecting the mentality of the community of its speakers (Gicala, 2013 and 2021).

Following such a conceptualisation of translation, I approach the *Shewings* of Julian of Norwich as a linguistic expression of her individual worldview, which – *via* uniquely feminine linguistic means, in a text that seems to overflow with words – reports her revelation of God's love in terms of maternity, and her reassuring message that "all shall be well" and we will be saved. It can be assumed that a translation should reflect, or reconstruct in the target language, this linguistic overflow and maternity-based imagery, shared from the abundance of Julian's heart.

4. Linguistic worldviews in modern English translations by women

In this section, I will look at two modern translations of Julian's book², treating them as women's translations of a woman's translation, since (in view of what was said above) Julian's account of her experience is a translation itself. How did she encode her mystical experience in human language?

² As each of the published modern translations analysed in this paper is based on a compilation of the three extant manuscripts of Julian of Norwich's Long Text, I adopt the 2010 source text edition, transcribed anew and carefully annotated in all cases of textual differences between the manuscripts, as the one that can serve as a comprehensive and optimally balanced basis for comparing the two translations in question.

Let us now turn to the corpus itself. The present analysis focuses on excerpts comprising most of Chapter 60 of the Long Text and its two translations. Each source text passage (Julian of Norwich, 2010, pp. 333-336) is followed directly by the modern English translation by Elisabeth Spearing (Julian of Norwich, 1998, pp. 140-141), and then by a more recent translation by Mirabai Starr (Julian of Norwich, 2013, n. pag.). The respective versions are abbreviated as follows: JN – Julian of Norwich; ES – Elisabeth Spearing; MS – Mirabai Starr. Julian's medieval text in the edition quoted here had a number of elements highlighted in bold; I have removed the original bold print and used bold to mark elements I am analysing. Also, since the original chapter considered here is a single stretch of text, undivided into paragraphs and with apparently disorderly punctuation (some sentences end with a comma and on occasion new sentences begin with a small letter), I have divided it into five segments (examples 1-5). In my discussion of the translated excerpts I use italics for the key metaphor of motherhood, bold type for other metaphors, and underline for omissions, reductions or additions in a given translation.

Example (1)

JN: Our kynd Moder, our Gracious Moder, ffor he wold al holy become our Moder in al thyng, he toke the ground of his werke full low, & ful myldely in the maydens womb, & that he shewid in the first where he browte that meke mayde afor the eye of myn Vnderstondyng in the simple statur as she was whan she conceivid. that is to sey Our hey God is sovereyn wisdom of all in this low place he raghid him & dyte him ful redy in our pore flesh himselfe to don the service & the office of Moderhede in all thyng,

ES: *Our natural Mother, our gracious Mother (for he wanted to become our mother completely in every way),* undertook **to begin his work** very humbly and very gently in the Virgin's womb. And he showed this in the first revelation, where he brought that humble maiden before my mind's eye in the girlish form she had when she conceived; that is to say, our great God, the most sovereign wisdom of all, was raised in this humble place and **dressed himself in our poor flesh** to do the service and duties of motherhood in every way.

MS: *God chose to become our Mother in all ways,* humbly and tenderly **cultivating the ground** of his work in the womb of a maiden. Our transcendent God, the glorious wisdom of the universe, emptied himself into this earthy place and **made himself entirely available through our own poor flesh.** In this form he himself offered the unconditional service and duties of motherhood.

The passage displays more than one interesting feature, the most important of which is the image of Christ's motherhood. Although not unheard of before in the Bible itself as well as in some early Christian writings, where it appears frequently (though not exclusively) in texts authored by women³—Julian's treatment of God as a mother is exceptional in her extensive elaboration of that image, for which Chapter 60 is the most noteworthy. Apart from being detailed, the image here is built upon what seems to be the stereotype of a mother: a woman who gives birth to a child and who nurtures the child by fulfilling the typical responsibilities

³ See, for instance, Isaiah 49:1, 49:15, 66, 13, and Matthew 23:37. These, however, are just isolated occurrences of God's maternity. Among medieval female writers and mystics who applied the concept of motherhood to God are Marguerite d'Oygnat, Mechtild von Hackeborn, Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden. The imagery was particularly detailed in the writings of Marguerite, who compared Christ's death on the Cross with a woman's labour, while Angela and Catherine described the Church as a mother, using the images of breasts and milk (Sikorska, 1996, pp. 110-111).

of providing food and love (as will be seen below). This passage contains the first instance of the image of Christ's motherhood, expressed by mentioning how he undertook the duty of a mother.

