

**The development of Margery Kempe's 'maner of
leuyng': an interplay of oral and literate practices**

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Abstract

This thesis examines Margery Kempe's construction of her 'maner of leuyng', as it shifts back and forth between oral and literate cultures. Her devotional biography involves seeking advice, inspiration and support from literate men, and enclosed women of religion, both through verbal exchanges, and through listening to sermons, or hearing books read aloud. As a lay secular woman, Margery is dependent on literate men to receive recognition as one of the *mulieres sanctae*, to provide her with a connection to the literate world, and ultimately to aid in the production of the manuscript now known as *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

Contextual topics include women and literacy, women and books, the education of women in the late medieval period, and especially orality and aurality. Margery's 'maner of leuyng' is shown to be not a random collection of characteristics and beliefs held by other holy men and women, but as a set of carefully selected traits and beliefs authorized and accredited by religious authorities. The relationship between the second amanuensis, or priest-scribe, and Margery is examined, including their individual roles in the production of the *Book*, as well as possible parallels between the *Book* and a Book of Hours, a book Margery may have possessed. The significance of codes of behaviour, including examining the relevance of *meditatio*, *discretio spirituum*, and tears and compunction, is also discussed.

Abbreviations

| | |
|------------|---|
| <i>BMK</i> | <i>The Book of Margery Kempe</i> , ed. by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS o.s. 212 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940) |
| EETS | Early English Text Society |
| e.s. | extra series |
| <i>MED</i> | <i>Middle English Dictionary</i> , ed. by Hans Kurath and others, 13 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954-2001) |
| <i>OED</i> | Simpson, J.A., and Weiner, Edmund S.C., eds, <i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2nd edn, 20 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) |
| o.s. | original series |
| s.s. | supplementary series |

- The translation of the Bible used in this thesis is: *The Douay-Rheims Version* (London: Baronius Press, 2008)

Introduction

The argument presented in this thesis is that Margery Kempe's 'maner of leuyng' involves a fluctuation between a natural background of oral tradition, with that of the less accepted and expected, literate tradition. I will make a contextual study, working from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, of how the subject of the book associated herself with learned men of religion, and familiarized herself with devotional texts, in order to advance her knowledge of religious matters pertaining, in particular, to her chosen manner of living. The culmination of this personal development would become the writing down of her spiritual lifestyle, which was dictated to an amanuensis, and then corrected and copied down again with the assistance of another scribe. I will therefore be looking to unravel both the construction of the *Book*, and that of Margery Kempe's devotional lifestyle, in order to extract the relevant details of her flux between a verbal mode of existence, with that of a written one.

There are ten separate references to Margery's 'maner of leuyng' within the *Book*.¹ There is also one use of 'maner leuyng', and one of 'maner of gouernawns & leuyng'. Further to these there are three usages of 'maner of gouernawns (or governauns)',² and various different forms including 'maner of': 'crying', 'werkyng', 'crying & wepyng', 'visyons & felyngys', 'werkyng in crying', 'thowtys', 'lyfe', and 'dalyawns'. Additional examples of Margery's manner of being include the compounds 'crying & wepyng', 'visyons &

¹ See Appendix I for a list of the usages of 'maner of leuyng' (or other similar expressions mentioned in this section) in the *Book*.

² *MED* gives a definition of 'gouernawns' as being: 'way of life' 4.(b). It can also mean 'self-discipline', or 'self-control' 4.(a).

felyngys', 'visitacyons & holy contemplacyonis' and 'speche and dalyawnce'. There is also one example of 'forme of her leuyng', and two references to other female mystics (Birgitta of Sweden, and Marie d'Oignies) and their 'maner of leuyng'. By assembling the other words that are used interchangeably with 'leuyng', we begin to understand what Margery must have considered this lifestyle to be. It would have included her crying and weeping, her visions or revelations, her thoughts and contemplations, her speech and communication, and her work. The *Book* becomes a validation of Margery's manner of living—a validation that could only be achieved through the agency of literate men, operating on behalf of an allegedly illiterate woman.³

Margery's 'maner of leuyng', then, is her religious lifestyle, where God speaks to her directly 'in hir sowle',⁴ presenting her with visions of the Nativity and Passion, revealing holy mysteries to her, or simply guiding her along her devotional path. It has much to do with verbal communication, whether through the voice of God speaking in her soul, or her speech and communication with others. Even her crying and weeping are highly significant aspects of Margery's oral communication. She uses her tears as a beacon to call attention to herself, much as her white garments and silver ring do, inviting dialogue or debate. Through this type of confrontational behaviour, Margery was able to speak her mind, even teach or preach to others, as well as draw learned men to her, and through them, become increasingly appreciative of the value of literacy and literate authority, and what it could accomplish for her. In this way Margery's

³ The notion of Margery's alleged illiteracy will be examined in my chapter 'Literacy and Orality'.

⁴ See, for example, *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3.

words could acquire a permanence they could not achieve with the transient nature of the spoken word.

In order to consider the progress of development for Margery, from a strictly oral expression into having a book produced of her words and deeds, I will be looking at the relevant aspects of subjects concerned with such training, including: women and education, women and books, memory, and, of course, orality and literacy themselves. I will also examine the numerous books that Margery Kempe was, or may have been, familiar with.⁵ As part of this study I will be looking at devotional books and pious practices. Codes of behaviour, including *meditatio*, *discretio spirituum*, and ‘tears and compunction’ provide a background to the development of Margery’s manner of living. I will also look at some of the more important individuals that Margery was associated with, or turned to, seeking help in the form of their spiritual guidance, and their support.

Besides examining books mentioned and referred to in the *Book*, and the people described on its pages, I will also be looking at the book itself—how the *Book*, at times, operates in recognition of itself. This will entail exploring how the *Book* came to be written, who were the scribes, and what their influence may have been upon the development of both Margery the woman, and Margery the subject of the book, as well as the structure of the *Book* itself. I will look too at the title given to the *Book*, in order to draw out the possible significance of the words used to describe it. Through such a combined method of study, I will demonstrate how Margery Kempe’s ‘maner of leuyng’ is revealed by the codes

⁵ There are both books listed in the *Book*, and others that may be associated with it through textual analogue. See my Appendix II for a list of the books associated with *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

through which she articulates her spiritual excellence, inspired by a tangled network of influences, but ultimately being sourced from books.

(a) Approaches to *The Book of Margery Kempe*

When the Butler-Bowden translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe* was published in 1936, it provided a more complete version of the *Book* than had that of Wynkyn de Worde, but it was still not without its major drawbacks.⁶ Both printings were responsible for serious misunderstandings of Margery and the *Book*. The editing of both books led readers to an incomplete and prejudiced understanding of the contents, as chapters were relocated, cut back, or omitted entirely. Butler-Bowden wrote, in regards to his preferring the historical to the mystical aspects of the *Book*:

Except to those particularly interested in it, the great amount of mystical matter would probably prove wearisome. Certain chapters, entirely devoted to that subject have therefore been removed from the body of the book and printed as an appendix.⁷

Through his deciding for the reading audience that the mystical elements could be ‘wearisome’, Butler-Bowden not only intimated a prejudice towards those sections of the *Book*, but physically removed them from the main body of the

⁶ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by W. Butler-Bowden (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936).

⁷ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Butler-Bowden, p. 16.

text as well, thus disturbing the unity of the remaining chapters, and presenting an incomplete understanding of both the woman, and the *Book*.

Since the release of the Meech and Allen unabridged *The Book of Margery Kempe* in the EETS series, there have been numerous approaches towards a better, or fuller understanding of the *Book*. Two of the most influential have been those by John Hirsh and Lynn Staley.⁸ Hirsh makes the suggestion that the second of Margery's two scribes was a co-author of the *Book*, while Staley sees the scribe not as a contributor, but as a trope.⁹ For Staley the author is 'Kempe', and the protagonist of the *Book* is 'Margery'.¹⁰ More recently, two essays included in Olson and Kerby-Fulton's *Voices in Dialogue* attempt to encapsulate the aims and methods of the *Book*, both taking a different approach to resolving the issue of authorship.¹¹ For Watson it is important to establish that Margery, and not her scribe, was the one mostly in control of the writing of the *Book*.¹² In contrast to this, Riddy looks to concentrate on the text, admitting she

⁸ John C. Hirsh, 'Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, in *Medium Aevum* 44 (1975), 145-50; Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (Univervity Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

⁹ See also Clarissa Atkinson, who questions whether the *Book* was written by, or for Margery Kempe, and therefore if it is biography or autobiography. Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 21.

¹⁰ See 'Lynn Staley, 'The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe', in *Speculum* 66 (1991), 820-38. Staley interprets the author as a real woman, Margery Kempe, who writes biographical fiction about a character also called Margery Kempe. For clarity she calls the author 'Kempe', and the protagonist 'Margery'.

¹¹ Nicholas Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', pp. 435-53; and Felicity Riddy, 'Text and Self in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', pp. 395-434, in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

¹² Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 397.

does not know how it was produced, and expressing no interest in attempting to discern the manner in which it came to be written.¹³

In fact, we cannot know for certain who is the author, or indeed the subject of the *Book*. We can either choose to trust that the *auctor* is ‘Mar. Kempe of Lynne’, or we can opt to see this individual as a construct, and therefore that ‘Mar. Kempe’ is a character created in order to deliver a message on behalf of the *auctor*.¹⁴ This message might be, as Staley suggests, one of a politico-religious nature, or it may be a kind of *exemplum* describing either how to live a devotional life in the world, or even, how *not* to live a devotional life in the world.¹⁵ If we assume the *Book* to be an autobiography, there is a further complication when considering the means by which it was put into writing. In Chapter 87 we are told that Margery experienced ‘visitacyons & holy contemplacyonis [...] mor þan xxv zer whan þis tretys was wretyn’.¹⁶ This means that the treatise we are reading contains the material of a life, some of which occurred as much as a quarter century ago. By the time it was written down and revised, the woman presented dictating her life would not be the same woman who had experienced these things. Her perspective and understanding of them would have inevitably changed. If we are interpreting the voice of Margery Kempe speaking to us through the *Book*, it is the voice of Margery from 1436, whose memory was certainly influenced over time by her internal voice telling,

¹³ Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 438.

¹⁴ *BMK*, II.9.243.

¹⁵ The term ‘politico-religious’, defining Staley’s approach, is Riddy’s. Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 436.

¹⁶ *BMK*, I.87.214.

and re-telling each episode to herself, shifting subtly with each telling, until the version written on the page occurred.¹⁷

It is because of this inevitable distortion of events that particular episodes within the *Book* cannot be relied upon as historical fact, in particular because we do not have an alternative version of them coming from any other source.¹⁸

Further to this, the very process of Margery 'writing' her life necessitates her lived experience becoming a narrative. If we accept the scenario where a woman is dictating her religious life over the past twenty-five years to her scribes, we must see in this a type of fictionalizing similar to the form presented by Staley's 'Margery' and 'Kempe'. However, unlike Staley, I do not see 'Margery' manipulating 'Kempe' in order to criticize what she saw as a flawed politico-religious system, but rather, a 'Margery' of the present describing herself in the past. This past persona, who inevitably is a partly fictionalized character, is what could be interpreted as the individual 'Kempe'.¹⁹

Just as this autobiographical Margery is looking back to the past, she is also looking forward to the intended audience of her *Book*. She did not, according to the *Proem*, desire her book to be released until after her death: 'And so sche went to þat man, preyng hym to wrytyn þis booke & neuyr to be-wreyn it

¹⁷ For the dating of the priest-scribe's revision of Book I, see, for example, *BMK*, p. li. The date could be slightly earlier or later, depending on whether it is Margery's voice speaking to the first scribe, or to the priest-scribe (and at what stage of the revision it was).

¹⁸ Our only mention of a Margery Kempe of Lynn comes from an Account Roll of the Trinity Guild in Lynn, where a 'Margeria Kempe' is admitted as a member of the Guild before Easter, 1438. See *BMK*, pp. 358-9.

¹⁹ I will refer to the protagonist of the *Book* throughout this thesis as Margery, rather than confusing things with two names for one individual. Also, my use of 'Margery' will therefore be indicating the woman known otherwise as 'þis creatur', and not as an historical figure.

as long as sche leued'.²⁰ Therefore, her book is intended as a type of relic, a memory of her spiritual life, or manner of living, that will inspire others towards good, and true, devotional living:

& so schal I ben worschepyd in erth for þi loue, dowtyr, for I wyl haue þe grace þat I haue schewed to þe in erth knowyn to þe world þat þe pepil may wonderyn in my goodness & merueylyn of my gret goodness þat haue schewyd to þe þat hast ben synful, & be-cawse þat I haue be so gracyows & mercyful to þe, þei þat ben in þe worlde xal not dispeyrin, be þei neuyr so synful, for þei may han mercy & grace 3yf þei wil hemself.²¹

These words of God to Margery are enforced by her own words, in the form of a prayer, at the close of the final segment of Book II:

And for all þo þat feithyn & trustyn er xul feithyn & trustyn in my prayerys in-to þe worldys ende[.]²²

Margery clearly sees her name and manner of living surviving her, and her book would be the means for conveying this knowledge, up until the end of the world.

If we cannot be confident of the voice of Margery, it is even more uncertain when we might be hearing the voice of either the first scribe, or the

²⁰ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

²¹ *BMK*, I.84.206.

²² *BMK*, II.10.253.

priest-scribe. Watson attempts to identify moments when the priest-scribe intercedes in the narrative, and provides convincing reasoning for such interventions.²³ In doing so, he is providing a ‘soft’ version of Hirsh’s thesis, as opposed to adopting Staley’s—‘efforts to make the second scribe disappear’.²⁴ Riddy, on the other hand, looks beyond the different voices and towards a ‘textual unconscious’.²⁵ Rather than examining the *Book* in terms of authorship, she looks for discourse.²⁶ Instead of asking ourselves: ‘Whose language is it?’, Riddy redirects the approach by suggesting we concentrate on: ‘who speaks?’, and ‘who perceives?’.²⁷

Early in her essay, Riddy considers the ambiguous title, where ‘of’ can mean: ‘by’, or ‘about’. The question that arises is whether we are looking at a book considered to be ‘by’ Margery Kempe, or the book ‘about’ her. It is a significant difference, as one denotes Margery as the author, while the other stresses her role as the protagonist.²⁸ This difference, Riddy argues, demonstrates a kind of indeterminacy shared by the uncertainty of an author’s voice.²⁹ The

²³ Watson, ‘The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 398-415.

