Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999. xiv + 197 pp.

Investigations into the category of the self are fashionable in Medieval Studies, and that Julian of Norwich's *Revelation* should be the focus of such inquiry, as it has in recent articles by Jay Ruud and Felicity Riddy, and as it does now in Christopher Abbott's full-length study, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology*, comes as no surprise. Abbott offers a welcome addition to the discussion of the individual in the late Middle Ages, resisting the impulse to locate in Julian of Norwich within the progress narrative of the humanist subject. Rather, he portrays Julian as a theologian who uses autobiography as a means of developing a distinct, individual-based ecclesiology. Focusing on the Long Text, Abbott examines Julian's insistence on the value of the person and personal experience, arguing that the significance Julian attributes to personal experience allows her to posit the "possibility and legitimacy of making a theological and potentially shareable interpretation of experience in a religio-political context where grace and truth are taken as being authoritatively and definitively mediated by the clergy" (179-180). In Abbott's analysis, Julian ascribes "real religious value" to personal experience by emphasizing "the individual's ontological union with Christ" (181); in the process, she creates a context in which an authoritative, autobiographical "I" emerges. In doing so, she "depart(s) from the homeland of undifferentiated, communally determined and supervised identity" by foregrounding her status as separate, authorial subject (183).

In chapter 1, Abbott lays out the context in which Julian's first-person narration of her experiences betray a differentiated, authorial voice and thus might be called "autobiographical" by identifying elements of "intrinsic" and "formal" autobiographicality within the text. The two modes, he argues, work together in an autobiographical project, and Julian uses them to relay the personal experiences that serve as the basis for her theological vision.

Those visions precipitate a careful negotiation for Julian as she seeks to understand the relationship between her personal experiences and the values shared by the Christian community in which she participates. In chapter 2, Abbott traces Julian's effort to reconcile the complex relationship between the temporal Church and its teachings, which constitute the body of Christ, and the Christ of her private revelations. If in the beginning Julian's visions seem to focus on her relationship to God, Abbott argues that her reconstruction of her experience leads her to develop a "theological understanding of the way in which the human race...is mystically enclosed in Christ" (45). Julian arrives at this understanding as she moves from "vision alone to vision and dialogue," a journey which shows her how each individual potentially participates in the

same kind of dynamic relation with the mystical Christ (78). The union between Christ and the individual is more than mystical, however; it is enacted in the lived experience of each soul: for Julian, "(t)he persecution of Christ's Church is manifested in the suffering of real individuals on the ground" (79). This recognition implies a "theological justification of autobiography" as it yields an absolute value to the incarnate individual in the context of the Church (79).

Chapters 3 and 4 treat the significance of the incarnate individual through close analysis of Julian's relation of the Lord and the Servant vision. These two chapters work together to explore the argument that Abbott sees at the heart of that example: "the union of Christ with the individual (is) the necessary basis of a mystical (rather than a merely institutional) ecclesiology" (45). That union, which unites the personal and the ecclesiological, dissolves the gap between the differentiated subject and the Christian community as a whole.That erasure of difference affirms the value of individual experience, giving it legitimacy alongside the Church as an "interiorized ecclesiology" (46).

Chapter 3 focuses on the doubleness of the parable of the Lord and Servant, exploring the dual nature of the Servant as both Christ and Adam, especially as they represent the possibility of redemption for humanity as a whole. The dual identification of the Servant with Christ *and* Adam "points again to the notion of a mystical union with Christ as constituting the true bond between human beings in the new creation of grace" (103). The mystical union between Christ and humanity provides Julian with a revised understanding of the Church: Julian conflates the Church and the individual soul, seeing the two as coinhering in the marital union with Christ. The vision of unity with which the parable concludes–a unity which binds Christ to humanity as a whole–thereby provides Julian with an important symbol that secures her claim for the significance of personal experience.

If chapter 3 details the significance of the particularity of the individual soul, chapter 4 explores the implications involved in seeing the personal as universal. Focusing on the individual's substantial union with God, Abbott argues that according to Julian's vision, "everyone carries something like a christological DNA code" that ties them to God through the unbreakable bond of Christ's humanity and divinity (115). Here, Abbott analyzes Julian's representation of Christ as mother, which he sees as the vehicle through which Julian relates her understanding of the redemptive potential that she sees as a substantial part of the human condition. In Abbott's reading, Julian's emphasis on incarnation through this metaphor allows her to imply that there is eternal, spiritual value to all of human experience, opening up a space in which "the possibility of authoritative and credible religious autobiography" emerges (141).

