Encompassment in Love: Rabi'a of Basra in Dialogue with Julian of Norwich

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Abstract: Rabi'a Al-Adawiya (*ca.* 717-801) and Julian of Norwich (*ca.* 1343-1416) offer fertile ground for comparative study, but they have yet to be studied together in detail. The present essay is the first sustained comparative analysis of these two crucial voices, each dominant in research on Islamic and Christian love respectively. There are powerful correspondences between the contemplatives' approaches to divine love—correspondences that generate rich possibilities for comparative study. Both Julian and Rabi'a seek an apprehension of the ineffable Beloved in their prose and poetry respectively. Attention will rest primarily on these women's approaches to Divine familiarity and indwelling, enshrined in their prayer practice and in their imaged enclosures.

Keywords: medieval; Christian mysticism; Islamic mysticism; Rabi'a of Basra; Julian of Norwich

In eighth-century Basra in the Arab lands, a solitary woman spoke of her love for the Divine. Six centuries later, in a fourteenth-century anchorhold in eastern England, another solitary woman conveyed her visions of Divine love. These two remarkable voices, each dominant in research on Islamic and Christian love respectively, have nonetheless never been studied together in any sustained way. When Rabi'a Al-Adawiya (*ca.* 717-801) and Julian of Norwich (*ca.* 1343-1416) are placed in dialogue with one another, an intense reaction ensues.[1] Rabi'a and Julian were both unique contributors to the languages of divine love in their respective periods and regions. Whilst the reader must remain acutely sensitive to the distinct contexts of these two women,

there remains a synapse that connects them. A synapse is not simply a place of connection, but also a place of ongoing communication, which makes it a particularly apt term.[2] There are powerful correspondences between the contemplatives' approaches to divine love in their prose and poetry. Attention will rest primarily on these women's perspectives on Divine familiarity and indwelling, enshrined in their assertions on prayer and in their imaged enclosures. Writing in 1979, Joseph Norment Bell suggested that a comparative study of love in Islamic and Christian traditions was much-needed but still "premature."[3] Now, forty years later, comparative study between these two religious traditions is arguably no longer premature, and remains much-needed. The methodological difficulties of such a comparative study remain numerous, however, and it is by addressing these that we begin.

The Case for Comparative Reading

I: Summary of their Lives and Work

According to the traditional narrative, Rabi'a lived her early years in abject poverty and became an orphan at a young age, after which she was sold in slavery. According to Persian Sufi Farid al-Din Attar's (*ca.* 1142 - *ca.* 1220) hagiographic account, her slaver encountered her in prayer surrounded by light. Awed by this sight, he gave Rabi'a her freedom.[4] After her release from slavery, she lived as a recluse, a solitary ascetic who "like her Christian sisters in the life of sanctity […] espoused a heavenly bridegroom and turned her back on earthly marriage."[5] She died in 801, an elderly woman revered in her community.[6] Having said all this, it is worth quoting Rkia Cornell's warning: "As best as we can tell, her biography is largely— if not entirely— fictional."[7] Our access to Rabi'a has been mediated by later hagiographers, including Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021) and Attar.[8] Even the extent to which Rabi'a lived as a solitary is debatable, given later interventions by these hagiographers.[9] The attribution of 'Rabia's' corpus is thus, inevitably, also a vexed question. As asserted in the work by Javad

Nurbakhsh, translated by Leonard Lewisohn: "Historically, it is not clear whether Rabe'ah [*sic*] actually composed the poetry attributed to her, or merely learned the poems of various poets and later recited them on appropriate occasions. The latter conjecture is more probable."[10] Remaining mindful of these cautions, the present essay refers to Rabi'a-as-poet not as the historical woman, but as a figure and speaker constructed by later writers.

Although little is known of Julian of Norwich's life, she remains more documented than our Basran saint. Following a debilitating illness at the age of thirty, Julian experienced extraordinary visions, which she had written down in later years. She became an anchorite before the age of fifty.[11] Before this, she may have been "a nun at the Benedictine convent at Carrow," this being "a mile from the church of St. Julian's, Conesford, in Norwich, where she was later enclosed as an anchoress."[12] It has also been suggested, however, that she was a laywoman, and even that she gave birth to a child.[13] Her prose *Revelations of Divine Love* are known in two versions, the Short Text and Long Text.[14] Editors Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins even find it more appropriate to identify them as two separate texts: *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman* and *A Revelation of Divine Love*. Julian's doctrine of love has been covered extensively in scholarship.[15] However, while Julian has been situated in a pan-European context, she has not yet been placed in a more global one.

II: Rabi'a and Julian in Dialogue

Rabi'a has been linked briefly to Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510), and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380).[16] In her pioneering work, Margaret Smith also made many valuable, albeit brief, parallels between Rabi'a and later medieval Franciscans.[17] But there has been no sustained comparative study of Rabi'a and any of these European contemplatives. In a well-meaning but troubling preface to a major study of Rabi'a, Doris Lessing remarks:

> Inevitably, when we in the West think about Rabia [*sic*], we have to do it in terms of what we know of Christian mystics, particularly the women, Teresa of Avila and others. [...] She [Rabi'a] passed through the conventional terrors and raptures that are familiar to us from them. The words she used, the prayers, the beseechings, the language of yearning love: this phase of her life—for it was a phase—is within our grasp because we have read it all before, not least because contemporary psychology has illuminated some of these attitudes, often from the point of view of frustrated sexuality. But then something happened, and Rabia changed.[18]

Lessing asks readers to approach Rabi'a as a unique figure, separate from the biases of Western scholarship. Given the centuries of colonialist dominance in scholarship on Sufism, this is deeply needed.[19] But, in doing so, she also seems to denigrate the Christian contemplatives and close down the possibility of dialogue between Rabi'a and these European women. To come to the novelist's defence on the former point: she was writing in 1982. This was a number of years before the efflorescence of the feminist scholarship of the 1980s and 90s that genuinely 'illuminated' European women's 'mysticism'—and certainly not only with 'frustrated sexuality' in mind.[20] Regardless, an unhelpful barrier seems to have been erected in Lessing's statement, discouraging dialogue.

In fact, the ground-breaking work on early English anchoritism by feminist scholars of the 1980s-90s has been a key stimulus for the present essay. The scholarship by Catherine Innes-Parker and Elizabeth Robertson—to name two notable examples—has emphasized the agency of devotional women as readers and writers. [21] Such scholarship has placed English texts in a vibrant tradition of European women's devotional writing.[22] These scholars have demonstrated that English texts associated with women's anchoritism—such as *Ancrene Wisse,* the *Wooing Group*, and Julian's *Revelations*—should not be read as the embarrassing dregs of a misogynistic culture. Rather, these texts invest women's devotional voices and practices with vigorous

potency and authority.[23] In this vein, Mechthild and Gertrude of Helfta (d. 1298 and d. 1302) have been identified as indirect forebears of Julian.[24] But I would like to suggest that in looking further afield, we can find an earlier indirect forebear for Julian in Rabi'a. Like Julian, Rabi'a is a distinctive and powerful contributor to the languages of divine love.