Side by side with this dominant concept of motherhood are some other images that accompany it (marked in bold). In her translation, Spearing follows the source text by using the lexeme "work", while Starr resorts to the agricultural metaphor of "cultivating the ground". Secondly, where Spearing refers to Jesus adopting the human form as "dressing himself" in it, Starr makes a more abstract reference to Jesus "making himself available" in the human body.

In regard to the flow of text, the beginning of the excerpt reveals that Elisabeth Spearing's translation is as literal as possible and contains all repetitions present in the original, whereas Mirabai Starr's rendering opts for concision. Moreover, Starr leaves out completely part of the source text. A pattern seems to emerge.

Example (2)

JN: The Moders service is nerest redyest & sekirest, [Nerest for it is most of kind. Redyest for it is most of loue. And sekerest] for it is most of trueth; This office ne myte, ne couthe ne never non don to the full but he alone.

ES: The mother's service is the closest, the most helpful and the most sure, for it is the most faithful. No one ever might, nor could, nor has performed this service fully but he alone.

MS: Being nearest to our own nature, the mother's serving is most immediate. Being unconditionally loving, the mother's service is most willing. And being the truest thing there is, the mother's service is most certain. Only God could ever perform such duty.

Passage (2) describes the ideal of a mother and makes it clear that this ideal can only be fulfilled by God. As in example (1), Mirabai Starr cuts short Julian's eloquence and leaves out the repetition, while at the same time adding her own explanation. In contrast to this strategy, Elisabeth Spearing follows the original almost word for word.

Example (3)

JN: We Wetyn that all our Moders beryng is us to peyne & to deyeng. And what is that but our very moder Iesus he alone beryth us to joye & to endles lyving blissid mot he be: Thus he susteynith us within himselfe in love & traveled into the full tyme, that he wold suffre the sharpest throwes & the grevoussest peynes that ever were or ever shall be, & dyed at the last & whan he had don & so born us to bliss, yet myte not al this makyn aseth [t]o his mervelous love, & that shewid he in these hey overpassing wordes of love: If I myte suffre more I wold suffre more: he myte no more dyen but he wold not stynten of werkyng, wherfore than him behovyth to fedyn us for the dereworthy love of moderhede hath made him dettor to us,

ES: We know that our mothers only bring us into the world to suffer and die, but our true mother, Jesus, he who is all love, bears us into joy and eternal life; blessed may he be! So he *sustains us within himself* in love and *was in labour for the full time* until he suffered the sharpest *pangs* and the most grievous sufferings that ever were or shall be, and at the last he died. And when it was finished and he had *born* us to bliss, even this could not fully satisfy his marvellous love; and that he showed in these high surpassing words of love, 'If I could suffer more, I would suffer more.' He could not die any more, but he would not stop working. So next he had *to feed us, for a mother's dear love has made him our debtor.*

MS: We are aware that when our mothers give birth to us we end up suffering and dying. But what is this? Our true Mother Jesus, embodiment of all love, gives us a birth that leads only to never-ending joy and eternal life. Oh, what blessing! In love, he *labors to carry us inside himself, until we come to full term*. Then he suffers the most painful blows and excruciating *birth pangs* that ever have been or ever shall be endured, only to die in the end. And when he had finished dying, and *birthed* us into endless bliss, still all this could not satisfy his wondrous love. This is why he said, “If I could suffer more, I would suffer more.” He could not die anymore, but he did not want to stop working on our behalf. And so now he must *nourish us, which is what a mother does*.

In the original, this passage elaborates the feminine God-as-mother worldview by adding details: here is an image of Jesus in the process of giving birth to a child, having carried it in the womb until the ninth month, after which he feeds the newborn. The two stages, first carrying the child in the uterus and then giving birth at the right time, are present in the translation by Elisabeth Spearing, who uses the verb “to labour” with the meaning of ‘giving birth’. In Mirabai Starr’s rendering, the mother struggles to carry the child in her womb (the verb “to labour” is used here in the sense of ‘to work’) until the ninth month, which implies that what is difficult is not only the delivery itself but the pregnancy too. Also, in line with her overall tendency towards greater textual clarity, Mirabai Starr explicates the suffering of Jesus as “birth pangs”, although the original does not refer to the context of childbirth.

Moreover, Starr uses the lexeme “birth” as a verb, which is correct but unusual (neither the *Longman dictionary of English language and culture* nor the *Oxford advanced learner’s dictionary* list it as a verb). What this may imply is the presence of a non-literal meaning, which might be interpreted as taking the emphasis off Christ’s immediate, bodily involvement (via his physical pain and death) in people’s salvation. Similarly, Starr’s use of the verb “to nourish” where both the original and Spearing use “to feed” modifies the meaning by adding a non-literal tint to it. Indeed, while ‘feeding’ denotes giving food, ‘nourishing’ means either providing healthy food or supporting an idea or a plan.