²⁴ Watson, ‘The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 400. See also Sarah Rees Jones, who argues that the book is a work of fiction written by a cleric, who fabricated the story of a woman’s devotional life for his own purposes. Sarah Rees Jones, ‘Margery Kempe and the Bishops’, in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Brown and others (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 377-91.

²⁵ Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 436.

²⁶ Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 437.

²⁷ Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 439.

²⁸ See my chapter section on the title of *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

²⁹ Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 436.

blurring of meaning demonstrated by the title can also be found in the opening sentence of the *Book*, where ‘the text names itself [...] as a “tretys”’.³⁰ Since ‘tretys’ can apply to both writing and speech, the use of it can be seen as an immediate signal for an intermingling, rather than a bifurcation, of orality and writtleness in the text.³¹ These are arguments forwarded by Riddy, and she furthers this by adding:

Literacy is not separate from orality, and “literary practices” are shared by those who can and cannot read and write.³²

Riddy’s understanding of an intermingling of oral and literate practices is one that this thesis adopts, in particular bearing in mind the peculiarity of an allegedly illiterate woman who moves with apparent ease between the two practices. The lay men and women labeled by medieval standards as illiterate, who were nevertheless capable of observing ‘literary practices’ could, and should, be better defined.³³ Firstly, there existed those individuals illiterate in Latin grammar, who nevertheless held skills in reading or writing in the vernacular. Such people might be designated as ‘illatinate’, rather than illiterate. Secondly, there were others that, although incapable of reading or writing in either Latin or the vernacular, could enter—

³⁰ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.1, and Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 438.

³¹ Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 438. Riddy cites *MED*, *tretise* 1. (a) and 2. (a), and emphasizes that Chaucer uses it in both senses.

³² Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 438.

³³ For a more elaborate examination of literacy among the laity, refer to my chapter on literacy and orality.

into literacy from its margins: by listening to sermons on Christian ritual practice illustrated through pictures, or by participating in the myriad administrative rituals of both secular and sacred lettered cities.³⁴

This ‘paraliterate’ society follows a ‘paraliterate’ system, where ‘literacy involves much more than command of the technologies of reading and writing’.³⁵ Such a method of learning, where knowledge can be accumulated from visual sources, aural sources, or through taking part in devotional practices, is similar to that described by Richard Dawkins as ‘meme’ learning, where—

memes propagate themselves in the meme pool [as genes in a gene pool] by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.³⁶

Since learning by imitation does not require fully literate abilities, such a lack of comprehensive skills is not prohibitive. Literate, ‘illiterate’, and ‘paraliterate’ members of society, therefore, are all capable of following literary practices.³⁷

³⁴ Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins, eds., *Beyond the Lettered City: Indigenous Literacies in the Andes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 192.

³⁵ Rappaport and Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City*, p. 170.

³⁶ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 206. ‘Meme’ is Dawkin’s foreshortening of ‘mimeme’, which he defines as ‘a unit of cultural transmission’.

³⁷ Of course, further subdivisions of such groups can also be found, for example, semi-literate people who may speak and understand Latin, but cannot read or write it.

There are elements of Riddy's argument that I would take issue with; for example, the fact she seems to ignore that 'tretys' is a common medieval term for a 'work of instructional or informative character', such as *The Book of Margery Kempe*.³⁸ The two meanings of 'tretys', of writing and speech, would not appear to have been intentional. Instead, the *Book* is presented as a '[work of instructional or informative character] and a comfortabyll for synful wrecchys'.³⁹ This is enforced by the fact that the 'tretys' is to provide 'vndyrstondyng', that is to say, it will educate. Also, the title we now know the *Book* by, was probably first given to it when the manuscript was printed in abridged form.⁴⁰ This means that the title we now know it by was unlikely to have been that of the original. Whether the 'of' in the title meant 'by' or 'about' is something of a moot point in relation to the original theme intended for the *Book*. The ambiguity was not a construct that the original author was likely to be ascribing to her treatise. However, such discrepancies do go a long way in explaining why the *Book*, and Margery, have continued to perplex and challenge scholars in regards to the relationship between author and subject.

³⁸ *MED*, *tretise* 1.(a). 'A formal discourse or written work expounding a topic, a work of instructional or informative character, a disquisition on a circumscribed topic'. The *MED* includes the *Prick of Conscience* 'Wha-swa can nocht drede may lere þat þis tretice wil rede or here'; *Mandeville's Travels* 'I schewed hym this tretys þat I had made'; and Bokenham's *Lives of the Saints*, 'Wherfore I preye ... You ... to whom I dyrekte This simple tretihs' as examples, among others. See also, for example, *The Chastising of God's Children*: 'Heere bigynneþ þe kalender eiper þe table of þe chapitels of þis tretys here aftir suyng, þe whiche tretys is clepid þe chastisyng of goddis children'. *The Chastising of God's Children: And the Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*, ed. by Joyce Bazire and Eric Colledge (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. 91.

³⁹ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.1.

⁴⁰ The Wynkyn de Worde printed extracts were called, *A shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taught by our lorde Ihesu cryste, or taken out of the boke of Margerie kempe of Lynn*. See, for example, *BMK*, p. xlvi.

The fundamental disparity in approach between Riddy and Watson, is that for Watson the *Book* is ‘an account based on actual historical events’, while Riddy sees it as ‘a mode that presents itself as fact’.⁴¹ This apparently subtle distinction amounts to the difference between reading the *Book* as an historical document of factual content, as opposed to one where the reader is always aware of the fictional qualities within it. Rather than concentrating on an autobiographical text which is interpreted as being ‘unproblematically true’, it is important to keep in mind ‘the blurred boundaries between writing, narrating and reading’, which often make the voice of the *Book* both unclear and indeterminate.⁴² Rather than attempting to decipher what is truth and what is fiction, this thesis focuses on the way in which ‘þe creatur’ is shown to interact with men and women of religion in various social spaces, and how both the reading of books, and speaking of books or their content, plays a significant role in this interaction, and how the manner of living of ‘þe creatur’ is shown to develop through this process.⁴³

(b) Looking for a Manner of Structure

The Need for a Discerning Spirit

Both Watson and Riddy seem to overlook the significance of *discretio spirituum* and codes of behaviour. Instead, Riddy talks about Margery’s ‘practice

⁴¹ Watson, ‘The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 455; Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, p. 456.

⁴² Riddy, ‘Text and Self’, pp. 456, and 441.

⁴³ For use of ‘þe creatur’ see, for example, *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4-5. The more common form of address for Margery is ‘þis creatur’.

of confession' being 'represented as a mode of self-narration'.⁴⁴ Riddy sees the 'telling of her life story' as 'part of [Margery's] life'.⁴⁵ Watson, on the other hand, identifies *discretio*, but at the same time complains about the *Book* 'heightening our sense of incongruities rather than trying to resolve them'.⁴⁶ Watson also speaks of the *Book* being 'puzzled and defensive'.⁴⁷ Watson sees Margery's life as 'following two, apparently contradictory, trajectories'.⁴⁸ On the one hand he sees a movement towards ever greater perfection, while on the other he sees Margery being identified with a closer identification with the sinful world.⁴⁹ This understanding of Margery's 'riven self-hood' fails to appreciate the need for qualities such as humility and perseverance, alongside those of exceptional virtue and piety when the doctrine of *discretio spirituum* was used to consider a visionary's conduct.⁵⁰ It becomes equally essential to demonstrate that Margery has been tempted, overcome these temptations, and learned the distinction between good and evil, as it is to demonstrate her sanctity through her

⁴⁴ Riddy, 'Text and Self', p. 445.

⁴⁵ Uhlman observes how, in the concluding chapters of Book I, the details of Margery's 'felyngys & reuelacyons & þe forme of her leuyng' (I.*Proem*.3-4) intersect with 'þe writyng of þis tretys' (I.89.219). See Uhlman, 'The Comfort of Voice', p. 51. I will comment further about Margery's 'practice of confession' below.

⁴⁶ Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', p. 418.

⁴⁷ Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', p. 415.

⁴⁸ Riddy, 'Text and Self', p. 447.

⁴⁹ Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', p. 418.

⁵⁰ Riddy, 'Text and Self', p. 447.

revelations and pious behaviour.⁵¹ What both essayists fail to examine is the need for the *Book*'s protagonist to demonstrate that she is continually observing *discretio spirituum*, and thereby continuing in her lifestyle of meekness and humility.⁵² Through missing the role played by *discretio*, both studies fail to isolate a key element of the *Book* that can aid in ascertaining both the form and function of the 'tretys'. Margery's pilgrimage towards spiritual excellence is a process of learning whereby she seeks succor and guidance from oral and written sources. Sermons, books, and 'holy dalyawns' with men and women of religion, the saints, and God himself, represent the methodology by which Margery accumulates her spiritual wisdom.⁵³

Margery's striving for spiritual excellence involves either the furthering of her manner of living, or verifying that 'þer was no disseyte in hir maner of leuyng'.⁵⁴ She is seen to display what Nicole Rice describes as 'spiritual ambition'—

⁵¹ Rosalynn Voaden defines *discretio spirituum* as originating 'in the belief that good and evil spirits [...] can [...] be distinguished by observing the virtue of the recipient, the circumstance of the apparition, the orthodoxy of the revelation, and the 'fruits' of the experience—that is, striving after goodness or succumbing to temptation.' Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), p. 48.

⁵² See my chapter section '*Discretio spirituum* and Codes of Behaviour' for a fuller description of Margery's need to observe *discretio*, and the means by which she does so. See also Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*: The Issue of *Discretio Spirituum* Reconsidered', in *English Studies* 92 (2011), 119-37.

⁵³ For 'holy dalyawns' see, for example, Margery speaking with Julian of Norwich in *BMK*, I.18.43. For the importance of books and sermons, see I.14.29 and I.59.144.

⁵⁴ *BMK*, I.18.43.

a phenomenon, widespread among prosperous late-fourteenth-century laypeople, that grew in proportion to, and was enabled by, social ambition. Spiritual ambition was a desire for the highest distinctions in the religious realm: assurance of salvation in the next life, and the possibility, in this life, of seeing and experiencing personal closeness to God through contemplation.⁵⁵

Rice's definition matches perfectly with Margery Kempe, as presented by the *Book*. Margery is described as a lay woman, daughter of a powerful merchant with mercantile aspirations of her own, with concerns about the afterlife, and seeking closeness to God through her meditations and contemplations.⁵⁶ Rice also comments on the significance of 'conduct guides' and how these could be set up and used as a means of 'emulating and affiliating with various religious orders'.⁵⁷ Margery's manner of living involves, to an impressive level, the use of 'conduct guides', and the emulation of different holy women, or aspects of

⁵⁵ Nicole R. Rice, 'Spiritual Ambition and the Translation of the Cloister: *The Abbey and Charter of the Holy Ghost*, in *Viator* 33 (2002), 222-60 (p. 224).

⁵⁶ For an overview of Margery's family, or possible extended family members see, for example, Appendix III in *BMK*, pp. 358-68. Margery's father, John Brunham (see *BMK*, I.45.109) was a burgess that held offices as Mayor of Lynn, a member of parliament, and an alderman of the Trinity Guild (see also: Windeatt, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 10). For an example of her apparent concern over the afterlife see *BMK*, I.5.16-17. For examples of her social ambitions see: *BMK*, I.2.9-11. For more on her meditations and contemplations, refer to my chapter section, '*Meditatio* and 'Thynkyng'.

⁵⁷ Rice, 'Spiritual Ambition', p. 226. Although works described by Rice as 'conduct guides' do offer conduct advice, I use her term with caution, as the complexity of their use is not sufficiently described by such a restrictive expression.

particular religious orders.⁵⁸ While remaining in the world, Margery is shown to follow ‘conduct guides’ (as well as lives of holy women) such as *The Scale of Perfection*, the *Revelations* of St. Birgitta, the *Stimulus Amoris*, and the *Incendium Amoris*.⁵⁹ Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, and the vitae of Marie d’Oignies, and Elizabeth of Hungary, were also almost certainly guides she was familiar with and made use of.⁶⁰

Confession

Confession is, of course, enormously important to Margery. She uses it not only to tell her life story, but also to win allies; for example, the Pope’s legate in Constance who hears her confession and supports her against antagonistic travel companions.⁶¹ When summoned before the Abbot and Dean of Leicester, among others, Margery will only describe why she wears white

⁵⁸ The emulation of the life of Birgitta of Sweden is the most obvious and commonly written about guide that Margery appears to follow. For reference to the similarities of their vitae see, for example, Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 25. See also, Julia Bolton Holloway, ‘Bride, Margery, Julian, and Alice: Bridget of Sweden’s Textual Community in Medieval England’, in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1992), p. 203; and Gunnel Cleve, ‘Margery Kempe: A Scandinavian Influence in Medieval England’, in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium V*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), pp. 164-65. For an example of Margery’s manner of living bearing semblance to the Free Spirit movement, see my chapter section, *Discretio spirituum* and Codes of Behaviour.

⁵⁹ See *BMK*, I.17.39 and I.58.143 for lists of the books.

⁶⁰ See *BMK*, I.62.152-4. See also my chapter section, *Meditatio* and ‘Thynkyng’ for Margery and the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, and the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*.

⁶¹ *BMK*, I.27.63.

clothes to the ‘worthy clerkys’, not to the lay Mayor, and will do so in the form of confession.⁶² This manner of confined ‘dialogue’ is much safer than speaking out to a large, and largely antagonistic gathering. It operates within the prescribed bounds of Church practices and demands the discretion and discernment of the listeners. According to the *Book*, Margery gains special privilege from the Archbishop of Canterbury to take communion or have confession as often as desired, and is defended in this by Robert Spryngolde before the Prior of Lynn, Thomas Hevenyngham.⁶³ But confession is also a means by which Margery demonstrates her devotion, much like her praying with beads.