Numerous problems remain with such an approach, however. There is always the danger of treating women's writing as an uncritical mass, as though women must naturally form participants in a historical dialogue. Within this, there is also the risk of dissolving Julian and Rabi'a into the contemplative traditions of which they were each part, when they should stand as unique authors in their own right—not as mere representatives. Rabi'a and Julian are also not the easiest coupling. This is not only because of the temporal and geographical distance; it is, more pressingly, because of an inescapable theological chasm that lies between them. Fundamental to the Christian faith is Jesus as the Divine Incarnate, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14).[25] Jesus is the enfleshed Son of God ('God sent his Son, made of a woman' (Galatians 4:4)). As celebrated in Isaiah 9:6: "For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace."[26] Fundamental to the Islamic faith, however, is divine unity (*tawhid*), which disallows association of God with what is not God (*shirk*). As stated in sūrah 112: 'Say, "He is God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No-one is comparable to Him"' (112:1-4).[27] In Islamic scripture, Jesus is a revered prophet (*rasul*), but he is not the Son of God, and there can be no Trinity. As affirmed in sūrah 4: 'believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a "Trinity"' (4:171). In sūrah 5, 'Al-Ma'idah' (The Feast), Jesus himself is said to deny his divine status: "When God says, 'Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God?"' he will say, 'May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say" (5:116-117). [28]

Orthodox Islamic teaching thus denounces *hulul* (divine indwelling) and *ittihad* (union of God and his creation). Whilst Rabi'a is part of a Sufi or Proto-Sufi tradition that has a more complex, less condemnatory attitude to 'indwelling' and 'union', her work is still underpinned by Islamic scripture.[29] Julian is a profoundly Incarnational theologian, with the Flesh of Christ the foundation of all her writing, His Body the core signifier from which all emanates. This theological gulf between Julian and Rabi'a cannot be ignored, but I do not believe that it prohibits comparative study.

III: Islamic and Christian Contemplative Traditions

Despite methodological difficulties, there are strong grounds for enabling dialogue between Julian of Norwich and Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, even within the confines of source-based analysis. Whilst there is no evidence that Julian drew on or even knew Rabi'a, there is a deeper influence at work. Research has shown that "Sufism" was influenced by early Christian asceticism and reclusion, and that Islamic 'mysticism' nurtured later Christian solitary-affective devotion.[30] To quote from Schimmel's pioneering work of the 1970s:

> The most significant contacts of the early Abbasid Muslims were with Christians, split into numerous groups ranging from the Nestorians to the many Monophysite sects and churches. Christian ascetics and hermits who inhabited places in Iraq and the mountains of Lebanon are mentioned frequently in Sufi stories— and in pre-Islamic poetry there were already allusions to the light shining forth from the Christian hermit's cell.[31]

She also suggests that the woollen garment (*sūf*), which is one etymological theory for the word "Sufi," was itself inspired by Christian ascetics—a tantalizing and feasible possibility.[32] Bell also reminds us that there is a fundamental unity between "East" and "West," for both "shared the same Neoplatonic heritage."[33]Although scholars have questioned the need to find Neoplatonic roots to Sufism, observing instead that it was generated from within Islam itself, these two

positions need not be mutually exclusive.[34] Most germane to this essay, Binyamin Abrahamov has also shown the influence of Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian traditions on Sufism's conception of divine love.[35] We should also not forget that Rabi'a was one of the earliest Sufis to become known within Europe, with her legend disseminated by Joinville, the chancellor of Louis IX, in the late thirteenth century.[36] On a related note, there is evidence of correspondence between Arabic poetry and the "fin 'amor" traditions of Europe, especially within the richly multicultural region of Al-Andalus.[37] This region of the Iberian Peninsula also nurtured two Sufi poets in Arabic, Muhyiddin Ibn al- 'Arabi (d. 1240), and Abu al-Hasan al-Shushtarī (d. 1269), both of whom were, in turn, influenced by Christian symbolism.[38] Additionally, Lydia Schumacher has traced the substantial Avicennan influence on the Franciscans.[39] To accept these multidirectional influences between Islamic and Christian mysticism is not to degrade either tradition, but rather to celebrate the wealth of cultural exchange at the core of both histories.

Moreover, there are overlaps in ascetic and reclusive praxis. Early and late medieval Sufism was characterised by an asceticism (*zuhd*) that is intimately resonant with preceding and subsequent Christian histories.[40] Cornell draws to our attention the fact that Rabi'a "represented the culmination, and not the beginning, of the Basran tradition of women's spirituality."[41] This tradition included reclusion (*nusuk*), engrossed remembrance of God in meditation (*tafakkur*), rapture (*waliha, ha'ima*), and extreme weeping (*buka*) to the point of blindness.[42] Shabaka of Basra, for instance, led a group of enclosed women in asceticism, in the so-called *saradib*, or subterranean cells in her house.[43] The parallels with Western Christian reclusion are irresistible here: not least that these women would also have been "buried," just as the Christian anchorite should have been—dead to the world.[44] Akin to their Christian counterparts, these Basran women dedicated themselves to love of the Divine. As is voiced in a nocturnal prayer attributed in various versions to Habiba Al-Adawiyya, Bint Umm Hassan, Bardah al Sarimiyyah, and Rabi'a herself:[45] "My God! The stars have set, everyone's eyes are closed, the rulers have locked

the gate of the city, and every lover is alone with his beloved; this is when I devote myself to You."[46] It is this intimacy shared between Lover and Beloved to which we will now turn.