Other choices made by Starr in order to recreate Julian’s vision include, yet again, a more concise treatment of two elaborate clauses present in the original and rendered word for word by Spearing. It is also interesting to observe her explicitation of the object of Jesus’ work after childbirth: “working on our behalf”.

Example (4)

JN: The Moder may geven hir Child soken her mylke, but our pretious Moder Jesus he may fedyn us with himselfe; & doith full curtesly & full tenderly with the blissid sacrament that is pretious fode of very lif, & with al the swete sacraments he susteynith us ful mercifully & graciously And so ment he in this blissid word wher that he seid, I it am that holy Church prechith the & techith the, that is to sey all the helth & lif of sacraments, al the Vertue & grace of my word, all that godness that is ordeynid in holy Church for the I it am.

ES: The mother can give her child her milk *to suck*, but our dear mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and he does so most generously and most tenderly with the holy sacrament which is the precious food of life itself. And with all the sweet sacraments he sustains us most mercifully and most graciously. And this is what he meant in those blessed words when he said, ‘It is I that Holy Church preaches and teaches to you’; that is to say, ‘All the health and life of the sacraments, all the power and grace of my word, all the goodness which is ordained in Holy Church for you, it is I.’

MS: Her Tender Breast

The human mother can *suckle* the child with her milk, but our beloved Mother Jesus can feed us with himself. This is what he does when he tenderly and graciously offers us the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life. In mercy and grace he sustains us with all the sweet sacraments. This is what he meant when he said that he is the one that Holy Church preaches and teaches about. In other words, Christ-the-Mother is entwined with the wholeness of life, which includes all the sacraments, all the virtues of the Word made flesh, all the goodness that Holy Church ordains for our benefit.

This passage further develops Julian's view of God as our mother: after timely delivery, the mother proceeds to feed her newborn with life-giving nourishment. Again, while Spearing reconstructs the original in modern English, Starr both shortens Julian's text and makes the imagery more concrete. The shortening concerns expressions of emotionality which the translator considered, perhaps, excessive for the mentality of the contemporary, not necessarily Christian reader; clarification, of course, suggests that Starr wanted to remove possible ambiguity. For this purpose, Starr provides this section with a heading⁴, "Her Tender Breast", where, interestingly, she uses the feminine gender (the possessive adjective 'her') in reference to Jesus. This, however, happens only in the section title, whereas in the text itself Jesus is referred to as "he". A lexical example of specification is Starr's use of the hyponym "to suckle", referring only to mammals, in place of the hyperonym "to suck" which is present in the source text and in Spearing's version.

A significant alteration is Starr's use of the reported speech in place of the direct speech in the original and the earlier translation. The direct words of Jesus revealing himself to Julian through the phrase "it is I" are reported, rather than quoted, by Mirabai Starr, who introduces a more indirect account: instead of a first-person message, there is an interpretation, which might create an effect of distancing the reader from the text. In "A Note on the Translation", Starr gives insights into the reasoning which guided her strategy: "Julian uses certain terms that fit for her time but which I feel could alienate my contemporaries – particularly those among us who are not Christians yet are on a serious path of spiritual awakening and seek wisdom teachings in multiple traditions." She describes her translations of Christian mystical texts⁵ as "a dance between fidelity to the original and accessibility for a new audience", targeting "people of all faiths and none". She also admits to having to resist her "impulse to change some of my subject's more dogmatic notions to suit my own interspiritual sensibilities." (Starr, 2013, n. pag.) Various degrees of the abovementioned fidelity to the original can also be traced in Example 5 below:

Example (5)

JN: The Moder may leyn the Child tenderly to her brest, but our tender Moder Iesus he may homely leden us into his blissid brest be his swete open syde & shewyn therin party of the Godhede & the joyes of hevyn with gostly sekirnes of endless bliss [...].

ES: The mother can *lay the child tenderly to her breast*, but our tender mother Jesus, he can familiarly lead us into his blessed breast through his sweet open side, and show within part of the Godhead and the joys of heaven, with spiritual certainty of endless bliss [...].

⁴ This is not an isolated occurrence: Starr's entire translation is divided into titled sections which are shorter than the original chapters.

⁵ Apart from *The Showings...* by Julian of Norwich, Mirabai Starr's translations of Christian texts include *The Interior Castle* by Saint Theresa of Avila, *Dark Night of the Soul* by Saint John of the Cross as well as some collections of prayers. Starr is also an international speaker on the issues of inter-spiritual dialogue.

MS: The human mother can *tenderly lay the child on her breast*, but our tender Mother Jesus can lead us directly into his own tender breast through his sweet broken-open side. Here he reveals a glimpse of the Godhead and some of the joys of paradise, with the implicit promise of eternal bliss.