Despite being assured by God that she does not need to pray with beads, Margery continues to do so.⁶⁴ In a similar way, Margery persists in seeking and practicing confession regularly despite being told early in her devotional life that she is to be granted contrition and will not know purgatory.⁶⁵ Margery apparently requires the personal satisfaction derived from such practices, despite them being unnecessary as part of her salvation. Watson expresses this behaviour by stating: ‘she can never love enough, pray enough, cry enough’.⁶⁶ But there can be further agendas involved in Margery’s frequent confessions. As Foucault expresses it:

⁶² *BMK*, I.48.116.

⁶³ *BMK*, I.57.139.

⁶⁴ *BMK*, I.36.89-90.

⁶⁵ *BMK*, I.5.16-17.

⁶⁶ Watson, ‘The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*’, p. 419.

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship[.]⁶⁷

There is obviously a clear link between Margery being shriven or telling her manner of living to a man or woman of religion, to that of her dictating her autobiography to her amanuensis, to the audience of her *Book* receiving this information.⁶⁸

There are other aspects associated with confession that we ought to bear in mind when thinking of Margery and the *Book*. The first of these is the element of truth. A person giving confession was expected to be honest, just as, in the *Proem*, we are told that the *Book* expresses only the ‘very trewth’.⁶⁹ Margery could be seen as attempting to extract, as Foucault expresses it, ‘from the depths of [herself], in between the words, a truth’.⁷⁰ At the same time, the audience of the *Book* is expected to experience a similar cathartic moment when they realize

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 61.

⁶⁸ Opposing constructs of the narrative voice in the *Book* include Karma Lochrie seeing Margery’s role as one of interdiction—inserting ‘her own voice between text and reader’. Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 100. See also Julian Boffey interpreting Margery’s life as assembled ‘out of and around the revelations’. Julia Boffey, ‘Middle English Lives’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 634. Finally, see Naoë Yoshikawa for a progression and structure found in the *Book* that relates Margery’s meditations with her memory. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe’s Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literature, Liturgy and Iconography* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

⁶⁹ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.5.

⁷⁰ Foucault, *The History*, p. 59.

the truth of 'þe hy & vnspecabyl mercy of [... Christ]'.⁷¹ Also, by portraying Margery continually seeking remission of sins and telling her manner of living through confession, we are led to assume that the men hearing her avowal are sanctioning her lifestyle and life story.⁷² Another aspect of confession, again highlighted by Foucault, is that of sex being 'a privileged theme'.⁷³ Margery's confession that is never told, related in the opening of the *Book*, has been assumed by some scholars to be of a sexual nature.⁷⁴ Whether or not her secret

⁷¹ *BMK*, I.Proem.1.

⁷² See Foucault on the one listening being the master of truth, who not only deciphers what is said, but provides a hermeneutic function: Foucault, *The History*, p. 67. The notion of truth and *The Book of Margery Kempe* is one worthy of examination in a further study, but which this thesis does not have the scope to cover. It must be kept in mind that not every word in the *Book* can, or should be taken as complete truth. Memory comes into play, and while none of the narration may be a deliberate lie, it may still contain elements of fabrication, or distortion of the truth (the imaginative autobiographical memory). It is therefore important to maintain the possibility of distortions occurring, especially when there are other competing agendas present, besides that of telling the truth. Rather than concentrating on how much or how well Margery remembers things, it becomes important to consider *why and how* she recalls particular events. See, for example, Susan Bluck, ed., 'Autobiographical Memory: Exploring Its Functions in Everyday Life', *Memory* (Special Issue), 11 (2003) 113-224. On memory and the medieval mind see also: Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski, eds., *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). See also Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁷³ Foucault, *The History*, p. 61. There are opponents to Foucault's understanding of medieval confession and his genealogy of sexuality, however. See, for example, Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 12-42. For sexuality in confessors' manuals see: Jacqueline Murray, 'Gendered Souls in Sexed Bodies: The Male Construction of Female Sexuality in Some Medieval Confessors' Manuals', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1998), pp. 79-93.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Windeatt, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 302.

regarded a past promiscuity, it is not much longer (Chapter 4) before we hear her confessing to the ‘snar of lechery’.⁷⁵ This deadly sin is then remedied by her being ‘schrevyn many tymes & oftyn’.⁷⁶

Margery’s confessions to past iniquities do, as Riddy suggests, bear a striking resemblance to questions to be asked of a married woman, listed in an English mid-fourteenth-century confessors’ manual.⁷⁷ Her wearing of an elaborate headpiece, her disobeying her husband, her lechery, and her facing accusations of being heretical or hypocritical are all relevant to these questions.⁷⁸ The striking similarities between the confessor manual questions, and Margery’s confession of past iniquities are a detail that might be indicative of Margery’s familiarity with facing such questions during a confession.

Ann Marie Rasmussen writes that ‘a secret is a social event’ and that ‘knowledge of a secret can create community’.⁷⁹ Margery relating her manner of living through the medium of the *Book* is involving us in her community, making us part of her social, or religious network, by ‘confessing’ to us the secrets of her

⁷⁵ *BMK*, I.4.14. We are also told, in Chapter 3, how Margery would be ‘schreyn sum-tyme twyes or thryes on þe day’ [*BMK*, I.3.12], in particular for the undisclosed sin mentioned in Chapter 1.

⁷⁶ *BMK*, I.4.16.

⁷⁷ See Riddy, *Text and Self*, p. 447. Taken from Michael Haren, ‘The Interrogatories for Officials, Lawyers and Secular Estates of the *Memoriale presbitorum*’, in *Handling Sin*, ed. by Biller and Minnis, pp. 123-63.

⁷⁸ See *BMK*, I.2.9 for a description of her head piece, hoods and cloaks, and the same chapter includes examples of her disobeying her husband, answering him ‘schrewydly & schortly’. Margery’s lechery has already been mentioned above. Accusations of her being hypocritical, or disingenuous, follow her throughout the *Book*, in particular in relation to her tears.

⁷⁹ Ann Marie Rasmussen, ‘Introduction’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30 (2000), 1-4 (p. 1).

devotional lifestyle. Watson identifies the intended audience being primarily the people of Lynn, a claim I would agree with, but with the caveat that all the readers and listeners of the *Book* are spiritually expected to join as part of Margery's community.⁸⁰ Confession is a verbal practice in the tradition of the Church, but in the *Book* it is also words on the page. Lee Patterson states that confession is 'one of the most central modes of self-representation available in late-medieval England'.⁸¹ Margery 'confessing' her manner of living to her audience, through the medium of the *Book*, is a means of conveying the oral word through literate conventions.

Confession is one medium through which oral and literate practices can be seen to interrelate in the *Book*. This thesis will examine further ways in which Margery can be seen to interact with both lifestyles in order to create and validate her manner of living. Margery's assembling of a devotional lifestyle will be demonstrated as a process of acquiring erudition from both written and verbal sources, where manipulation of this acquired knowledge is used to verify Margery's observance of orthodox and precedential practices. Unlike earlier studies, this thesis will engage with the oral and literate sources and traditions found within the *Book*, and thereby identify the assembly of Margery's manner of living, and ultimately, lead to a better understanding of why and how the *Book* is constructed the way that it is.

⁸⁰ Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', p. 425.

⁸¹ Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 386.

Chapter 1

(a) Women and Literacy

In this chapter I will be looking at the late medieval woman and literacy, in order to provide an historical background to the world in which Margery Kempe practised her religious lifestyle. This exploration will cover aspects of orality and literacy, looking at the kind of background Margery would have been raised in as a woman of the late fourteenth-century, including in this consideration the rank of her family, the geography of her domicile, and her own personality revealed through a contextualised reading of the *Book*. The importance of books will become apparent here, as a tool for the education of children, but also as a guide for learning and instruction into adulthood. The power of both the written and the spoken word will be explored, as well as how each was used. I will also examine the definition of literacy in a period where Latin, not the vernacular, was the language referred to by the term 'literate'. A further sub-section will explore the use of memory, in particular in relation to Margery's oral background, and in the production of her book.

Immediately, when looking at the subject of medieval literacy, there is a difficulty with the terminology. Definitions for 'literacy', particularly in the late medieval period, can tend to vary, but a primary consideration deals with the use of the word *litteratus*, where universal Latin, not the local vernacular language, is the significant factor, and a commanding knowledge of Latin grammar in particular is the requirement. Being literate, therefore, became associated with a fluency in Latin grammar, and even if one were able to read and write in the

vernacular, they would still be considered illiterate.¹ Very few late medieval women of the laity would meet such criteria, as it was neither required nor desired for them to attain such proficiency. M.B. Parkes draws a distinction between three separate kinds of literacy: 'that of the professional reader, which is the literacy of the scholar or the professional man of letters; that of the cultivated reader, which is the literacy of recreations; and that of the pragmatic reader, which is the literacy of one who has to read or write in the course of transacting any kind of business.'²

Margery Kempe, as the daughter of an important merchant in a flourishing English town, might fit into the second or third category, but not the first. Her father, John Brunham, was a burgher of Bishop's Lynn and held, according to extant archives, the position of Mayor of Lynn five times, was one of two members of parliament representing the town, and was an alderman of the Trinity Guild. He also held posts of coroner and justice of the peace and chamberlain at different times.³ Margery, as the daughter of such an important burgher in Lynn, could have had the opportunity to gain a degree of literacy for recreation, or for business, but would not have been considered to be literate. Katherine Zieman states 'Although many women read, and may even have taught children Latin prayers and elementary reading skills, they were rarely

¹ I will explore the difficulties in this division between Latin and vernacular degrees of literacy in my section 'Margery's Literate Place'.

² M.B. Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', in *Literature and Western Civilization: The Mediaeval World*, ed. by David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby, 3 vols (London: Aldus Books, 1973), II, p. 555.

³ See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (London: Penguin Books, 1985; rev. edn 1994), p. 10. Lynn was estimated to have a population of 4,691 in 1377, by English standards a large and prosperous town at the time. See Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p. 15.

accorded the status “literata”⁴. Margery was not a scholar, did not belong to a monastery, and would not have attended university. Therefore, in order to consider her degree of literacy, it is essential to look at what kind of education a woman of Margery’s background and social standing might have received. Although this will involve some degree of speculation, a reasonably accurate picture of the sort of education a woman like Margery might have received, considering the kind of evidence now being presented in academic studies, is not entirely elusive, nor impossible to gauge.

Women and Education

Education of varying degree was available to both boys and girls in the late medieval period, although it was not as easy for the female gender to acquire a formal learning, particularly if they were of the middle estate or below. Different kinds of education could be provided to an individual, from institutions including grammar schools, song schools, universities, nunneries or monasteries, or simply through learning at home.⁵ Groups such as the city Guilds, or the Lollards’ ‘schools’, could also provide some kinds of education. In this section I will briefly review the kinds of education that may have been available to Margery Kempe in late medieval Norfolk.

⁴ Katherine Zieman, ‘Reading, Singing and Understanding: Contructions of the Literacy of Women Religious in Late Medieval England’, in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad: Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 3, ed. by Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2003), p. 98.

⁵ Of these the grammar schools and universities would be excluded for girls, as will be commented on below (p. 35).

Bishop's Lynn did possess a school from the first half of the thirteenth-century.⁶ Following the Black Death of 1348-9, the decline in population would probably have made more places available to more people who were outside of the category of the most prosperous citizens.⁷ Margery, as the daughter of John Brunham, was already a member of Lynn's elite. The questions that then arise are: would women have attended this school, and would the situation have remained the same twenty-five to thirty years after the plague?⁸ Education was a right for girls, just as for boys, as recorded in the Statute of Artificers of 1406.⁹ However, as Helen M. Jewell states, 'Women of the elite were not uneducated but were excluded from the formal, dedicated, educational institutions available for boys, culminating in the universities. Thus girls of the upper classes, compared with their brothers, generally had less formal tuition in more private circumstances, educating at a younger age.'¹⁰

⁶ See Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p. 193. See also the appendix 'A List of Schools in England and Wales, 1066-1530', p. 357. Here both a (probable) grammar school and a (probable) reading or song school are listed from Margery's lifetime. The former would not have been available to her.

⁷ Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p. 218. This decline in numbers may have been exacerbated by the further pestilence in East Anglia of 1361, which claimed the lives of 'many boys, young people and the rich'. Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p. 20.

⁸ This is working from the belief that Margery was born 1373. See *BMK*, (the Chronological Table on) p. xlvi, (and the note for p. 234, ll. 18-19 found on) p. 345.

⁹ It stated, 'every man or woman, of what estate or condition that he be, shall be free to set their son and daughter to take learning at any manner of school that pleaseth them within the realm'. See, for example, Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1996), p. 138. Whether or not such recommendations were followed to the letter of the law is, of course, another matter.

¹⁰ Helen M. Jewell, *Women in Late Medieval and Reformation Europe 1200-1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 93.

Margery was not of the upper class, but was of the upper echelon of Lynn's society. She would not, however, be training for a further education, and in fact would be excluded from this, and so the question becomes what level of formal education, if any, might she require?¹¹ Jewell also says, 'in the vast majority of households neither men nor women received any formal education in reading and writing. Most received only minimal religious education from parents and parish priests, and informal apprenticeship doing agricultural tasks.'¹² But again, Margery came from a privileged background. Her father was a merchant and a member of the ruling elite in the town. Agricultural tasks would not have been part of any training she would have found necessary, but rather, some knowledge of sums, and of reading, if not writing, would have been more part of the desired curriculum.¹³

In regards to women and the education of the mercantile class (in London), Sylvia L. Thrupp says: 'there is reason to believe that most of the intelligent women had found ways of learning at least to read and write English'.¹⁴ Although working from a broad generalisation, we know from the *Book* that Margery was an intelligent and headstrong woman. While this does not

¹¹ In Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, The Penguin Social History of Britain (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 227, Keen distinguishes three categories of education: 'elementary ('reading and song' [...]); secondary ('grammar' which implied some schooling in Latin); and higher education'.

¹² Jewell, *Women in Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*, p. 152.

¹³ See, for example, Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London: 1300-1500* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 155: 'The merchant's craft demanded some degree of literacy'.