Intimacy

At the heart of the synapse connecting Rabi'a and Julian is their attempted expressions of a complex, loving intimacy with the Divine. This intimacy is encapsulated in the Arabic term *khalili* (intimate, friend) and the English term *homley* (homely) respectively. Before turning to their texts, a note is needed on terminology. The doctrines of love in contemplative Islam and Christianity are profoundly multifaceted, to the extent that it is difficult to find a single "theory of love" in either tradition.[47] There were significant early contributors to a taxonomy of mystical love among contemporaries of Rabi'a.[48] To quote Cornell: "there is evidence to conclude that the term *mahabba* was a common word for love in early Islam, and that ascetics and Proto-Sufis used it to replace the more generic word *hubb* as a term for the love of God."[49] '*Ishq* would become the cornerstone of love terminology in Sufi traditions subsequent to Rabi'a, though it has no Qur'anic authority.[50] The term has the sense of passionate love, and the word has erotic undertones. There is an analogous—and perhaps related—merging of *agape* and *eros* in the writings of Christian Europe.[51] In Julian's vernacular, she promotes the term "love" above that of "chearite" (the English rendering of Latin *caritas*); this "love," however, arguably contains senses of both *caritas* and *eros*.[52] Cornell posits *eros* as a potential source for the term *'ishq*, and this is an avenue worth investigating in future scholarship.[53] In what follows, I use the term *mahabba* with a sense that it is intimately related to *'ishq*, 'as a comprehensive term for exclusive devotion to the beloved'—and I use the term "love" for Julian in a comparably expansive way.[54]

To seek Rabi'a's expressions of divine intimacy, we must first look to her poem *You Have Infused My Being*.[55] This poem is about kenotic filling, an infusion (*takhallul*) of the Divine into the soul (*rūh*): "You have infused [*or* penetrated *or* permeated] my soul thoroughly, as an intimate friend must."[56] The Arabic *takhallul* has the sense of both penetration and permeation, and the expression of thoroughness underscores the "filling" that must take place in kenosis. Rabi'a affirms God as an intimate friend, *khalilu*, which is also related to the term for penetration, *takhallul*. As observed by Martin Lings, "From the basic Arabic root *kha'-lām-lām* are derived the words *takhallul* (intimate penetration) and *khalil* (intimate friend)."[57] It is an intimacy that echoes the statement in sūrah 50 of the Divine being closer than the jugular vein.[58] This intimate infusion into the soul becomes the very definition of love; it is an ultimate in-dwelling. In such indwelling, the speaker forms a dialect of sound and silence, of speech and the absence of words: "When I speak, I speak of you; when I am silent, I am in ultimate longing for you" (p. 5, l. 2). In speech (*hadith*), God is inscribed in each utterance. And in silence (*sakat*), God resides in the "deep feeling," or the "ultimate longing" (*ghalīla*). Each stance of the solitary—the worded and the silenced—is sated with, drips with, God.

Divine intimacy is given further voice in the poem known as *My Rest is in My Solitude*.[59] The opening statement of her repose in solitude immediately evokes her eremitic existence: "My rest [*rāhati*], oh kinsfolk mine, is in my solitude [*or* solitary retreat]; and my beloved [*habibi*] is always in my presence" (p. 3, l. 1). However, it is in fact her communal solitariness that is evoked in this first, paradoxical line.[60] There is an appeal to her "kinsfolk" (*ukhwati*) concurrent with her solitude (*khalwati*). The *khalwa* defined a form of solitary retreat in Sufi and Proto-Sufi traditions.[61] In such paradoxical solitariness, her Beloved is ever-present, as indicated in the Arabic *da'iman fi hadrati* (always in my presence) (l. 1). Her labour of love is all-consuming, stimulating in her a continual, fraught longing: "I have found no alternative to his love; his love is my test [*or* ordeal] among the nations" (l. 2). In her spiritual wanderings, she remains

transfixed in “witness” or “contemplation” (*yash-hadu*) of His Beauty (*hasnahu*): “Wherever I am, I witness his beauty” (p. 3, l. 3). The speaker’s wanderings, despite her stability of abode, signals the restless movement of the soul in longing for God.

There persists an anxiety surrounding God’s potential withdrawal; an anxiety of absence remains. There lingers a sense of loss in this turning away from the world, a sense that emptiness rather than fullness may await the soul’s pilgrimage in the wilderness. In the speaker’s longing (*muna*), she acknowledges that she may die of love and yet not find the beloved’s pleasure: “If I died of love and did not find his pleasure, oh my torment among people, oh my suffering” (p. 3, l. 4). It is a state of not-there-ness, an absence, that demands medicinal healing. The Divine is named for His healing attributes—he is the “doctor of my heart” (*tabib al-qalbi*), yet his essence is defined fully as that of painful longing (*muna*): “Oh doctor of my heart, you who is all of longing, give me union with you: it will cure me deeply” (p. 3, l. 5). The Divine is, simply, longing, *muna*, in all His Being. Yearning and ecstasy are put in an oppositional balance. Both emanate from the Being who is joy and love:”‘O you, always my joy, my life, you are my existence and my ecstasy” (p. 3). Rabi’a expresses this intense need for the Beloved through a play on the two words for “existence” (*nash’ati*) and “ecstasy” (*nashwati*), following Lings’ translations of these terms (pp. 2-3, l. 6). For Rabi’a, creation cannot simply be a revelation of the Divine: “I have departed [*or* emigrated] from all people to seek union with you: my ultimate goal in longing.” She is forced to emigrate (*hajar*) from humanity in order to attain the healing, coveted union—what is her ultimate goal in longing (*munyati* (p. 3, l. 7).[62] We have a complete turn away from the trappings of human relationality, towards an utter encompassment in love. There, the soul finds the coveted union or “meeting point” (*wasul* (p. 3, l. 7)).

The nature of the *muna* portrayed in *My Rest is in My Solitude* is conveyed further in the poem known editorially as *Two Loves I Give Thee.* Rabi’a is careful to distinguish two layers of divine Love: “I love you with two loves: the love of passion, and the love that is due to you” (p.

3). This first kind of love is "ordinary" yearning; and the second is an approach to God's pure essence, the love that is of his nature. The first is one of familiar, known love, which allows continual remembrance of God; it is labelled with the term *hawa*, which can be loosely translated as "yearning" or "passion" (p. 3, l. 1).[63] Transfixed in remembrance (*dhikr* (p. 3, l. 2)), Rabi'a's speaker is, in this first type of love, the mindful ascetic replete with continual remembrance of the Divine—a process arguably akin to the monastic traditions of memory studied so famously by Mary Carruthers.[64] But it is the second, apparently superior, level of love that forms the heart of Rabi'a's poem, with the contemplative attempting to reach God *as* love: love that is *ahlon lithaka*, "love that is yours" or "love because Thy due is love," the latter being Lings' translation (pp. 2-3, l. 1)

Distinguishing these two loves has concerned scholars over many decades, and indeed many centuries. Responding to this long critical tradition, Widad El Sakkakini identifies the difference as "fervent" versus "worthy" love: "Rabi'a in her 'fervent' love meant only God's love and his generous benefactions. Loving God 'for his worthiness' meant to love him for his beauty and splendour which he made clear for her to see. And that is the higher of the two loves."[65] The second, superior love is thus for God's essence, with reward and punishment taken out of the equation. As asserted in another poem attributed to Rabi'a:

> O Lord, if I worship You
> Because of fear of hell
> Then burn me in hell.
> If I worship You
> Because I desire paradise
> Then exclude me from paradise.[66]

One legend even refers to Rabi'a walking through the streets with a lit torch and bucket of water; the torch was in order to set heaven aflame, and the water to douse the infernos of hell. In this way, devotion to God would be for His beauty alone.[67] The second love in *Two Loves I Give Thee* is an approach to God's essence that unveils: *kashfikuh* (p. 3, l. 3). Such unveiling allows sight of the Divine. In Rabia's unveiling, all "ego" is destroyed. The speaker's self-effacement is a crucial act of ascribing all achievement to the Divine, where Lover and Beloved mingle and no separation remains: "Praise is not mine in this, nor in that, but yours in this and in that" (p. 3). The reference to God as resident in "this" (*tha*) and "that" (*thaka*) at the end of the verse enables a dialectic performance of Divine omnipresence (p. 3, l. 4). The all-encompassing nature of the intimate Beloved is encoded in these pronouns/determiners.