In this last example, the attention of the careful reader is drawn to some details which complete the motherhood image. A difference can be noticed between the two translations where the choice of preposition is concerned. In Spearing's translation, which follows the source text in the use of "to" ("lay the child... *to* her breast"), the image continues the theme of breast-feeding: in order to breastfeed the child, the mother holds him closer to her nipple. The preposition "on" used by Starr ("lay the child *on* her breast") activates the meaning of "breast" as 'chest': the mother holds the baby so as to make it lie on her chest. Consequently, whereas in Spearing's version the whole passage compares a woman's breastfeeding with Jesus' feeding us with himself, Starr juxtaposes a mother's gesture of tenderness with Jesus' openness to people. While both renderings fall under the overall motherhood theme, Spearing's translation is more faithful to Julian's intention of further emphasizing God's specifically female function of breastfeeding, rather than God's closeness to humanity.

Another relevant element of the concept of Christ's motherhood is the more concrete image of his "broken-open side" in Starr's translation: perhaps another case of explicitation for the sake of non-Christian readers, who may not immediately recall the account of the Crucifixion. Lastly, there is a difference between "certainty" and "promise". Of course, when given by God, the two are theologically equivalent; from the human point of view, however, the former means an unquestionable guarantee while the latter may give the human being slightly less assurance.

To sum up Example 5, the choices made by the two translators, Elisabeth Spearing and Mirabai Starr, support, respectively, either the view of God as a breastfeeding mother, evoking connotations of absolute, blissful union with her baby, or of God's motherly love expressed as a tender gesture, which seems to involve slightly less closeness and intimacy.

5. Conclusions

In accordance with the aim of the present study, the analysis above described the metaphor of God's maternity along with Julian of Norwich's style as the linguistic expression of her worldview and traced the characteristics of that female worldview in two modern English translations done by women. In the analysis, these modern translations were viewed as women's renderings of a woman's account, or translation, of God's message received by Julian. Since mystical experiences are usually difficult to express in human language, Julian probably wrote down her account of God's love, tenderness as well as suffering for the sake of man in terms that were familiar to her as a woman: motherly love, pregnancy, childbirth. It was interesting to see to what degrees the two translators either followed Julian of Norwich's conceptualisations of God's love or dressed the author's ideas in the frameworks of their own minds. The two modern English translations can be treated as a translation series containing some departures from the original linguistic worldview consisting, among others, in certain shifts in the female perspectives.

Elisabeth Spearing's translation is certainly faithful to the original text. It pays attention to Julian of Norwich as a female author, to her colloquial style and her use of maternal imagery when describing God. Spearing's strategy of minimal intervention may have been dictated by her awareness that she was translating a voice that she regarded as uniquely female in the treatment of the divine. Some thirty years later, Mirabai Starr used a different translation

strategy to render Julian's text into modern English. Her translation tests the limits of the original text's malleability in several ways, producing a very modern adaptation. All three aspects considered in this study, namely text layout, grammatical as well as personal gender, and the use of metaphor have clearly been rendered differently in Starr's version. Not only has Julian's record of her vision undergone profound recontextualization, or rewriting⁶: this translator speaks with her own voice more than Elisabeth Spearing, and does so confidently and with a sense of purpose.

Liz Herbert McAvoy views Julian's account as "the motherhood matrix" and describes it in terms resembling the holistic approach apt to embrace a text as an author's linguistic worldview:

[...] there is no doubt that Julian's writing is saturated with images drawn from being a woman in the world; allusions to childbirth, motherhood, sexuality and domesticity, for example, combine to form a powerful statement asserting the centrality of female experience to the redemptive process and its articulation. (McAvoy, 2004, p. 69)

It must be admitted that both translations emphasize the conceptualisation of the divine as feminine and maternal: sustaining life, giving birth, feeding, welcoming, and protecting. However, they do this in different ways. Where Spearing's translation conveys this comforting worldview by carefully reconstructing the original perspective of Julian of Norwich, including the mystic's emotional, exalted means of expression, Starr seems to considerably alter some of the female imagery as well as the flowing syntax of the original, and thus recreates a voice that in her rendering is more sober and restrained, yet more accessible to contemporary, not necessarily Christian readers, inhabitants of the global village.

To conclude, it seems plausible to suggest that it is in the hands of courageous women translators of the divine to enable the Christian view of the male, paternal God to gradually shift, with each new translation, towards conceptualisations of God which highlight God's equally female, maternal nature.

6. References

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⁶ In the words of Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, "whatever their intention, [rewritings] reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way." (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1995, p. ix)

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