¹⁴ Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 161.

automatically guarantee that she would have therefore received enough education to read or write in English, nor does it, on the other hand, exclude her from having done so, and in fact, we do know from the *Book*, that when most determined (whether in beginning a business in brewing or milling, declaring celibacy with her husband, or travelling to Germany against her confessor's instructions), Margery tended to get her way. If she desired to learn to read and/or write, and the means presented itself, she had the type of personality to take advantage of such an opportunity. If we assume, from knowledge of Margery's explorations in the trades of brewing and milling,¹⁵ that she had an interest in merchandising (although perhaps not from such a young age), then a basic education in reading and arithmetic would have been beneficial, whether sought by herself, or provided by her parents, or husband.¹⁶

A girl training to assist her family or her future husband would have as much need for rudimentary reading and possibly writing skills as her brother. They might have been asked upon to take the responsibility for the business should the father or husband be called away, become ill, or die. Assuming no brother or other male member of the family took their place, it would be more in the family interest for a daughter or wife to take responsibility than to hire the aid of an outsider. And we know, as already stated, Margery ran two businesses,

¹⁵ See *BMK*, I.2.9-11. Margery fails at both businesses, at brewing because her ale went flat, and at milling because the horses ceased to pull the millstone.

¹⁶ Thrupp writes: 'In the training of girls the end in view was to make them grow up useful, with a sense of economic responsibility toward the family of which they were a part, and at the same time to keep them gentle, so that they would be amenable to male authority. The relative emphasis that was laid on these ideas varied with the wealth and personal disposition of the parents ... it was not uncommon to encourage girls to learn a trade in order that they could be self-supporting or of assistance to their husband.' Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, pp. 169-70.

possibly alongside those of her husband. Thrupp observes that 'illiteracy would have hampered a woman's efficiency in business matters. It followed that girls were recognized as in need of at least some elementary education for the same mixed reasons, economic and religious, as their brothers.'¹⁷

Besides local schools, children could be sent away to study, and for girls this would most likely mean being sent to a nunnery. According to Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, any education offered in a nunnery would not be extensive, but would probably involve 'petty learning and vernacular instruction'.¹⁸ Orme is slightly more specific, although remains, of necessity, speculative, by stating that they would probably learn 'the abc and to read at sight the basic Latin prayers and the hours of the Virgin Mary. They would have been schooled in good manners at the table and in church: quiet deportment, crossing oneself, saying prayers, and venerating images.'¹⁹ The nuns themselves were often not educated beyond such a level,²⁰ and so it is unlikely that their students could have

¹⁷ Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 171.

¹⁸ Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340-1548: Learning, Literacy and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 116.

¹⁹ Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p. 286. Power's opinion is that education in a nunnery probably included reading, embroidery, needlework and singing, but that it was unlikely Latin was taught, as many of the nuns would not have been literate in that language. Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 276-9. This education in a nunnery may have overlapped with the kind of education offered in schools that Copeland compares with the kind of education stretching back to Roman times, which included 'learning the letters of the alphabet, and then syllables, words, and pronunciation'. Rita Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent in the Later Middle Ages: Lollardy and Ideas of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 15.

²⁰ Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p.275. Lee records that late medieval nuns were expected to be able to read and to sing, but not to write. Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval English Society: The Dominican*

expected more. Nevertheless, it is a fairly substantial education for a burges's daughter,²¹ and had Margery attended such a school, it is likely she would have left with the ability to read at some level of proficiency in English, and perhaps even to recognize the Latin prayers and the hours, such as would be found in a Book of Hours.

Records do exist of female teachers from the period before, during, and slightly after that of Margery Kempe. Many more female teachers may well have existed, and as Orme explains, a reason for there not being further extant records could be due to the fact that women shared the vernacular word used for male teachers ('schoolmaster', or in Latin *magister scholarum*).²² Those with the surname 'Schoolmaster' may have acquired it because their husband, or father, was a teacher, or it may have been their own title. However, there do exist examples of the feminine form of the name, such as Margaret Skolmaystres (Oxford) mentioned in 1335, Matilda Maresflete (Boston, with her occupation written as *magistra scholarum*), dated 1404, E. Scholemaysteresse (London) from

Priory of Dartford (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), p. 136. He also notes that not all nuns possessed those skills, and that literacy in English nunneries was mostly vernacular. Bella Millett points out how the *Ancrene Wisse* advised that, although a recluse might be well educated, she should not be tempted to speak back with a visiting priest, for fear of appearing to be a teacher. See Bella Millett, 'Women in No Man's Land: English Recluses and the Development of Vernacular Literature', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 86-103 (p. 94).

²¹ Orme writes that the children attending the nunnery schools 'were mainly girls and small boys from the nobility, gentry, and sometimes wealthy burges families, the latter especially in houses near towns' (*Medieval Schools*, p. 285). Power also includes wealthy burgesses in her list. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, pp. 265-6.

²² Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p. 166.

1408, and Elizabeth Scolemaystres (also London) being mentioned in 1441.²³ Orme states 'There may have been many women instructors in towns, ministering to girls, small boys, or both. Very likely they concentrated on the lower end of the curriculum: the abc, the reading of Latin prayers and primers, and perhaps the reading of works in French or English.'²⁴ What is important here is not just that women could be entrusted with the teaching of boys as well as girls, but that they themselves would therefore have needed to acquire a sufficient education to be able to pass it on to others. However, a student could only obtain as much knowledge as their teacher had acquired. Since women were excluded from higher education, anyone studying under a female teacher could only expect to learn the fundamentals of reading, and would unlikely be taught how to write.

If she had not received a formal education, there is all likelihood that Margery did receive some at home.²⁵ Pamela Sheingorn considers the idea of mothers teaching daughters, using the significant visual evidence offered by representations of St. Anne teaching the Virgin Mary.²⁶ Sheingorn argues that such images 'promulgated the notion of mothers as teachers and daughters as apt and willing pupils, just as it celebrated literacy, especially among upper- and

²³ See Orme, *Medieval Schools*, pp. 166-7, for the details on women teachers.

²⁴ Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p. 167.

²⁵ Jewell writes, for example, 'Children were reared in the family household until old enough to be sent to a social superior, or at least an equal, for the household-type of education.' Helen M. Jewell, *Women in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 145.

²⁶ Pamela Sheingorn, "'The Wise Mother': The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary", in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 105-135.

middle-class women'.²⁷ Images of Mary's Annunciation also have a literary motif in the image of an open book, replacing the spindle, with the pages often revealing Isaiah 7:14: 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son'. Nicholas Love, as Sheingorn points out, paints this image in words in his translation of *Meditationes vitae Christi*.²⁸ Such an image, found in church sculptures, Books of Hours, altarpieces, and in textual descriptions, is one Margery would very likely have been familiar with. Interestingly, perhaps, Margery does not provide such a tableau in her own meditative enactment of Anne with Mary. Instead, she concentrates on aiding Mary's upbringing by providing her with 'good mete & drynke, wyth fayr whyte clothys & whyte kerchys'.²⁹ The fact it is omitted is consistent with Margery's presenting herself as a woman unable to read or write. It would become problematic, to say the least, for her to then teach Mary to read on behalf of St. Anne. Instead, she chooses 'more appropriate' feminine tasks of providing physical sustenance.

Education within the home would probably have included learning the alphabet, which could be taught by displaying it on a board or wall, on slate, or on a wooden board with a sheet of parchment nailed to it.³⁰ Otherwise, a book would be used, most commonly a primer—'a small-sized book of prayers designed for use by lay people rather than the clergy'.³¹ Later, Books of Hours

²⁷ Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother", p. 106.

²⁸ Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother", p. 107.

²⁹ *BMK*, I.6.18. More will be said on this topic below, in the section 'Margery Kempe and Literacy'.

³⁰ Orme, *Medieval Schools*, pp. 56-7.

³¹ Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p. 57.

were often used to educate, and were, in Margery's lifetime, already being mass-produced³² for a more middle-class market, and were 'the most widely disseminated texts during the later Middle Ages in England'.³³ The Book of Hours (also called a primer, or *Horae*, but not the same primer as above)³⁴ would usually include the Paternoster, as well as the Ave Maria and the Apostles' Creed, all of which children were expected to learn by rote. Alphabets could also be found in a Book of Hours.³⁵ These prayers, and the offices and other components of a standard Book of Hours, would have been in Latin. I will examine Margery Kempe and Books of Hours in Chapter 4, but it is worth noting here the significance of her possible possession of a Book of Hours,³⁶ and the

³² See Lawrence R. Poos, 'Social History and the Book of Hours', in Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: George Braziller, 1988), p. 34. Poos uses the term 'virtually mass-produced', which has other connotations in this century, and considering the amount of books being turned out, before the advent of the printing press, I feel it is safe enough to say 'mass-produced'.

³³ Patricia Cullum and Jeremy Goldberg, 'How Margaret Blackburn Taught her Daughters: Reading Devotional Instruction in a Book of Hours', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and others (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), p. 217. For an article on the (mass-) production of Flemish Books of Hours for the English market see Saskia van Bergen, 'The Production of Flemish Books of Hours for the English Market: Standardization and Workshop Practices', in *Manuscripts in Transition: Recycling Manuscripts, Texts and Images: Proceedings of the International Congress held in Brussels (5-9 November 2002)*, ed. by Brigitte Dekeyzer and Jan Van der Stock, (Paris: Peeters, 2005), pp. 271-82.

³⁴ Rita Copeland distinguishes them by either 'liturgical' or 'catechetical' books. The latter could include 'the ABC along with the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the seven deadly sins, and so forth.' The liturgical primer was then the Book of Hours. Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent*, p. 16.

³⁵ Cullum and Goldberg, 'How Margaret Blackburn Taught her Daughters', p.231.

³⁶ The possibility of Margery possessing a Book of Hours stems from the mention of a book held in her hand in *BMK* I.9.21.

exposure to written Latin it would have entailed. This introduces the notion of what Michael T. Orr calls ‘devotional literacy’.³⁷

All Christians were expected to be able to recite the *Paternoster*, the *Credo*, and the *Ave*, and Latin was the usual language for formal prayers. This was true whether they were clerics, or whether they were literate, or illiterate lay people. The prayers would be learned through repetition, although possibly, as explored above, they would be learned through the aid of reading them in a book. However, learning by rote does not imply knowledge of grammar, nor does it imply that the prayers could be recognised in script; and yet, we ought to avoid the notion that receiving only a minimal education in Latin implies a complete ignorance of the language. The continual repetition of prayers in Latin rather than English would surely make certain words of the prayers, if not all, become familiar in meaning as well as in resonance.

Instead of a full understanding of Latin, M.B. Parkes talks about ‘knowledge of formulae’, where the terms of the trade, or jargon, can be recognized in the otherwise unreadable language.³⁸ Such a knowledge could be acquired either from religious or business-related terminology. This then leads into a kind of education that is self-taught, where recognition through constant visual exposure, or through rote learning (possibly combined with asking meanings of words of a cleric, a parent or other relative, or a co-worker, for example), allows the individual to become familiar with what they are seeing or

³⁷ See Orr, ‘Tradition and Innovation in the Cycles of Miniatures Accompanying the Hours of the Virgin in Early Fifteenth-Century English Books of Hours’, in *Manuscripts in Transition*, ed. by Dekeyzer and Van der Stock, p. 263.

³⁸ Parkes, ‘The Literacy of the Laity’, p. 559.

hearing. Terminology that is necessary, or an integral part of the lifestyle, would become absorbed, either through continuous exposure to it, or through need of using *le mot juste*, or both.

A further organized type of school or study that has not been mentioned so far, and which not only permitted, but also encouraged women to participate, was that offered by the Lollards, notably those of Norwich.³⁹ The Lollards were ‘advocates of reading and writing’,⁴⁰ and of course theirs was the common-held belief that the Bible should be read in English. Their ‘schools’ were more accurately meetings that were attended by adults rather than children, and whose purpose was for religious study.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this did not stop them from being seen as a threat to the improper education of others, and such a fear provoked Thomas Arundel in 1409 to issue constitutions for his province that included an order that schoolmasters would not teach anything regarding the faith or sacraments which was to the detriment of the Church.⁴²

Although the female Lollards, of the Norwich ‘group’ in particular, were believed to have good skills in literacy, Rebecca Krug describes this as

³⁹ See, for example, Orme, *Medieval Schools*, pp. 53-4.

⁴⁰ Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p. 222.

⁴¹ For more on the Norwich group, see, for example, Rebecca Krug’s chapter ‘Children of God: Women Lollards at Norwich’. Rebecca Krug, ed., *Reading Families: Women’s Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 114-53. See also Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 181-2.

⁴² Arundel’s province consisted of the two-thirds of England that was south of the River Trent. See Orme, *Medieval Schools*, p. 222. For his constitutions see Nicholas Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409’, *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822-64.

inaccurate and exaggerated. Instead, she emphasizes that they were ‘involved’ with the written word, and that the written text was important to them as devoted supporters of Lollard learning.⁴³ What they exhibited was a hunger for knowledge gained from books, and in particular when it added to their sense of ‘spiritual identity’.⁴⁴ These Lollard meetings, therefore, were not about learning reading or writing, and were not directed to children, but were adult men and women who were gathered to further them in the unity of their beliefs.

Hawisia Mone, one of the Norwich group of women, was known to be a frequent organizer within the group, and had a daughter that could read.⁴⁵ Her husband, Thomas Mone, was an important member of the Norfolk Lollards, and their example demonstrates how important the family was in disseminating ideas and furthering erudition. Schools, or conventicles, were often held at home, and William White, among others, taught at Hawisia’s organized meetings.⁴⁶ When she was charged and brought to trial, she was accused of learning from these meetings, but not of teaching at them. It is possible that Hawisia’s illiteracy protected her from such charges. Her role in these meetings remains unclear, however, and no evidence exists of her attending conventicles elsewhere.⁴⁷

⁴³ Krug, ‘Children of God’, pp. 115-16. She also states that ‘Some of the women indicted at the Norwich heresy trial could read and possibly write’ (p. 117).

⁴⁴ Krug, ‘Children of God’, p. 117.

⁴⁵ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, p. 135.

⁴⁶ Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities 1420-1530* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 61.

⁴⁷ McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, p. 62.