As Rabi'a's Beloved is *khalīli* (my friend, intimate), Julian's is "homley" (homely). This "homeliness" is fundamental to Julian's understanding of Divine intimacy.[68] In Georgia Crampton's words, the term can be used in "passages on intimate communion of the soul with the divine," and Wolfgang Riehle suggests that the English term translates *familiaritas*, a word originating with Gregory the Great (d. 604) and referring to mystical union.[69] In Julian's *Revelations*, the word occurs particularly as three parts of speech: "homley" used as an adjective and adverb, and the noun "homlyhede." As has been observed, it collocates most strongly with the term "curteis"/"curtesly."[70] Julian effects a balance of the near and the far, the homely and the courteous. We might already hear echoes of this in Rabi'a's poetry—the dialectic of "this" and "that" through which an unknown Divine may be reached.

"Homley" also collocates with a range of other terms in the *Revelations*, particularly *mervelous/merveil*, *loving*, *joy*, *comfort(ing)*, *sweetness/sweetly*, *wonder*, *dreadful*, and *reverent*. In Chapter 7, for instance, the two attributes of reverence and fearfulness are juxtaposed with "homely" and "curtes": "oure good lorde, that is so reverent and dredefulle, is so homley and curtes" (Watson and Jenkins, p. 147).[71] Such collocations are telling of the semantic expanse of

"homley." It is knitted at once with the marvellous, wondrous, and fearful elements of the Beloved—yet is also bound with the sweetness of His joy and comfort. That it does not simply mean "nearness" is evidenced by Julian's nuanced distinction late in the *Revelations*, to be "homely and nere to God" (Chapter 74, p. 359). One may be "fasten[ed]" to him "homley" (Chapter 76, p. 363)—but homely intimacy is necessarily also inflected with marvel and dread. This "marvelous homelyhede" is, for Julian, "more joy and liking to me than if he gave me gret geftes, and wer himselfe strange in maner" (Chapter 7, p. 147). It is the "strangeness"—for her Beloved to be *strange in maner*—that would cause suffering. Julian is a master in evoking the coldness, the clamminess of estrangement in this dark, barrier-filled world.[72] For Julian, the absence of the Lord is itself the peak of torment: "if there had ben no paine in this life but the absens of our lorde, methought sometime that it was more than I might bere" (Chapter 64, p. 323). In this fear of absence, Julian is remarkably akin to Rabi'a—whose greatest torment, as seen earlier, rests in dying without the Lord's approval.

Along with the adverb "sweetly," "homely" is connected with two other vibrant adverbs: "nakedly" and "pleynly." The author affirms God's pleasure at the approach of the innocent soul, aligning the "homely" approach of the soul with vulnerability, purity, and clarity (p. 141). To be homely with God, inspired by the touching of the Holy Ghost, a soul must have shed all covering, all earthly garments that conceal and occlude. But that this does not signify the emaciation, the unhealthy bareness of the soul, is shown by the collocation of "homley" with the adverb "fulsomely" in Chapter 43 on the potency of prayer. "Fulsumely" has the sense of "abundantly" and "profusely"; it is especially associated with generous sharing of light, treasure, offers, and spices.[73] Notably, this collocation of *homley* and *fulsumely* occurs in what Barry Windeatt has identified as a uniquely multisensorial passage in Julian's writing:[74]

> than shall we alle come into oure lorde, oureselfe clerely knowing and God fulsomly havyng; and we endlesly ben alle had in God, him verely seyeng, and fulsomly feling, and him gostely hering, and him delectably smelling, and him swetly swelwing. And than shall we se God face to face, homly and fulsomely[.] (p. 259)

This is a feast of love—a luxurious, generous movement of the soul towards God. After all, in the *homely* activity of Lover and Beloved, much takes place. His blood is taken "ful homely" (483), though this is rendered as "holsomly" by Watson and Jenkins (p. 167). Julian's statement "than shall we se God face to face" possibly invokes Isaiah 59:2: "But your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he should not hear." In the disintegration of sin, the Face may be revealed. Julian's assertion is so close to—if also fundamentally different from—Rabi'a's words "To lift the veils for me to see Thee."[75] Both Rabi'a and Julian have a homely beloved whose countenance they may look upon in ultimate oneness of substance; and both revel in this Beloved's intimate presence. But whereas both women seek the "Face," one is of the Divine transcendent, and the other is of the Divine in human flesh. The Eucharistic overtones in Julian's conceptions of homeliness cannot find an easy equivalent in Rabi'a's verse. It is in their converse with the Beloved that we may find further—perhaps closer—parallels.

Prayer

Crucial to Divine intimacy is the ongoing communication with the Beloved in the form of prayer. For neither woman is prayer exclusively an act of supplication. More integrally, it is a loving conversation, a voiced or silent interaction with the Divine— as embodied in those night-time cries on Basran rooftops. It is a form of communion, a nearing towards the Divine; prayer is a route towards a deepened homeliness. Both Julian and Rabi'a do embrace ritualized, structural prayer—but for both, the most powerful prayer is a freer communication of love. In the accounts

of Rabi'a's life, it is clear that the ritualistic Islamic prayer (*salat*) and beseeching prayer given freely (*du'a*') remain significant. The latter in particular may have been informed by the Qur'anic affirmation of God as the only true respondent to orants.[76] In one of the poems attributed to Rabi'a, the speaker warns of taking respite from ritualistic devotion: "Your prayer [*salat*] is a light [*nūr*]', she declares, and 'your sleep is stubbornly against these prayers." The word for prayer used is *salat*, signalling the structured, ritualized Islamic prayer.