The final chapter, "Interiority and the Pastoral Dimension," examines two rhetorical elements in the *Revelation* which illustrate Julian's elevation of the significance of the individual and of lived experience: what Abbott calls "the idiom of interiority" through which Julian conceives of the person as a mystical subject; and what Abbott calls "the pastoral thrust of Julian's work" (46). He examines Julian's unusual, non-visual use of metaphor to develop a concept of interiority, arguing that her refusal to offer objectifiable images promotes a focus on the inward as that which is "most real" (164). Then, he traces the practical counsel Julian offers for a dedicated Christian life, demonstrating how the "idiom of interiority" underscores Julian's insistence on the human potential for a personal relationship with God not only on the level of the mystical, but on the level of lived experience as well. This yoking together of the mystical and the mundane underwrites "a belief in the possibility of making a theological interpretation of actual experience," which Abbott sees as the driving force behind Julian's autobiographical project (178).

Abbott inhabits Julian's text with care and precision, offering complex and nuanced close readings that earn their conclusions. His study is especially useful as it documents the similarities among Julian's conception of the mystical subject and those of Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and the English mystics. By illuminating the parallels among these diverse theologians, Abbott yokes Julian's thought to the monastic tradition, documenting a precedent for her seemingly unique theology. He emphasizes, rightly I think, the critical role of the sacrament to Julian's particular religious vision, foregrounding the historical specificity of the kind of subject Julian sees herself as being. His treatment of the God-as-Mother metaphor is particularly helpful as it regards the deployment of that metaphor in its historical and exegetical contexts, illuminating the complexity of the tradition and Julian's participation in it.

That said, Abbott inhabits Julian's text a bit too exclusively: like the anchorite who produced *Revelation*, Abbott remains too enclosed within that Julian's text, avoiding an examination of forces outside traditional ecclesiology to understand Julian's determined emphasis on the individual as an entity of "real religious value;" the rise in the significance of confession, the shift from realism to nominalism, an emerging economy of contracts between individuals, and the Lollard heresy all have been linked to an emerging consciousness concerning the category of the individual in the late fourteenth century. In the end, Abbott's text leaves the impression that Julian's autobiographical impulse, with all of its theological implications, emerges solely from her visionary experiences, with very little influence from the social milieu. Abbott attributes that impulse to a need to assign "credible religious value to her own personal experience," but if we are to accept that autobiography emerges in the early fifteenth century, its impetus seems more overdetermined than Abbott's text suggests.

Contemporary theory likewise goes unconsidered here, particularly as it relates to conceptions of the self and interiority. That oversight seems especially a shame as the kind of subject Abbott describes Julian to be differs not only from the conception of the subject that is commonly held today, but also from the static, undifferentiated conception of the subject that for too long has been considered the medieval paradigm of selfhood.

These omissions aside, Abbott's study is a welcome addition to scholarship on Julian of Norwich. His account of Julian's development of the concept of the mystical subject offers an important starting point for further consideration of the complexities and differences that distinguish medieval identities, especially as they are grounded in faith, and offers a much-needed disruption to the progress narrative that for so long has characterized discussions of the "history of the self."

Mary Peters
University of Oregon

Gabriella Brooke, *The Words of Bernfrieda: A Chronicle of Hauteville.* Cheney, Washington: Eastern Washington University Press, 1999. 258 pp., $18.95.

The long subtitle of this novel, elegantly laid out on its title page, reflects in its diction and even in its hierarchy of scripts the conventions of the sources on which it is based, "contemporary accounts and histories of the Normans in France and Italy:"

The Chronicle of the Life of Fredesenda
Wife of Tancred of Hauteville and
Mother of Robert Guiscard Duke of
Apulia and Rogier Count of Mileto from
her Birth in 1000 Anno Domini at
Granville in Normandy until her Death
and Burial at the Abbey of Santa
Eufemia in Apulia in 1063 Anno Domini
The Words of Bernfrieda by her Hand
Written at the Abbeys of Santa Eufemia
in Apulia and Santa Agatha in Catania
by the Grace of God