The subject of the education of late medieval females remains a largely elusive one, due to a lack of concrete evidence. Up until recently, scholars have been more interested in the details of male education, and there is far more in the way of documentary evidence to support it. Since a girl's education would often involve training at home, and never beyond the elementary school level, there is far less evidence available to define the precise degree of their accumulated knowledge. And yet sufficient secondary evidence survives to give us enough reason to believe that education for girls of the mercantile class and above, could involve at least basic skills such as learning the alphabet, or reading familiar jargon. As Parkes expresses it:

The extent of literacy among the laity in the Middle Ages must always be a matter of debate, but in my opinion the tendency has been to underestimate it. The general pattern of the evidence indicates that from the 13th century onward increasing reliance and importance was placed upon the written word. This was accompanied by the growth of the reading habit [.] The growth of the reading habit gave rise to an increasing literary awareness.⁴⁸

Parke's comments about understanding 'literacy among the laity' may hold true across the gender divide, and there is good likelihood that the needs of business might require the merchant wife or daughter to acquire some skill of reading in the vernacular, although the evidence is not favourable that she would

⁴⁸ M. B. Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', p. 572.

have been able to write as well.⁴⁹ However, it is highly unlikely that a woman of the mercantile class would have received any formal education in Latin. At the very most, she might have learned to recognize letters and certain words through learning to read the abc,⁵⁰ and through making use of a Book of Hours, or other service book, with either Latin or a mixture of Latin and vernacular script. With a basic skill in recognizing letters and the sounds they made, she may have been able to follow parts of a service, or at least to know in which part of the book to find the appropriate prayer, for example. It would therefore be more appropriate to describe a person not fluent in Latin as 'illatinate', where, despite not being fluent, a certain degree of skill or understanding in the language was still possible.

Women and Books

After having looked at the kind of education a burgess's daughter like Margery Kempe might have acquired in the late medieval period, I will move in this section to examining women's use of books. This will entail a brief exploration of the kinds of books women might possess, read or have read to them, inspire the writing of or request to be written,⁵¹ or write themselves (through a scribe).

⁴⁹ Rita Copeland calls this a kind of 'occupational skill' and states that it may be acquired in the family, in work environments, from relatives, neighbors, and/or employers. Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent*, p. 16.

⁵⁰ For a commentary on learning to read from Latin, rather than the vernacular, see Orme, *Medieval Schools*, pp. 59-60.

⁵¹ Women might be the inspiration for the writing of a book devoted to them, such as Margaret Kirkby for Richard Rolle's *English Psalter*, and possibly for his *Form of Living*, as well. See, for example, Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 246, for the former, and Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics*, p. 64, for the latter. In fact, Kirkby may have requested the *English Psalter* of Rolle.

Women of means not only owned books in the early fifteenth-century, which were becoming more available through increased production, but were avid listeners as well. Although books were predominately the realm of men, and in particular priests and scholars and the aristocracy, women certainly had their roles to play, and not, as so often has been believed or assumed, in merely passive ways. This section will concentrate in particular upon the kinds of devotional guides and hermeneutics that we know Margery was familiar with, and the type of book that would be associated with them.

Alexandra Barratt explores how, for the medieval person, whether male or female, *auctoritas* resided entirely with the male.⁵² The ultimate author was God, who was not only ‘the Word’, but also believed to be male. This Godly male authority, as Barratt highlights, delivered the power and influence to the masculine gender throughout the Middle Ages, despite the notion of Jesus as mother, and philosophies such as Julian of Norwich’s restructuring the Holy Trinity as a Father-Mother, rather than a Father-Son model.⁵³ This meant that books were primarily written by, intended for, and as much as possible, maintained in the realm of men. Women could read books (or have them read to them), own books, and even have them written, but their representation in the statistics of books owned, read and written is sparse compared to that of men.

Such statistics do not denote that women were not making use of books, however. The relatively small amount of existing data, largely taken from wills,

⁵² Alexandra Barratt, *Women’s Writing in Middle English* (London: Longman, 1992), p. 6.

⁵³ For the idea of Jesus as mother see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

is misleading because women required permission from their husbands to make and register a will, and a large majority of surviving records are those of widows. Also, fewer wills by women may have been registered.⁵⁴ A woman was not as likely to have a will written, or record gifts, or have documents kept for posterity, as her male counterpart. And yet, recent studies have begun to show more interest in women's use of books, probing into details of their ownership and exchange of books, from wills, from illuminations, from book dedications, and such collected details are suggesting a more common book usage among women.⁵⁵ Such details can come from studying the types of books addressed to or concerning women. For example, in *The Lollard Bible* there occurs a discussion as to whether or not it is appropriate for women to learn to read.⁵⁶ As M. B. Parkes points out, 'Such a discussion would be pointless if by that time reading had not already become something of a habit'.⁵⁷

Despite the fact that women did read, there existed a misogynistic prejudice which sought to exclude them, or to categorize their use of books by implying women had an inferior understanding of them. Men were believed to read a book and acquire a very different understanding of it than a woman could.

⁵⁴ See Anne M. Dutton, 'Passing the Book: Testamentary Transmission of Religious Literature to and by Women in England 1350-1500', in *Women, the Book and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda's Conference, 1993*, ed. by Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor, 2 vols (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), I, p. 44. See also Carol M. Meale, '...alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englich, and frensch': Laywomen and their Books in Late Medieval England', in *Women and Literature in Britain*, ed. by Meale, pp. 131-2.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Dutton, 'Passing the Book', p. 42. For images in particular, see Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother", pp. 105-6.

⁵⁶ See M. Deansley, 'Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,' *Modern Language Review* 15 (1920), p. 349.

⁵⁷ Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', p. 557.

A man could explore the depths of a text on a spiritual level, while women would comprehend the same words on a shallower, more mundane and literal level. Rita Copeland expresses the distinction by stating a 'good, productive, spiritual reading that leads to faith is identified with a masculine essence, and perverse reading, which is literal and self-interested, is associated with a feminine principle of carnality'.⁵⁸ This idea of how a woman was expected to read will become more significant when I later explore women and literacy, but it is worth highlighting here for the way it reveals how books were addressed to women, and how women were expected to make use of them.⁵⁹

Just as defining literacy in the late medieval period is difficult because of various degrees of understanding in both reading and writing of the vernacular and of Latin, so too is judging women's ability to read simply by assessing available records of book ownership or exchange. Owning a book, it must be remembered, did not necessarily imply the ability to read it. A book could be an inheritance, not actively purchased for the purpose of perusal; it could be seen as an object of beauty, a sacred object, an investment, a memory of a lost loved one, a fashion accessory, a status symbol, or a conversation piece. However, an illiterate book owner could still make proper use of it by asking a friend, or

⁵⁸ Rita Copeland, 'Why Women Can't Read', in *Law, Literature, and Feminism*, ed. by Susan Sage Heinzelman and Zipporah Batshaw Wiseman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 253-86 (p. 257).

⁵⁹ There are also different kinds of reading, such as: meditative, performative, private, or silent, as examined by Jessica Brantley. See Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 1-2; 14-15; 17-18; 123-6; 238-40; 270-8; 278-9. Performative reading and Margery Kempe is examined in: Carol M. Meale, 'This is a deed bok, the tother a quick': Theatre and the Drama of Salvation in the *Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Medieval Women*, ed. by Riddy and others, pp. 49-67.

neighbour, or parishioner who was literate to read it out loud to them.⁶⁰ The inability to read did not prevent the owner from making use of its contents.

The books associated with women that I will be looking at are liturgical, and although women were involved with worldly books as well, such as the romance, it is the books containing liturgical subject matter that are most relevant to Margery Kempe and her lifestyle. Religious books too play an important part, and I use Anne M. Dutton's clarification to differentiate the two: liturgical books include missals as well as paraliturgical ones such as Books of Hours and primers, prayer books and Psalters, while religious books are those of 'spiritual literature', such as hagiographies or the writings of mystics and visionaries, like *The Golden Legend*, or *Revelations of St Bridget*, as well as didactic, meditative and devotional books such as *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and Richard Rolle's *Meditation on the Passion*.⁶¹

One of the most common books owned, and one that was particularly popular among women, was the Book of Hours. In Jo Ann Hoepner Moran's study of book ownership in the York Diocese between 1370-1509, missals, portifors (portable breviaries), primers and psalters account for fifty percent of all books bequeathed.⁶² This is particularly remarkable when compared with the

⁶⁰ The subject of having a book read will be examined further in my section 'Margery Kempe and Literacy', below.

⁶¹ Dutton, 'Passing the Book', pp. 41-2 and 47-50.

⁶² Hoepner Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling 1340-1548*, p. 196. Hoepner Moran does not clarify that she means Books of Hours when she calls them 'primers' in her chart, or in the text that follows it. She does, however, specify that she is referring to Books of Hours in her Index.

single citing of both Chaucer's *Troilus* and *Canterbury Tales* in the same study.⁶³ According to such statistics, liturgical books were considerably more popular than literature. The ownership of Books of Hours, in fact, dramatically increases from five examples, between 1370-1399, to seventy-three during the years 1400-1449. However, it is essential to keep in mind that not all books were bequeathed, and not all books that have survived were necessarily the most popular ones. Only a small percentage of the population had wills drawn up and registered, and of these there are few including the moveable chattels of women.⁶⁴ As Ann Clark Bartlett expresses it, 'By the end of the Middle Ages books were cheap and commonplace enough to be bequeathed anonymously along with household goods. During the late fourteenth century English readers could purchase small devotional texts for less than one shilling.'⁶⁵

Besides Books of Hours, Psalters are listed as being owned by the merchant class, where recorded in testaments of the laity.⁶⁶ Either of these may be the book that Margery Kempe is clasping in Chapter 9 of the *Book*, '[s]he knelyd up-on hir kneys, heldyng down hir hed and hir boke in hir hand, prayng

⁶³ Meale writes that Chaucer 'would appear not to have been particularly widely read by women, either during or after his lifetime'. Meale, 'Laywomen and their Books in Late Medieval England', in *Women and Literature in Britain*, p. 142.

⁶⁴ See Dutton, 'Passing the Book', pp. 43-5.

⁶⁵ Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers*, p. 14. M. B. Parkes notes a primer worth 16d among the stock of two bankrupt grocers in the 1390s, and comments that such a low price suggests some form of cheap production. 'Increasing demand, better-organized production, cheaper handwriting, and the introduction of paper' are given as his reasons for this. Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', p. 564.

⁶⁶ See Nigel Morgan, 'Books for the Liturgy and Private Prayer', in Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume II 1100-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 311, 313.

owyr Lord Crist Ihesu for grace and for mercy'.⁶⁷ Both were popular with women, and Meale notes that '[m]any of the finest psalters and books of hours dating from the fourteenth century were produced at the instigation of women, and this tradition seems to have continued into the fifteenth century'.⁶⁸ Although it is aristocratic women being referred to here, we know that women of the merchant class owned them as well.⁶⁹ Mary C. Erler writes that Psalters are 'the most characteristic fourteenth-century book bequest and, we might conclude, the most characteristic form of female reading at that time' and, further, that a 'shift from psalters to primers in the mid-fifteenth century' occurs, making Books of Hours the most popular book of the century.⁷⁰

Statistically, however, the evidence for female book ownership, particularly in the mercantile class, is low. Although a Book of Hours or a Psalter may have been a treasured possession, it would probably have been an inexpensive volume of the type being mass-produced at the time, and unlikely to be valuable enough to include in a testament, even if the woman was able to produce a will. Such an inferior copy would also be more likely to become damaged than a finely produced example, making it less likely to survive as part

⁶⁷ *BMK*, I.9. 21. This subject will be discussed in more depth in a separate section on Books of Hours (Chapter 4).

⁶⁸ Meale, 'Laywomen and Their Books', p. 137.

⁶⁹ For example, Eamon Duffy comments on how, by the early fifteenth-century, Books of Hours 'were routinely owned and used by wealthy townsmen and-women.' *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 21.

⁷⁰ Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 39. Morgan records it as having become 'the most common prayer book of the laity' by 1400. Morgan and Thomson, *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume II*, p. 306.

of the modern manuscript record. It is doubtful that a woman of Margery's background would own a religious book like those of Rolle or Hilton. And yet we know, from the evidence given in the *Book*, that Margery was exposed to the works of both men. In Chapters 17 and 58 there is reference of having Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, and Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* read to her.⁷¹ What we gain from this is the knowledge that women did not need to own a book in order to be familiar with it, and to discover its contents. In fact, for this type of book it was safer and more customary for a woman to have it read to her than to own it, although even that could be hazardous. Admitting to literacy for a woman of Margery's socio-economic group, in a region very close to a centre of Lollardy, could bring the individual into suspicion of heresy, as in the case of the Norwich Lollards.⁷²

The majority of religious books owned and used by women would have been in the vernacular. Ann M. Dutton writes:

Women's use of religious literature was almost exclusively in the vernacular. Of the 103 transmissions of religious literature in wills and inventories, 41 involve texts written in Middle English, 12 involve texts in French, and only one transmission involves a Latin text. The remaining

⁷¹ *BMK*, I.17.39, and I.58.143.

⁷² See section 'Women and Education' in this chapter for more on the Norwich Lollards.

49 transmissions involve texts whose language is neither specified nor determinable.⁷³

Such statistics seem reasonable considering the rarity of women able to read Latin. Not all these books were in English, however, as French represented about a quarter of all female transmissions in wills, but books in French dwindled during the fifteenth century.⁷⁴ Dutton's study does not include bequests of liturgical and paraliturgical texts (Prayer-books, Psalters, Primers and Books of Hours). The language most commonly used in Books of Hours was Latin, with Anglo-Norman or Middle English being used only for additional prayers and devotions.⁷⁵ The predominant use of Latin raises the question of why the most popular book among women was primarily comprised of a language they were not fluent in. There may be numerous possible explanations for this, for example that it was the language of the Mass and therefore retained, that to translate it would require special authority, or that women were still able to find their place, and follow to some degree what was occurring, without having a grammatical understanding of the language.⁷⁶

⁷³ Dutton, 'Passing the Book', p. 50. This is working from 'a study of women's ownership of religious literature in England, as recorded in wills and inventories dated between 1350 and 1500' (p. 42).

⁷⁴ There were 41 texts written in Middle English, and 12 in French, and only 1 in Latin. Dutton, 'Passing the Book', p. 50. On the decline of French texts see Dutton, 'Passing the Book', p. 51.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Morgan, 'Books for the Liturgy and Private Prayer', pp. 310, and 314-15.