Deeper than *salat* and *du'a* is prayer as communication with the Beloved, *munājāt*.[77] The word *munājāt* is related to *nājā*, "to whisper to, talk confidentially with someone," often used to describe speech between lovers.[78] Recently, and specifically on the *Munājāt* of Khwāja 'Abdullāh Ansārī of Herāt (d. 1089), Minlib Dallh has written on the various resonances of *munājāt* as intimate conversation or communion; in invocation of Serge de L. de Beaurecueil, he parallels the *munājāt* with a "cri de Coeur."[79] We cannot necessarily define the poems attributed to Rabi'a as prayers in and of themselves, but I believe they parallel the prayers that may have pervaded her ascetic existence. In Smith's words, "prayer to her in truth was 'loving converse' with her Lord, not supplication on her own behalf or on behalf of others but simply communion with the Divine Friend, and perfect satisfaction in His presence."[80]

The texture of Julian's *Revelations* are profoundly informed by ratified liturgical cycles.[81] But there is also prayer outside of this structure, what the speaker in an earlier English meditation may have termed prayer when "at ease" ("on eise").[82] In its purest, strongest form, this prayer becomes a communion, a 'loving converse' with the Divine Incarnate. In her essay on the liturgy in Julian's work, Annie Sutherland remarks that "one is often left with the impression that the most meaningful prayer is that of silent, unscripted contemplation."[83] Sutherland further employs the terms "prayerful interaction" and "prayerful living," which are very apt for understanding prayer in both Julian and Rabi'a.[84] The "prayerful interaction" or "prayerful

living" for both Rabi'a and Julian marks their work as a "loving converse" with the Divine, whether in silent or spoken, scripted or unscripted form.

In a poem attributed to Rabi'a, known to Western readers in Daniel Ladinsky's translation *In My Soul*, various architectural spaces are built within the soul: "In my soul there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church where I kneel."[85] All these spaces resist nomenclature, however, for: "Prayer should bring us to an altar where no walls or names exist" (p. 12). Rabi'a looks to the absence of delineation and signification. The intermediate section of this poem shifts the speaker from an imagined prayer to ultimate self-destruction: "Is there not a region of love where the sovereignty is illumined nothing[?]" (p. 12). This leads to the final statement on dissolution in love: "In my soul there is a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church that dissolve, that dissolve in God." The approximate equivalent of *annihilation* (annihilation) in Islamic traditions is *fana'*.[86] These places of worship lose their substance as the poem progresses towards the fulfilment of *fana'*, the summit of her love-labour. Ecstasy itself becomes self-cancelling: "ecstasy gets poured into itself / and becomes lost" (p. 12). And there is a crucial resistance of corporeality; the figurative "wing" of contemplative flight displaces the hold of any "mind" or "body." All is crushed as this superior state of consciousness is entered: it is "where the wing is fully alive but has no mind or body." Here is the "region of love," Rabi'a says: an otherworld of nothingness, of annihilation. In this region of love entered through prayer, there are no walls or names. Instead, all "dissolve" into the Beloved (p. 12).

For Julian, encompassment in love is an act of completion, a making whole of what has been dispersed (Chapter 31, pp. 217-221); it is a process of union enhanced by prayer: "Prayer oneth the soule to God" (Chapter 43, p. 255). Chapter 43 is especially crucial for understanding Julian's approach to prayer. As she explains in this section, prayer restores the condition of the soul to become closer to God's image, degraded as it is by sin (p. 255). Prayer is an alignment of the will with God ("Than is prayer a witnesse that the soule wille as God will," p. 255), and its

nature is participatory, with the devotee becoming a "perteyner" (partner) "of his good wille and dede" (p. 255). These statements in Chapter 43 intensify the comments made in Chapter 41: "Beseching is a trew, gracious, lesting wille of the soule, oned and fastened into the wille of oure lorde by the swet prevy werking of the holy gost" (p. 249).

Julian first employs the verb "beholdeth" in Chapter 43 as seeing, perceiving: the Divine "beholdeth us in love." A subsequent use of this word in Chapter 43 employs "beholdeth" with the sense of "indebted to": "as he were mekille [*much, greatly*] beholden to us for ech good dede that we do."[87] During prayer, the Lord thus sees (*beholds*) the devotee, and also empowers the devotee through a pretence of indebtedness (*is beholden to*). To pray is to be seen and to be enfranchised by the Divine. The sight of God through prayer is the fulfilment of desire—as for Rabi'a, it is the encounter with the Beloved itself that fulfils prayer's function. In Julian's words: "whan oure curtesse lorde of his special grace sheweth himself to oure soule, we have that we desyer" (p. 257). Prayer itself becomes an accomplishment of this encounter; the reason for prayer is inscribed in the process itself: "alle the cause wherefore we pray is oned into the sight and the beholding of him to whom we pray" (p. 257). This nuances the words in Chapter 42 on not gaining what is sought in prayer:

> But somtime it cometh to oure minde that we have prayed long time, and yet it thinketh us that we have not oure asking. But herefore shulde we not be hevy, for I am seker by oure lords mening that either we abide a better time, or more grace, or a beter gifte. He wille that we have true knowing in himself that he is being. (p. 253)

Prayer is not only a request. More deeply, prayer should be an encounter of God, a knowing of his being. Prayer is an aspiration towards future joy: "prayer is a rightwis understanding of that fulhed of joy that is for to come, with tru longing and seker trust" (pp. 253-255). As affirmed in Chapter 43, prayer facilitates the soul's approach to God, allowing it to achieve a higher

malleability; prayer renders the soul "suppul and buxom to God" (p. 257). In such suppleness and obedience, God may be seen face to face.

Enclosures

With the intimacy enabled through such "loving converse," both Rabi'a and Julian construct the soul as an enclosure in which to house the Divine— and the Divine as a safe-hold in which the Lover can find shelter. This is a crucial aspect of the synapse that connects them. However, it is also perhaps the most fraught area of comparative study: Julian's profoundly Incarnational understanding of 'enclosure' cannot be reconciled easily with Rabi'a's poetry. To begin with Rabi'a: as discussed earlier, architectural focal points are internalized in the poem *In My Soul*. In the dominion of the soul, Rabi'a identifies multiple loci of worship: a temple, a shrine, a mosque, a church. Across all these loci, the speaker orients her worship, kneeling in devotion. In prayer, the speaker's soul becomes a space of in-dwelling. A range of enclosures take root within the soul, even as they all finally "dissolve" into the Infinite Divine.

The soul-enclosed mosque becomes a fundamental expression of Divine intimacy in Rabi'a's *My Rest is in My Solitude*. In this poem, a secure presence of the divine becomes focused around the architecture of the mosque: the *mihrab* and *qiblah*. As the speaker announces: "Wherever I am, I witness his beauty. He is my prayer-niche [*mihrab*] and my prayer-direction [*qiblah*]" (p. 3). Most simply, the *mihrab* is defined as the niche in the mosque that indicates the direction of prayer. However, the history of this term suggests a spectrum of meanings. It has been posited that earlier sources indicate *mihrab* to be a covered prayer space, rather than its more 'technical' modern usage as prayer-niche.[88] *Mihrab* may have originally signified "a row of columns"; but it then also took on the sense of the *maqsurah*, the screen in front of the *qiblah* wall—the *qiblah* being the marker of direction for prayer.[89] As such, the "mihrab" has at this early point in history the sense of an enclosed prayer space that nevertheless

performs a very visible communal function. It is significant that Rabi'a imagines propinquity to the Divine in a space of worship that is at once public and private, recalling the paradoxical first line of this poem. Different edifices—the mosque, the church, the temple—gain dominion within the speaker in the poem *In My Soul*. Here in *My Rest is in My Solitude*, the Divine becomes the prayer-enclosure, travelling with the speaker in all places. As the speaker affirms, it is the Beloved himself who is her niche and direction for prayer.