⁷⁶ The use of, and ability to understand some Latin, while being literate only in the vernacular, will be examined more closely in my section on Margery Kempe and literacy, below.

Recent studies of late medieval women's ownership, and use of books, is suggesting a more frequent use by women of them than was previously believed, but a lack of substantive evidence makes it a subject difficult to draw conclusive evidence from.⁷⁷ Not all books passed on between women would have been included in a will. Surviving copies of late medieval books may simply represent the more valuable and carefully maintained texts, while the cheaper, or more thumbed, marked, and worn examples did not survive the test of time. Also, with the exception of the Lollard trials, and glints of evidence supplied from material such as *The Book of Margery Kempe*, there is little evidence of how often women made use of books through the more passive means of attending readings. Nevertheless, there does remain enough evidence through surviving testaments, books, trial documents, and other secondary sources, to inform us that, by the first quarter of the fifteenth century, books were becoming more available to more people of both genders, not only for the gentry and aristocracy, but for the mercantile class as well.

One near contemporary example of a lay woman making use of books as part of her devotional lifestyle, in a similar way to Margery, is that of Margaret Purdons (died c. 1481). Margaret belonged to Norwich's 'governing class', as her husband was twice mayor of that city.⁷⁸ Besides the shared coincidence of being of the 'governing class' of a city, Margaret may also have known Richard of Caister at St. Stephen's, who died in 1420, the year Margaret's husband was

⁷⁷ Dutton, 'Passing the Book', p. 42. See also Mary Erler, 'Women Owners of Religious Incunabula: The Physical Evidence', in *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England*, pp. 116-133.

⁷⁸ Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 69.

first elected mayor. She certainly knew Richard's successor, Richard Poringland.⁷⁹ In fact, Margaret's will discloses

her many ties: with the men and women who were part of Norwich's governing class; with the city's hermits, anchorites, and priests; with several Cambridge doctors and masters of divinity, representatives of a learned, clerical culture. Most of all, her will reveals her connections with other women lay and religious, in every walk of life.⁸⁰

Margaret bequeathed four English books to women or to women's monasteries, and left two further books to men.⁸¹ Her will tells us that she owned, lent, and bequeathed books.⁸² Both in her background, and in her manner of living, from seeking out learned men and women, to sharing and reading or listening to devotional books, Margaret resembles Margery through the 'interpenetration of female lay and religious worlds'.⁸³

⁷⁹ Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, pp. 79-80. Margaret also bore a similarity to Margery in her interest in Syon and Sheen, as she bequeathed them both money (p. 81).

⁸⁰ Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 68.

⁸¹ One of these texts was 'a book called Hilton', and another was 'Le doctrine of the herte', addressed to women living under rule, where 'examination of conscience and confession are stressed /.../ moderation is everywhere recommended, along with reading, prayer, and meditation'. Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, pp. 76-7.

⁸² Margaret bequeaths books to women she has already loaned them to. See Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 69.

⁸³ Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety*, p. 77.

Memory

The art of memory, or the training of memory, was a learned skill developed as a standard part of the medieval education that included grammar, logic and rhetoric.⁸⁴ It was taught first in the monasteries and later in the universities.

Advanced memory training, as with the other skills listed above, was not part of a typical education for women, as it belonged to the branches of higher education from which women were excluded, where it was used for the storing of information absorbed from books. In a society where books were not always readily available, it paid to have an effective system for retaining and retrieving what had been studied on the page.⁸⁵ However, although women may not have received formal training in developing a ‘mnemonic organizational scheme’,⁸⁶ they too, particularly a merchant woman such as Margery Kempe, would have had need of such a skill, even if not as finely tuned, and formally taught. In this section I will examine the possible ways in which a late medieval woman might have learned to develop her ability to retain knowledge for easy recovery.

Mary Carruthers differentiates memory and what she calls ‘rote repetition’ as a means of separating the more advanced form of memory training from that of mimicking; her distinction revolves around the idea of using associations to spark remembrance, ‘either through a logical connection or through “habit”’.⁸⁷ She also comments upon the difference between recalling

⁸⁴ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 8.

⁸⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 20.

⁸⁷ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 20.

what has been received aurally, from that which was received visually.⁸⁸ Where one is temporal, the other is spatial, and aural remembrance is more difficult to retain. These two distinctions, of types of memory and modes of receiving information, can operate to define the difference between, for example, a mercantile woman's use of memory, from that of a male monk, or scholar. As Carruthers observes, 'The ability to recollect is natural to everyone, but the procedure itself is formed by *habitus*, training, and practice.'⁸⁹

Just as there were many levels of reading skills in the late medieval period, so too would there have been various degrees of proficiency at memory retention and retrieval.⁹⁰ It would be impossible to determine exactly what kind of training a woman like Margery might have received, if any, to develop such skills, but it is clear that one would become very dependent on the ability to retain information mentally. Yoshikawa suggests that Margery's dependence upon memory demonstrates how her cultural roots link back to the 'medieval monastic education in which mnemonic technique was developed to assist the monastic practice of meditation'.⁹¹ Such practices do not imply that all who meditated (or those who did not) would have developed mnemonic techniques. But it does foreground the idea that those living in that particular culture were likely to have both the need, and, to some degree, the ability for using them.

⁸⁸ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 27-8.

⁸⁹ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 64.

⁹⁰ On the different levels of reading skills see, for example, Christopher de Hamel, 'Books and Society', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume II*, ed. by Morgan and Thomson, pp. 12-13.

⁹¹ Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 5.

When considering the varying degrees of memory retention, or mnemonic techniques, it is useful to consider Carruthers' distinction between rote learning and memory training. Much of what might be learned from liturgical services, for example, would be accumulated over time by listening to the same spoken words in repetition. This kind of aural reception of information is received in a more passive way than the visual studying of a manuscript with the intent of memorizing it, or parts of it. It would be logical to assume that rote learning comprised a significant part of the memory usage of a late medieval woman, where a formal education in mnemonic techniques was not provided. In a similar way information may have been accumulated and retained from working in her father or husband's shop, or through conversations, and other oral and aural practices.

Yoshikawa believes that Margery would have had a more sophisticated memory system than that of basic rote learning. Her argument develops from the Franciscan imaginative meditation techniques expressed in the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, also known in Margery's time by Nicholas Love's translation, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. This technique operates through using short segments allowing one to store the appropriate images in the memory. Furthermore, Yoshikawa argues, there exists a 'rigid order which ties the material to be remembered into it'.⁹² Although not entirely convincing, when considered alongside the fact that Margery was continually conversing with men that would have most likely received mnemonic technique training, such as Alan

⁹² Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 6.

of Lynn, Richard of Caister, and Robert Spryngolde,⁹³ it is not unlikely that she would have had some degree of familiarity with such techniques, even if informally, indirectly, or incidentally. The priest of Chapter 58 that reads to Margery, and appears to take pleasure in sharing his knowledge and resources with her, may also have revealed such skills to her.

Despite the consideration of such possibilities, it is important to keep in mind the fact that much of what Margery learned and portrayed of the Passion and Nativity sequences could also have been attained through rote repetition, or merely through observation. Besides the liturgical processions and services, images on clergy vestments, paintings, stained glass, and sculptures, could all be found within the church portraying devotional images, while in the streets the performance of Mystery Plays could be witnessed. In Chapter 60, for example, we find Margery moved by the image of a *pietà* when visiting Norwich, while in Chapter 11 Margery and her husband visit York at the time the Mystery Plays were performed. Although the plays are not mentioned, Windeatt believes it likely that Margery and John attended.⁹⁴ Seeing the popular motif of the Passion and the Nativity portrayed, displayed, or narrated, could cause such images to sink into the unconscious memory, without the aid of mnemonic devices.

Alternatively, such images could also become sparks to fire a memory into consciousness. Margery's mental image of the *pietà* could have become a symbol through which she stored her memory of that particular visit to Norwich.

⁹³ Alan of Lynn being a personal friend of Margery's, Richard of Caister she met in Lynn when visiting Norwich, and Robert Spryngolde was the parish priest of Lynn, and a confessor to Margery. See, for example, *BMK*, I.9.22, I.17.38-40, and I.57.139 for mention of them.

⁹⁴ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Windeatt, p. 305.

We can't know if this was the case, but we do know that it inspired her to become 'holy occupied in þe Passyon of owr Lord Ihesu Crist & in þe compassion of owr Lady, Seynt Mary'. The representation of the pietà brought back images in Margery's mind of the Passion, and were vivid enough to compel her to 'cryyn ful lowed & wepyn ful sor, as þei sche xulde a deyð'.⁹⁵ Images in medieval literature could function both as 'mental' and as 'memorial'; literature was described by the writers of the time in visual terms.⁹⁶ The visual and the written word had a connection that does not exist in the same way today. Kolve states: 'In the Middle Ages to be audience to an "image" (whether verbal or visual) implied activity, not passivity. It called one to thought, to feeling, to meditation.'⁹⁷ Just as it was important for the reader or listener to build a mental image of what was being described in the text, the writer of that material would use mental images as a tool to retain memories and information. The interplay between the visual, the written word, and memory, can make Margery's pietà significant as a memory device. While it is unlikely that Margery would have received formal training in mnemonic techniques, it is evident that, whether coincidentally, or from receiving some manner of introduction to memory training from one of her many advisers, Margery does appear to retrieve certain memories from objects, or, as I will now examine, through dates.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *BMK*, I.60.148.

⁹⁶ See V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), pp. 9,18.

⁹⁷ Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, p. 30.

⁹⁸ Interestingly, although I do not believe it to be related to Margery's use, Lydgate, in preparation for his poem 'The Fifteen Joys and Sorrows of Mary', contemplated a painted scene of a pietà, and as he considered it more closely,

One of the striking things about the construction of *The Book of Margery Kempe* is its apparent lack of order. For example, Chapter 21 of the *Book* describes a moment when Margery is seemingly pregnant, an event that would logically place this Chapter before Chapter 11, when Margery seals her chastity agreement with her husband. Such a breach of chronological order gives the impression that the *Book* is being recorded in an unplanned and completely spontaneous way, rather than, for example, first preparing a sketch on a wax tablet. This suggests not only the absence of a comprehensive structure and theme, but also the lack of any mnemonic training for storing each memory in its properly allocated space upon a grid.⁹⁹ In fact, one does not need to search far to locate evidence of the *Book*'s lack of chronological order, for in the Proem comes the declaration, 'Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euey thing aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn'.¹⁰⁰

Such a lack of care in preparation goes against the kind of principles highlighted by Carruthers when quoting from Quintilian.¹⁰¹ Here it is stressed how one should first plan out a structure in one's mind, before committing it to written form, and that before perfecting such a technique, one can use waxed

saw a plan laid before him like a written page. See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 224.

⁹⁹ For the idea of a mnemonic technique where one would mentally form a flat area that is 'divided linearly into columns within a grid', see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁰ *BMK*, I.Proem.5.

¹⁰¹ See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 204-5, and M. Fabius Quintilian, 'Institutio oratoria', in *The Instituto oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. by H.E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library, 4 vols (London: Heinemann, 1922), IV, p. 101.

tablets to sketch out the layout. Again, the lack of evidence that such tactics were used, while in fact there exists testimony that everything was recorded in a random fashion, directs us to understand that no systematic memory training was exercised in presenting the *Book*. In fact, the statement in the Proem goes on to declare that ‘it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn’.¹⁰² In other words, things are evidently remembered in a random way, without the consistent aid of formulaic memory techniques, and not necessarily produced in the correct chronological order. While Margery may have used elements of medieval memory recall, such as using the *pietà* image to remember a visit to Norwich, if she were using it in a methodical way, the entire *Book* would be structured formally, rather than haphazardly.

Despite such arguments, there does appear to be a type of mnemonic pattern in the way in which Margery relates many incidents with a particular date from the Church calendar. This is explored in my chapter on Books of Hours, but I will mention here as well the observation made by Windeatt of how often Friday, the day of Christ’s Passion, is mentioned in the *Book*.¹⁰³ Also, significant saints’ days are common in the *Book*,¹⁰⁴ as well as other important calendar days such as Corpus Christi Day.¹⁰⁵ While it is possible that including such dates may represent the use of a type of grid memory system, it is more likely that the days were remembered *because* they bore such significance to the events, and may

¹⁰² *BMK*, I.Proem.5.

¹⁰³ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Windeatt, p. 321.

¹⁰⁴ For example St. James’s Day in, *BMK*, I.62.152.

¹⁰⁵ See *BMK*, I.45.107 for Corpus Christi Day.

even have been introduced as a means of infusing the events with a sense of poignancy. Considering the confession already examined from the Proem, that the *Book* 'is not wretyn in ordyr', it does not seem likely that the Church calendar would then be used for a systematic memory storage and recall system.

Another interesting fact which at first appearance may seem to divulge something of how Margery's memory works, is the similarity between Thomas Aquinas's form of intense meditative prayer and Margery's own variety of fervent devotion. Carruthers tells how Aquinas's biographers related his habit of lying down prostrate to pray.¹⁰⁶ Margery too lies prostrate in prayer, a fact attested to several times throughout the *Book*.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Aquinas would pray with tears, weeping in order to overcome an intellectual perplexity; his action was intended to 'stimulate [his] mental librar[y]'.¹⁰⁸ Finally, Aquinas, through prayer, develops a flame of love, which is fuelled and intensified by an understanding brought about by recalled memory.¹⁰⁹ Margery's tears are, of course, her most identifiable idiosyncrasy, and the fire of love is another frequently mentioned phenomenon in the *Book*.¹¹⁰

Upon closer examination, however, such similarities can be discovered to have other associations. Lying down in prayer, Carruthers notes, was a common

¹⁰⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 201.

¹⁰⁷ For example in Chapter 6, 'An-oþer day þis creatur schul[d] zeue hir to medytacyon, as sche was bodyn be-for, & sche lay style, nowt knowing what sche mygth best thynke, *BMK*, I.6.18.

¹⁰⁸ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁹ See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 201.

¹¹⁰ For example, Chapter 46, 'þan þe fyer of lofe kyndelyd so zern in hir hert þat sche myth not kepyn it preuy.' *BMK*, I.46.111.

position to assume and its benefit was ‘to shut out external stimuli, especially visual ones, which would serve to confuse or distract one’s recollective eye’.¹¹¹ However, in the *Book* we do not read of Margery seeking memories, but rather seeking thoughts. In the beginning of Chapter 6 Margery, while meditating and not knowing what to consider, asks Jesus, and is told to think upon his mother. This leads her to meditate upon St. Anne and the Virgin. She is not seeking memories, but her memory is serving to retell a story she is very familiar with. She is not, as was Aquinas, pursuing a manifest truth while seeking esoteric connections, but is instead looking to develop the bond between herself and God.

Margery’s tears come from a different source of inspiration, and have a different purpose from those of Aquinas. Rather than washing forth memories, Margery’s tears are an important part of her manner of living. She cries when she is overwhelmed by religious emotion, which can be sparked by empathetic feelings for another,¹¹² or by contemplating the Passion,¹¹³ for example. She also weeps for her sins,¹¹⁴ and out of gratitude to God.¹¹⁵ Margery, in fact, bursts forth into crying, weeping and wailing with great frequency and spontaneity. Unlike Aquinas she does not seek knowledge or memories, but looks to express

¹¹¹ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 201.

¹¹² Margery weeps in Chapter 58 as she hears how Christ wept for the people of Jerusalem. *BMK*, I.58.143.

¹¹³ For example, while contemplating the scourging in Chapter 80, *BMK*, I.80.191.

¹¹⁴ For example, *BMK*, I.5.16.

¹¹⁵ See *BMK*, I.87.214.

her fervent love of God. She cries in the tradition of other female mystics, such as one that she reveals her familiarity with, Mary of Oignies.¹¹⁶

Margery's notion of the fire of love more closely resembles that described by Richard Rolle in his *Incendium Amoris* than that experienced by Aquinas. Rolle's book is mentioned in Chapters 17 and 58, and alluded to in several instances, when Margery speaks of the fire of love using comparable terminology. This subject will be considered more carefully in my section on the *Incendium Amoris* in Chapter 3, but it is worth referring here to the similarity between Margery's descriptions of the fire of love in Chapter 35 of the *Book*, with the opening section of Rolle's prologue. Margery looks for, and according to the *Book* attains, a higher state of mystical connection with God through tears and meditation, which culminate in her experiencing a 'fire of love' sensation. Her 'fire of love' experience is not the result of a profound understanding reached through retrieved memory, as with Aquinas.

Memory training was received as part of higher education, primarily first for the monasteries, and later for the universities. It would therefore not have been part of a medieval woman's education. Women of the higher classes however, from the mercantile class upwards, although not required to memorize manuscripts, as would a scholar, might nevertheless benefit from the ability to scan a document and retain its *res*, if not learn it *ad verbum*. That is, of course, assuming they could read. The skills, if any, that they might have gained of a formal mnemonic system, would probably have come down to them from their husband, father, or brother, or as part of general knowledge. There is no evidence that I have come across, that would suggest a woman like Margery Kempe would

¹¹⁶ See *BMK*, I.62.152-4, and I.68.165-7.

have attained any refined skills in the craft of memory, however, there does appear to be ample indications that she could make use of commonly used memory tools, such as remembering certain details through the aid of visual, or calendar memory prompts.

Margery Kempe and Literacy

Of the many things one might be impressed about in regards to Margery Kempe, for example her independence, her tenaciousness, or her strength of belief, perhaps the most fascinating and startling aspect of her personality is her apparent ability to create what is considered to be the first autobiography in English, while presumably being an illiterate, uneducated woman. Through no apparent formal study, and, as she herself claims, with no knowledge of Latin, or of German, or Italian, she not only succeeds in creating a manuscript of her religious life story, but also manages to understand and make herself understood when faced with those different foreign languages.¹¹⁷ Whether through divine grace, or an education that goes far deeper than what Margery confesses to, the *Book* reveals a woman appearing to be in possession of some literate skills. Although she uses an amanuensis to pen her work, and is careful to declare her lack of education, there are numerous references one may source in the *Book* which could indicate that Margery had a far greater understanding of language and literature than she is willing or able to admit to. This, in turn, makes defining her as illiterate problematic, and it is essential to bear in mind that Margery's

¹¹⁷ See *BMK*, I.38.93 for Margery's attempts at Italian, and I.40.97-8 for the German. For her knowledge of the Gospel (assumedly the Vulgate if not a Wycliffe vernacular Bible) see I.52.126.

illiteracy probably lay more in the lack of a comprehensive understanding of Latin grammar, than in wanting any ability to read or write in the vernacular.¹¹⁸

Margery claims to have no knowledge of Latin, and yet, in Book II Chapter 10 she says ‘þis holy ympne “Veni creator spiritus” wyth all þe versys longyng þerto.’¹¹⁹ The question that arises here is whether she recited the prayer in Latin, or the vernacular (and the priest-scribe recording her book, for example, filled in the Latin title), and whether she had learned the prayer by rote or had a full understanding of it. Also, we know that Margery was exposed to books – as mentioned in the *Book* she has several read to her and is familiar with others.¹²⁰ Whether or not she herself could read is an item for debate and speculation, but what we can be more certain of is the fact that she was, with some regularity, exposed to the written word. Certainly she understood the value of words preserved in text. We also know that Margery spent a great deal of time associating with educated people—bishops and archbishops, bachelors and doctors of divinity, and anchorites.¹²¹ While we cannot be confident of the exact degree of her own literacy, we can be more certain of how well associated Margery was with learning and the written word, working from, and assuming the validity of the evidence provided in the *Book*.

Throughout *The Book of Margery Kempe* there are references to books and the subjects of books, both through direct mention, and through textual

¹¹⁸ See my section on ‘Margery’s Literate Place’ for a more detailed evaluation of her possible literate skills.

¹¹⁹ *BMK*, II.10.248.

¹²⁰ See, for example, *BMK*, I.58.143.

¹²¹ See, for example, *BMK*, I.Proem.3.

analogues. The books that are mentioned by name include writings by Walter Hilton, Bridget of Sweden, Richard Rolle, the pseudo-Bonaventura, Marie d'Oignies, and the Bible. It is also reasonable to assume that Margery was aware of Julian of Norwich's book, and of Elizabeth of Hungary's, as she met Julian and spent many days talking with her, and Elizabeth's treatise is referred to in Chapter 62. There is also the book mentioned in Chapter 9 that Margery owns, and the breviary that is the subject of part of Chapter 24. Furthermore, there are textual associations found within the *Book* that relate to content found in the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Angela of Foligno's book, and Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*. Besides learning the hymn *Veni creator spiritus*, with all its verses, as revealed in Chapter 10 of Book II, Margery also quotes from the Psalter in Chapter 6 of Book II.¹²²

The sort of evidence provided by the numerous books, and writers or subjects of books, referred to in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, would seem to indicate that, even if Margery was not literate, not even in the vernacular, that it was important to the purpose of the *Book* that she be seen to be involved with literate authorities. Both parts of the *Book* contain references to things literate, and, whether or not Margery was literate, she is certainly shown to be capable of learning verses from the Bible by heart. Such an emphasis of an 'illiterate' woman's frequent exposure to, use of, and understanding of the written word, demonstrates a tie between Margery Kempe and books, which enforces her authority by association. As Margery is shown to be aware of many important and relevant religious works, and the *Book* is shown to reflect their meanings and

¹²² See Appendix I for a list of books in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and where they are mentioned in the text.

messages, Margery, through meeting their standards, and following their examples, is shown to be an orthodox disciple.

Despite such conclusions, the subject of literacy in relation to Margery Kempe remains a difficult one, largely because medieval women were considered on the whole to be illiterate, and that very little is preserved in writing in regards to any specific literary activity.¹²³ The definition of literacy complicates things further, as there are considerations such as whether it involves the ability to read and comprehend the basic meaning, or to understand the grammar, or if they were able to write as well as read, or if they were able to read Latin, or simply the vernacular.¹²⁴ Also, the facts can be somewhat vague, or even contradictory, possibly due to the interpretation of the scant available evidence. Better, perhaps, is to use a term such as ‘illatinate’, if skills of reading or writing in the vernacular exist, and ‘paraliterate’, where technologies other than reading and writing have been used to develop literate skills.¹²⁵

During Margery’s lifetime, Norfolk was a highly populated region made rich from the cloth industry. In fact, East Anglia was ‘by far the most heavily

¹²³ For more detail of this complaint, see Barratt, ed., *Women’s Writing in Middle English*, pp. 2-4.

¹²⁴ For a further exploration of this see Katherine Zieman “Reading, Singing and Understanding: Constructions of the Literacy of Women Religious in Late Medieval England”, in *Learning and Literacy*, ed. by Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), p. 97.

¹²⁵ An ‘illatinate’ or ‘paraliterate’ person might still possess some degree of understanding written, or spoken Latin. See my introduction for more on the use of ‘illatinate’ and ‘paraliterate’. See also Rappaport and Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City*, pp. 170, and 192.

populated and wealthy rural area of the kingdom'.¹²⁶ King's Lynn, then Bishop's Lynn, was the eighth largest town in England in 1377, with an estimated population of 4,691 (where Norwich had 1,300 more, and London had as many as 40,000).¹²⁷ Margery's father, John Brunham, served as both Mayor of Lynn and as Alderman of the Guild of the Trinity.¹²⁸ Although not of the aristocracy, it is clear from considering such records that Margery came from an eminent leading family of the Norfolk mercantile class. During Margery's lifetime, the merchant class was gaining power, wealth and prestige.¹²⁹ Despite not having the same needs, habits, or opportunities of the gentry and aristocracy, merchants still required at least some degree of literacy to ply their trade.¹³⁰ Besides the possibility of Margery's receiving some kind of learning at home, there is also the chance that she was sent to a convent school, or to a household school of the nobility, where she would not have been taught Latin grammar, but might have

¹²⁶ Richard Beadle, "Prolegomena to a Literary Geography of Later Medieval Norfolk", in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, ed. by Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), p. 95.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p. 15.

¹²⁸ See *BMK*, I.2.9 and I.46.111. John Brunham's name appears six times in the Red Register as a member of parliament for the borough between the years 1364-1384, and five times as mayor of Lynn. He further held offices of chamberlain, coroner and justice of the peace. See Margaret Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1995), p. 41.

¹²⁹ For a link between the merchant class and the gentry see Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 160: 'The wealthier merchant families had always adopted much the same attitude to education as the more cultivated gentry.' Thrupp goes on to say that 'most of the intelligent women had found ways of learning at least to read and write English.' What she does not specify, however, is how to distinguish an intelligent merchant woman from one just beyond the capability of learning to read.

¹³⁰ See, for example, Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 155.

received some vernacular instruction.¹³¹ Literacy was becoming more commonplace with the English aristocracy by the fourteenth century, to the degree that they could read and write in either French or English, or even both, with a smaller number knowing Latin grammar as well.¹³² According to Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Young gentlewomen probably learned enough Latin to read their psalters or books of hours, but more likely received sufficient instruction in the vernacular [...] to run a household, read popular or religious literature, manage business affairs, and conduct themselves well in polite company.'¹³³

Besides Margery's reference to the saying of the *Veni creator spiritus* prayer, there are other instances in the *Book* where a possible knowledge of Latin may be of relevance. In Chapter 32, when Margery describes her miracle of understanding and being understood by the parson of the Roman Church opposite the English hospice in Rome (who did not understand any English), she is asked to say her *Confiteor* to him. The *Confiteor*, as a general confession of sins, could be said in either Latin or the vernacular, but it is referred to here by the Latin name. This may mean no more than that the amanuensis applied the correct term, or that Margery was familiar only with the word for the prayer, rather than being able to pray in Latin, but it suggests that Margery had at least a basic familiarity with some of the Latin nomenclature. God then sends, as we are

¹³¹ See, for example, Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling*, p. 116.

¹³² Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling*, p. 150. In a footnote Moran adds 'In the late fourteenth century and first half of the fifteenth, there was not yet the sharp distinction between nobility and gentry common to the sixteenth century. Although the distinction became clearer after 1450, this analysis will include members of the upper classes both the aristocracy and the gentry, including squires who became armigerous in the fourteenth century.'

¹³³ Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Margery Kempe', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 16.

informed in the *Book*, St. John the Evangelist to hear her confession. She says *Benedicite*, to which he replies *Dominus* in her soul. Clearly some knowledge of Latin exists, as it inevitably would through rote memory, and as such terminology was an essential part of the liturgical service. The question that arises is just how far such knowledge would go.

The previous and following chapters also include mention of Margery's being understood without speaking the language of those she attempts to communicate with. It seems clear that, through such episodes, a point is trying to be made—that Margery is not educated by men, but blessed by God. Her understanding comes not from books, but from the Holy Spirit. It is essential in making this point that Margery has no knowledge of the foreign languages she is exposed to. Her German confessor, mentioned above, comes to understand her and she him despite the fact that neither speaks the language of the other. In Chapter 40 this understanding is tested, as the priest is told a story by Margery in English, before other witnesses, which he then relates back in Latin, astonishing the listeners. It is a matter of some interest that Margery spends so much time in the company of German-speaking people and yet claims to have no understanding of the language. In fact, her own son, as well as the first amanuensis of the *Book* spoke German (and some believe them to be the same person), and Margery travelled to Germany with her daughter-in-law. Also, the tradition of trade between Lynn and the Hanseatic League, and later their competition for trade in the Baltic, would have meant that the merchants of Lynn would more likely be exposed to the German language.¹³⁴ Such strong ties and

¹³⁴ See, for example, Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, pp. 19-20. See also Kate Parker, 'Lynn and the Making of a Mystic', in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by John H. Arnold and Katherine Lewis

frequent exposure to the language would suggest that Margery had a basic understanding of German, at least a vocabulary and understanding of a few words.