In Julian's *Revelations*, there is a comparable—yet also inescapably different—emphasis on the soul-as-enclosure and the Divine-as-enclosure. Differently from Rabi'a's concept of enclosure, Julian's sense of enclosure is located in the body of Christ. Christ may "homely leden" us into his Side Wound, towards his Heart. By the same token, the human soul for Jesus is the "homeliest home"—the perfect, eternal dwelling ("endlesse wonning" [p. 337]).[90] Within the casing of the heart, the soul is an expansive, opulent residence (p. 335).[91] Where Rabi'a has *takhallul*, a penetration or permeation of Divine within the human soul (*You Have Infused My Being*), Julian develops a more explicit taxonomy for the soul-as-enclosure. As God is enclosed within the soul, so too is each human soul "enclosed" in God.[92] Julian's taxonomy of enclosure is deeply associated with "homeliness" from an early point in the Long Text, culminating in Chapter 10.[93] There, "beclosed" takes on a distinct meaning, used to capture the effect of drying blood on Christ's face: "I saw how halfe the face, beginning at the ere, overyede with drye bloud til it beclosid into the mid-face" (p. 157). The focus then shifts to the face's other side: "the other halfe beclosed on the same wise."[94] The Man of Sorrows is, after all, a relentless signifier: in the blood "be-closed" on his face, he performs the enclosure of all humankind within the garment of his love.

As is clear with this meditation on the Man of Sorrows, we cannot easily parallel Julian and Rabi'a, for the very fact that Julian's notion of the soul as enclosure is so profoundly

Incarnational. In Chapter 54, Julian states that in enclosure, there is "no difference atwix God and our substance, but as it were al God":

> the depe wisdome of the trinite is our moder in whom we are all beclosed. And the hye goodnesse of the trinite is our lord, and in him we are beclosed and he in us. We are beclosed in the fader, and we arn beclosed in the son, and we arn beclosed in the holy gost. And the fader is beclosed in us, the son is beclosed in us, and the holy gost is beclosed in us. (p. 297)

In the dense usage of the term "beclosid" in this passage, she performs the enmeshment of the soul and God. She also readjusts "beclosed" to encompass three angles: we are be-closed in each element of the Trinity, and each element of the Trinity is be-closed in us. Since the soul is be-closed in God, one must seek it within him, "our Lord God in whom it is inclosid" (Chapter 56). This in-closing is fundamentally cyclical in nature (p. 301). An embodiment of such cyclicality is in the safe "circle" of the womb. As Julian explains in Chapter 57, we too are all "be-closed" in Mary, knitted together with Christ in the safe circle of the womb (p. 305). Wombs are embedded within one another, as creation finds its expression in concentric circles:[95]

> our Savior is our very moder in whom we be endlesly borne and never shall come out of Him. Plentuously, fully, and sweetly was this shewde; and it is spoken of in the furst, wher it saide: "We be all in him beclosed." And he is beclosed in us; and that is spoken of in the sixteenth shewing, where he seyth: "He sitteth in oure soule". (p. 305)

These infinite circles are not identical to Rabi'a's expression of infusion within the soul. It is true that, for Rabi'a too, the ultimate goal is to realise that there is no difference between God and our substance, "but it is as if we are all God." But in the Proto-Sufi's case, "substance" does not have the same resonance or urgency as it does for Julian. In Rabi'a's poetry, there is an infusion of the Divine within the soul. The Divine merges and mixes with the human soul, removing the

distinctions between them. Such infusion is of a different order to the in-closing of the soul within the Divine Incarnate, mediated by the Virgin Mother's womb.

Conclusions

Together, Rabi'a of Basra and Julian of Norwich generate a rich dialogue in the synapse of their connection. Both have entered the modern imagination as solitary love-dwellers; both find language one means to convey, however imperfectly, their visions of Divine Love. It is true that each love-language is carved from the unique theological and socio-geographical contexts of each woman— remembering, in particular, the theological chasm that emerges when considering the doctrine of the Incarnation. Despite the methodological challenges, however, there are powerful reasons for studying them comparatively: this includes their approaches to Divine intimacy and indwelling, encoded especially in their assertions on prayer and on spiritual enclosure. In fact, we may find in Rabi'a an early, indirect forebear of Julian. Rabi'a's poetry works with semantically rich terms and the use of dialectics, inflected heavily with architectural images. In Rabi'a's language, God invades each particle of existence, redolent in speech and silence; he enfolds and opens out. Julian's Incarnational theology is marked by a semantic complex of homeliness, in-dwelling, enclosure, and self-destruction. The Beloved encompasses each soul, while also opening up each soul-enclosure to the world. This comparative approach to Rabi'a and Julian is a new one, and much remains to be achieved by future researchers. For instance, we are currently lacking a detailed comparative study of *annihilatio* in Christian and Islamic contemplation, even though Julian's "nowting" responds powerfully to Islamic *fana'* (annihilation) and *baqa'* (remaining, enduring in God). For both Rabi'a and Julian, their labour is replete with paradox: encoding and decoding, inscription and erasure, encompassment and dissipation. They seek, for all humanity, dissipation into Divine embrace.

NOTES

[1] To allow ease of reference for English-language readers, I am using the AD rather than AH system for centuries. I am using standard practice in transliteration of Arabic quotations. See further "System of Transliteration," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqah Nimatullahi, 1993), xi.

[2] The term "synapse" features prominently in Vincent Gillespie's work on Julian of Norwich, most recently in his essay on Julian's *ars moriendi*: Vincent Gillespie, "Seek, Suffer, and Trust: 'Ese' and 'Disese' in Julian of Norwich," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017), 129-58 (especially 134, 151, 154, 158).

[3] Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanabalite Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of NY Press, 1979), 6.

[4] See further Margaret Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics: the Life and Work of Rabi'a and Other Women Mystics in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 22-24.

[5] Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 32.

[6] See further Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 61-68.

[7] Cornell, "Rabi'a From Narrative to Myth: the Tropics of Identity of a Muslim Woman Saint," unpublished dissertation (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2013), 3.

[8] For a discussion of these sources and their manuscript traditions, see Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 2-15.

[9] On this, see further Laury Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 24-52 (especially 27). See also Julian Baldick, "The Legend of Rabia of Basra: Christian Antecedents, Muslim Counterparts," *Religion* 20, no. 3 (1990): 233-46.

[10] Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Women*, trans. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi, 1990), 73. See also the comment in the anthology *Islamic Mystical Poetry*: "Many of the

poems attributed to her have not been authenticated" (*Islamic Mystical Poetry: Sufi Verse from the Early Mystics to Rumi*, ed. Mahmood Jamal (London: Penguin, 2009), 5.

[11] See *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 5.

[12] Watson and Jenkins, eds, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 4.

[13] See especially Benedicta Ward, "Julian the Solitary," in Kenneth Leech and Benedicta Ward, *Julian Reconsidered* (Oxford: SLG, 1988), especially 22, 24-25.

[14] On the textual history of Julian's *Revelations*, particularly the development of her "Short Text" into her "Long Text." and on the manuscript tradition, see Watson and Jenkins, ed., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 10-12.

[15] See especially Wolfgang Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 200-45; and Vincent Gillespie with Maggie Ross, "The Apophatic Image," in *Looking in Holy Books* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 277-305.

[16] Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics,* 63. See also Charles Upton, *Doorkeeper of the Heart: Versions of Rabi'a* (Putney, Vt: Threshold, 1988), 14-17.

[17] See Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 91-92, 98-99, and 107.

[18] Doris Lessing, "Introduction" in Widad El Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis: the Life and Thought of Rabia al-Adawiyya, the Woman Saint of Basra*, trans. Nabil Safwat (London: Octagon, 1982), 1-6, at 1.

[19] On the colonial agendas of early scholars on Sufism, see Linda Sijbrand, "Orientalism and Sufism: An Overview," in *Orientalism Revisited: Art, Land, and Voyage*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (London: Routledge, 2013), 98-114; and Atif Khalil and Shiraz Sheikh, "Editorial Introduction: Sufism in Western Scholarship, A Brief Overview," *Studies in Religion* 43 (2014): 355-70.

[20] See, for example, Laurie A. Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision," in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse: Syracuse New York Press, 1993), 28-44.

[21] See, for example, Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); and Catherine Innes-Parker, "*Ancrene Wisse* and *Þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*: The Thirteenth-Century Female Reader and the Lover Knight," in *Women, the Book and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St. Hilda's Conference, 1993*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 137-48.

[22] For a sense of this broader scholarship, see especially Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, trans., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3-59.

[23] See further Elizabeth Robertson: "Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 142-67; and "An Anchorhold of Her Own: Female Anchoritic Literature in Thirteenth Century England," in *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Bolton (NY: Lang, 1990), 170-83.

[24] See further Georgia Ronan Crampton, ed., *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications), introduction and n. 23; online (http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/crampton-shewings-of-julian-norwich) [accessed 3 April 2020].

[25] "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

[26] See further the following biblical references: Luke 1:35 ("The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy

which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"); Luke 17:24 ("so shall the Son of man be in his day"); 1 John 4:2 ("Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God"); and Isaiah 7:14 ("Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel").

[27] Qur'anic quotations are from *The Qur'an*, trans. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), online version, accessed 5 January 2020.

[28] See also, for example, the following Qur'anic references: 19:35 ("it would not befit God to have a child. He is far above that"); 6:101 ("How could He have children when He has no spouse, when He created all things, and has full knowledge of all things?"); 5:17 ("Those who say, 'God is the Messiah, the son of Mary,' are defying the truth"); 5:75 ("The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; other messengers had come and gone before him").

[29] See the discussion of Sufi writers' approaches to *hulul* and *ittihad* in Robert L. Fastiggi, "The Incarnation: Muslim Objections and the Christian Response," *Thomist: a Speculative Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3 (1993): 457-93, at 466-68.

[30] See Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 49-52. On the difficulties of defining Rabi'a herself as "Sufi," see Christopher Melchert, "Origins and Early Sufism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3-23. On the limitations of the term "mysticism," see especially *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Samuel Fanous (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 294. It is being used in the present essay as a convenient shorthand.

[31] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 34.

[32] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 35.

[33] Bell, *Love Theory*, 6.

[34] On this point, see further Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazali and al-Dabbagh* (London: Routledge, 2003), 26.

[35] Abrahamov, *Divine Love:* for the quote, see p. 5; on the influence, see introduction, pp. 1-13. It is, however, an over-statement to say that "divine love is mainly the product of the Judeo-Christian tradition" (5).

[36] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 8; see also 7.

[37] On this, see Tova Rosen, "The Muwashshah," in *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, ed. Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Anthony Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 165-89; and Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50.

[38] See further *The Tarjumān al-ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, ed. R. A. Nicholson (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911), especially poems I-III along with their attendant commentaries; and Lourdes María Alvarez, trans., *Abu al-Hasan al-Shushtarī: Songs of Love and Devotion* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 111-25.

[39] Lydia Schumacher, "The Early Franciscan Doctrine of Divine Immensity: Towards a Middle Way Between Classical Theism and Panentheism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70, no. 3 (2017): 278-94.

[40] On links between Christian and Islamic asceticism, see further Melchert, "Origins and Early Sufism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Ridgeon, 3-23. It is also important to bear in mind that "asceticism" and "mysticism"—for so long polarised in scholarship—are in fact deeply interconnected, as corroborated by M. Dakake, Olga Solovieva, and other modern writers on this subject. See M. Dakake, "Guest of the Inmost Heart: Conceptions of the Divine Beloved Among Early Sufi Women," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 3, no.1 (2007): 72-97; and Olga Solovieva, '"Veiled with a Special Veil': Rabi'a of

Basra and the Ascetic Reconfiguration of Identity," *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 49, no. 2 (2014): 4-28.

[41] Rkia Elaroui Cornell, trans., *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr an-niswa al-muta'abbidat as-Sufiyyat* (Louiseville, Ky: Fons Vitae, 1999), 60. See further Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic Sufi Women," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Ridgeon, 240-52.

[42] See further Cornell, trans., *Early Sufi Women*, 61, 98, 108, and 124.

[43] Cornell, trans., *Early Sufi Women*, 90-91.

[44] For one expressive account of this, see *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, ed. Bella Millett, 2 Vols, EETS O.S. 325 and 326 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005-2006), Vol I, 46: 1034-35.

[45] See further Dakake, "Guest of the Inmost Heart," 85.

[46] Cornell, trans., *Early Sufi Women*, 202-203; see also n. 159 on 202.

[47] For scholarship on Sufism's theories of love, see: Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins*, especially lexicon and analysis, 13-72; Annemarie Schimmel, "Eros—Heavenly and Not So Heavenly," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, ed. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot (Malibu, Calif: Undena Publications, 1979), 119-41; and Carl W. Ernst, "Stages of Love," in *Classical Persian Sufism*, ed. Lewisohn, 435-55. See also the "Love in Religion" project at St Regent's Park, University of Oxford: <*http://www.rpc.ox.ac.uk/research-life/project-study-love-religion/*> accessed 26 June 2019.

[48] See further Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism's Religion of Love, from Rabi'a to Ibn 'Arabi," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Ridgeon, 150-80; and Ernst, "Stages of Love," 439-40.

[49] Cornell, "Rabi'a From Narrative to Myth," 113.

[50] See further Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 71, note on this page; Lumbard, "From *Ḥubb* to *'Ishq*: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 18, no. 3 (2007): 345–85; and Cornell, "Rabi'a From Narrative to Myth," 111, 114.

[51] On the relationship between these terms, see further Nancy M. Martin and Joseph Runzo, "Love," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 310-32 (especially 318-19); and Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 13.

[52] See also Reza Shah-Kazemi's discussion of the Arabic term *rahma* (found in the opening of every sūrah of the Qur'an) as "close to the meaning of *caritas* in Latin and *agape* in Greek": Reza Shah-Kazemi, "God, 'The Loving'", in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbour*, ed. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2010), 88-109.

[53] Cornell, "Rabi'a From Narrative to Myth," 114.

[54] The quoted phrase is Lewisohn's, "Sufism's Religion of Love," 162.

[55] This editorial title follows that provided in the translation in *Islamic Mystical Poetry*, ed. Jamal, 7. In Marin Lings' translation, the poem begins "Thou me my spirit": *Sufi Poems: A Mediaeval Anthology*, ed. and trans. Martin Lings (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2004), 4.

[56] Lings, *Sufi Poems*, p. 5, l. 2. All subsequent references are to this edition unless otherwise indicated. In order to maintain consistency in the rendition of specific theological and emotion terms, translations are my own—unless otherwise indicated.

[57] Lings, *Sufi Poems*, p. 93 n. 6.

[58] "We created man —We know what his soul whispers to him: We are closer to him than his jugular vein" (50:16).

[59] This poem nonetheless "cannot be attributed to her with any certainty": Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 31. See also the detailed discussion on attribution by Cornell, "Rabi'a From Narrative to Myth," 139-51.

[60] See Anne Clark-Bartlett's phrase, "highly sociable solitariness": Anne Clark-Bartlett, "Holy Women in the British Isles: A Survey," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition*, ed. A. J. Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout, 2010), 165-93.

[61] See further Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabi, Gender, and Sexuality* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 68.

[62] On Rabi'a's contemplative process as a "search" for God, see further Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 52.

[63] See further Bell, *Love Theory*, 11.

[64] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-17 for introduction.

[65] Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, 63.

[66] This translation is from *Islamic Mystical Poetry*, ed. Jamal, 8.

[67] See further the discussion of this legend in Martin and Runzo, "Love," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. Corrigan, 320.

[68] On intimacy in Julian's writing read through a medical lens, see further Alexandra Barratt, "'In the Lowest Part of Our Need': Julian and Medieval Gynaecological Writing," in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), 239-56.

[69] See Crampton, ed., *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, n. 126-7; and Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, trans. Bernard Standring (London: Routledge, 1981), 97-99.

[70] Crampton, ed., *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, n. 126-7.

[71] Although Julian's *Revelations* are arguably best read in discrete, localized sections, there will be some shuttling between distant chapters in order to assess the use of key terms (such as "homley") across her text.

[72] See, for example, this statement in Chapter 72: "we be so boren downe with weight of oure deadely flesh and darkhede of sinne, that we may not see oure lorde God clerly in his fair, blisseful chere" (347).

[73] See entry "fulsŏmlī (adv.)," *in Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Hans Kurath and S. M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1952-), online version (Michigan, 18 December 2001) <*http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/*> accessed 24 May 2019.

[74] Barry Windeatt, trans., *Revelations of Divine Love: A New Translation*, n. 97.

[75] Lings' translation, p. 2, l. 1.

[76] Surah 13:14: 'The only true prayer is to Him: those they pray to besides Him give them no answer any more than water reaches the mouth of someone who simply stretches out his hands for it—it cannot do so: the prayers of the disbelievers are all in vain.'

[77] See further Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 45.

[78] See further Aftandil Erkinov, "*Munājāt* or Free 'Religion': A Ritualistic Shamanistic Song or Spiritual Literature?" *Oriente Moderno* 87 (2007): 85-102, at 85.

[79] Minlib Dallh, *The Sufi and the Friar: A Mystical Encounter of Two Men of God in the Abode of Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017), 90.

[80] Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 49. The term "loving converse" is R. A. Nicholson's in reference to the *munājāt* (see further Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, p. 51 n. 16; and R. A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism* (Cambridge, 1923), 36.

[81] See further Annie Sutherland, "Julian of Norwich and the Liturgy," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 88-98; and

Vincent Gillespie, "'[S]he do the police in different voices': Pastiche Ventriloquism and Parody in Julian of Norwich," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. McAvoy, 192-207, especially p. 403.

[82] Quoted from *Þe Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, in *The Wooing of Our Lord and the Wooing Group Prayers*, ed. and trans. Catherine Innes-Parker (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2015), 110.

[83] Sutherland, "Julian of Norwich and the Liturgy," in *Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. McAvoy, 192.

[84] Sutherland, "Julian of Norwich and the Liturgy," in *Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. McAvoy, 193 and 204.

[85] Ladinsky's translation as reprinted in *Islamic Mystical Poetry*, ed. Jamal, 12; all subsequent references for *In My Soul* are to this translation, but I have not reproduced the line breaks introduced by Ladinsky.

[86] See further Andrew Wilcox, "The Dual Mystical Concepts of Fana' and Baqa' in Early Sufism," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (2011): 95-118.

[87] The full complexity of Julian's use of the verb "behold" is beyond the scope of the present essay. For discussion of her employment of the verbs "behold" and "beseech," see Michael Raby, "The Phenomenology of Attention in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love*," *Exemplaria* 26, no. 4 (2014): 347-67.

[88] R. B. Searjant, "Mihrab," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22, no. 3 (1959): 439-53, at 439.

[89] Searjant, "Mihrab," 453.

[90] See further instances in Chapter 54, 297.

[91] On this image in other "mystical" writers, see Crampton, *Shewings*, n. 2298-99.

[92] See further Vincent Gillespie with Maggie Ross, "Apophatic Image," in *Looking in Holy Books*, 292.

[93] See especially Chapter V, 139; and Chapter 6, 143-45.

[94] On reading Julian's *Revelations* "as a picture rather than a story," see Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 49.

[95] For the term "concentric" when applied to Julian, see further Gillespie with Ross, "The Apophatic Image," in *Looking in Holy Books, 292.*