The gift of tongues, or xenoglossia, is referred to in the New Testament books of Acts 2.4-8, and in 1 Corinthians 12-14, and Mark 16.17. Christine Cooper, in her essay 'Miraculous Translation in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', reveals how Margery is following the traditional oral and aural nature of the gift, as well as the less common gift of written communication, in her miraculous vernacular translations.¹³⁵ The two primary examples listed by Cooper include the second scribe's ability to interpret the first scribe's writing following prayers from Margery, when he could not previously do so, and the German confessor in Rome mentioned above.¹³⁶ What is exceptional about the latter case, which Cooper draws attention to, is the fact that Margery is able to indirectly 'preach a story of Holy Writ' with learned clerics in Latin.¹³⁷ As she relates her story in English, and the German priest translates it to Latin before the assembled group, he is, in effect, preaching Margery's words in Latin for her.¹³⁸ Not only does

(Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 55-73 (60-1); and Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 250-1.

¹³⁵ Christine F. Cooper, 'Miraculous Translation in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Studies in Philology*, 101 (2004), 270-298. See p. 273 for the oral and aural gifts (and miraculous literacy), p. 277 for the written, and p. 287 for Margery's experiences of both. Cooper uses the term 'xenoglossia' to mean both speaking and being understood in a previously unknown language. See also Christine F. Cooper-Rompato, *The Gift of Tongues: Women's Xenoglossia in the Later Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

¹³⁶ Cooper, 'Miraculous Translation', pp. 287 and 291-2.

¹³⁷ Cooper, 'Miraculous Translation', p. 294.

¹³⁸ *BMK*, I.40.97-98.

Margery ‘prove’ her gift of xenoglossia, she uses the voice of another to speak her Latin for her, and thereby avoids any charges of unorthodoxy.

In Chapter 52 of the *Book* we learn that Margery has been studying Scripture and has a good knowledge of the Gospels. Not only does she display knowledge of a Bible story, but she quotes directly from it: ‘Blyssed be þe wombe þat þe bar & þe tetys þat zaf þe sowkyn. þan ovr Lord seyde a-zen to hir, ‘Forsoþe so ar þei blissed þa heryn þe word of God and kepyn itt.’¹³⁹ In fact, this is not the only time that Margery displays knowledge of the Gospels. In Chapter 27, for example, she cites a text to her travelling companions.¹⁴⁰ Where did Margery acquire this knowledge? Was the Bible read to her in the vernacular? Did she belong to a study group such as the Norwich Lollard community?¹⁴¹ Of course, Lollard Bibles could be owned and used by orthodox believers too. The Lollard Bible enjoyed great success during the fifteenth century, partly because it pre-dated Arundel’s constitutional ban.¹⁴² Once again, the question arises as to whether or not Margery gained her relative skill in Latin and other languages through the more likely rote learning, or by means of a more formal education.

¹³⁹ *BMK*, I.52.126. This is assuming, of course, that scribal intervention has not taken place in order to provide the correct text.

¹⁴⁰ *BMK*, I.27.66.

¹⁴¹ See Krug, *Reading Families*, Chapter 3, for a detailed examination of the Norwich Lollard community.

¹⁴² See Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 310. Hanna further points out that ‘Lollard scripture had enormous advantages over any competitor: it was textually complete and an accurate rendition of its source, relatively compact, and [...] readily legible’ (p. 310).

It seems unlikely that Margery would have been involved with the reading community of Lollards in Norwich. Although she is accused of Lollardy in the *Book*, no convincing evidence is provided regarding a direct connection between Margery and Lollard society. Had she belonged to a reading school in Norwich, or with any Lollards in Lynn, it is probable that knowledge of this would have leaked out and been used against her. Further, Margery is examined on several instances and never found to be supporting of Lollard ideals. In fact, she is frequently shown to be following a devotional lifestyle contrary to that of common Lollard beliefs, such as the veneration of images, a belief in the need for indulgences, and a belief in the benefits of pilgrimage.¹⁴³ Finally, Margery almost certainly knew the first man to be burned for Lollardy in England—William Sawtre. Executed in 1401, Sawtre had been the parish priest of Margery's own church in Lynn, St. Margaret's.¹⁴⁴ Had she any connection with him, besides being a parishioner, this information too would seem likely to have become circulated by her enemies. Since Margery could not be found to hold Lollard sympathies, or have any connection with them, it is highly unlikely she received any education or support from a local community.

Mary Carruthers, in *The Book of Memory*, explores the different means of learning and of gaining literacy. To begin with she presents the difference between learning to write, and learning 'to compose and comprehend in a fully textual way'.¹⁴⁵ Also, she emphasizes how common it would have been for some degree of bilingualism to exist (Latin and a vernacular tongue) for every

¹⁴³ See, for example, Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, pp. 103-4.

¹⁴⁵ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 10.

educated European. As explored in my section on women and literacy, an individual was not necessarily illiterate simply because they could not compose fluently in Latin. With this in mind, we can see a possible picture of Margery Kempe being able to comprehend some Latin words (for example in learning her *Paternosters* and *Aves*), and to know some of the Latin responses as part of the Mass, or, for example, when following the Matins in a Book of Hours, while still remaining 'illiterate'.¹⁴⁶ Carolyn Dinshaw suggests that Margery may have understood more than just a little Latin:

'Margery clearly understands some Latin words and phrases, and it may be that she knows how to read Latin after all: Lochrie, tracing the Latinity of the *Book*, suggests that we entertain the possibility. Julian of Norwich's statement about her own unlearned status has not stopped scholars from attributing Latinity to her. But even if this suggestion seems too much for Margery, the point is clear: learning is not just the property of Margery's literate scribes, and the very concepts of literacy and text need to be extended.'¹⁴⁷

Lochrie also draws attention to how Margery requests of the Steward of Leicester that he question her in English rather than Latin, because she does not understand the language. However, when another cleric asks her what 'Crescite & multiplicamini' means, she replies without hesitation. Lochrie therefore states:

¹⁴⁶ For more on Margery's possible connection with Books of Hours, see Chapter 4 in this thesis.

¹⁴⁷ Dinshaw, 'Margery Kempe', p. 230.

‘She clearly understands some Latin phrases and scriptural texts even if she cannot speak or hear in Latin.’¹⁴⁸ Further, Lochrie stresses the fact that ‘traces of Rolle’s Latin work [*Incendium Amoris*] survive in Kempe’s book, not only in her images and mystical concepts but in her mystical idioms’.¹⁴⁹ This may be due to scribal influence, however, or from hearing Rolle in translation.¹⁵⁰ And yet both instances demonstrate Margery’s exposure to Latin works and words, and strengthen the argument for her memorizing some Latin words and phrases, if, at the same time, being unable to fully understand them.

Reading was often a social event, where a group of people would gather to listen. Books were a rarity, and highly valued, and the best way of sharing their contents with other people was through reading aloud.¹⁵¹ Margery mentions two specific instances in the *Book* when books are read to her.¹⁵² She even provides a list of at least some of the titles she heard. She exhibits a real hunger for knowledge of things religious, through her intercourse with educated and experienced men and women, and through her listening to books being read to her. Presumably, these books were in English, although some Latin was likely to have been present in the texts, which, one may presume, would have been translated by the reader to the listener.

¹⁴⁸ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p. 114.

¹⁴⁹ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, pp. 114-15.

¹⁵⁰ For a study of the English manuscripts of Richard Rolle see: Ralph Hanna, *The English Manuscripts of Richard Rolle: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 17.

¹⁵² *BMK*, I.17.39 and I.58.143. Chapter 62 lists books the priest-scribe was familiar with (I.62.152-4), and there is also mention made of, what is most likely to be, the hagiography of Mary of Oignies in Chapter 68 (I.68.165-6).

Margery may not have been able to read or write, but she was certainly repeatedly exposed to books¹⁵³, and as we learn in Chapter 9, even possessed one herself. Richard Beadle writes about the high concentration of sophisticated devotional writing occurring in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, first in the Yorkshire area, and then down to the East Midlands.¹⁵⁴ Margery, in her location of Lynn, would be in an ideal geographic location for the distribution of texts like those of Hilton, Rolle, and the *Cloud*-author, and, as has already been noted above, does in fact mention such titles herself. She would have been well aware of the power of the written word in preserving and promoting her auto-hagiographical life.

Carruthers' study becomes even more intriguing when looking at Margery's pattern of memories. Although Margery claims in the Proem that there is no pattern to her recollection of events,¹⁵⁵ a discernible pattern, although not chronological, does exist. Just as Carruthers describes a system of building up memories around an architectural frame, or background (the architectural mnemonic),¹⁵⁶ Margery's memories tend to be exclusively constructed around a physical situation. She is on the road to York, in St Margaret's at Lynn, on board a boat to the Holy Land, in the English Hospice in Rome—her memories are

¹⁵³ As expressed by Dinshaw, 'Margery Kempe', p. 226: '[Margery Kempe was] deeply engaged with the written word'.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Beadle, "Middle English Texts and their Transmission, 1350-1500: some Geographical Criteria", in *Speaking in Our Tongues: Proceedings of a Colloquium on Medieval Dialectology and Related Disciplines*, ed. by Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 71-2.

¹⁵⁵ *BMK Proem*, p. 5: 'Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thung aftyr oper as it we don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn.'

¹⁵⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 71-9.

located, and it would seem filed away, using a kind of geographical grid. Margery may not be as well trained as some at using a grid to store and locate memories, but her linking places and events would appear to be more than coincidental. Again, although there is no evidence of literacy here, there is further suggestion that Margery had at least the foundations of an educated understanding or fundamental training. However, as I indicated in my section on women and memory, there is not enough conclusive evidence to state with any confidence that Margery received, or was likely to receive, formal memory training.

As far as a study of Margery Kempe's possible literacy is concerned, it is unlikely that anything more than speculative determining will be achieved one way or the other. However, from studying the information provided in the *Book*, it is possible to piece together enough information to construct some understanding of what she was likely to have been capable of achieving, and through comparing her own displays of knowledge with historical evidence from the time, of further concluding whether or not it would have been possible for a woman like Margery to have achieved any degree of literacy. Again, while the full extent of such possible literacy cannot be proven, we can at least surmise what may have been possible, and even likely, for a woman of her class and station to achieve. In building as full an understanding as possible, we must at least pause to question whether or not Margery always told the truth about her abilities, especially as there is a clear agenda in her appearing not to understand the languages she then 'miraculously' makes herself understood in (that agenda being it makes her appear more saintly). Perhaps what we should be looking at is the balance between Margery's need to appear as a wise and blessed woman,

capable of exhibiting learning, but of the kind gifted by God, and not learned from man.

For Margery, Latin was not an essential language. It was the language of the Church fathers. Latin, as expressed by Tim Machan, was ‘the language of tradition, authority, and power’ while the vernacular was ‘the language of the people, impermanence, and change’. Margery did not gain her authority and power from using Latin. Her power came through using the vernacular, but more importantly through God speaking directly to her. Latin was, again following Machan, a language using ‘a highly codified prescriptive grammar’. It was the language of the Bible, of the Church, but, more significantly, of the past. Latin, Machan continues, ‘was in a very real sense a dead language’.¹⁵⁷ In contrast to this, the Middle English that Margery spoke was a living and ever-developing language, the language of the laity, and, ever more frequently into the fifteenth century, the language used for recording in text. By speaking in the vernacular and visibly displaying no firm knowledge of Latin, Margery could still claim her understanding of things religious through the special communication she had with God, while remaining within the boundaries of what a person of her class and gender was permitted to know.

Latin, however, remained the language of learning. It is likely that, if Margery did receive some kind of formal education, she experienced some very basic Latin training. As I examined in ‘Women and Education’, children studying the alphabet would often learn their ABC in Latin, as well as the three

¹⁵⁷ Tim William Machan, “Editing, Orality, and Late Middle English Texts” in *Vox intexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 230.

primary prayers (the *Paternoster*, *Ave Maria* and *Credo*).¹⁵⁸ These prayers were required learning, and would be heard so often in church, and at home, that learning them by rote would be relatively straightforward. A common tool used for early studies was the primer, or Book of Hours, a book that Margery may have possessed.¹⁵⁹ With all the exposure that she would have met with in Latin, it would not be supposing too much to imagine that Margery had some ability to understand, possibly to read and recite, but very unlikely to grammatically fully comprehend the language.¹⁶⁰

Margery's literacy, such as it was, was gained through the discourses she had with liturgical authorities, and from the books that she had read to her. This is as much information as we can be certain of, but by studying her social status and family background, we can be reasonably confident in assuming that some kind of previous education whetted her appetite, and made it possible for her to absorb and interpret the knowledge relayed to her later in life, through word of mouth and through listening to readings:

Women read, or had read to them, mostly devotional material, gospel harmonies, saints' lives and accounts of visions. The bulk of this material was in the vernacular, and had those qualities which made it attractive for reading aloud: it was vivid, simply presented, colourfully

¹⁵⁸ See Orme, *Medieval Schools*, pp. 56-58 & 286. See also Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 171.

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter 4 in this thesis on Books of Hours. See also Orme, *Medieval Schools*, pp. 58-9.

¹⁶⁰ According to Orme, 'Beginners at school learnt to recognise words and pronounce them, but they could not understand what they read unless they were told', *Medieval Schools*, p. 59.

described, repetitive and concrete. It had elements familiar to women from their own lives: domestic images, liturgical settings, descriptions of clothing and food, representations of family relationships.¹⁶¹

Margery's literary knowledge came mostly through second-hand contact with books, and therefore lacks the depth and subtlety that might be gained through a more intimate study and understanding. What is interesting about Voaden's quote above, and which is something I examine in my chapter section 'The *Book of Margery Kempe* in Recognition of Itself' (Chapter 2), is how familiar the description of books addressed to women is to the *Book* itself, in both content and in approach.

Margery's Literate Place

The question that arises following such considerations of Margery's abilities and involvements in the literate world is: 'What was her degree of literacy and how was this significant to her manner of living?' In this section I will outline the implications of Margery's probable literate skills as a late medieval mercantile woman, living the lifestyle of the *mulieres sanctae*. I will examine how her links with books and learned men of religion associated her with the literate world, and yet maintained her orthodoxy and greatly increased her authority. At a time when charges of Lollardy were common, Margery needed to isolate herself from their methodology and beliefs, in particular their preaching and teaching, and their reading circles and translating scripture into English. However, she also needed to produce a book which, in order to bear witness to her unique spiritual

¹⁶¹ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 35.

gifts, of necessity required to include examples of her wisdom and learning. I will also highlight the anomaly that is thereby created, as we are presented with a woman who is, but is not linked to a Latinate, or even a vernacular, literate world.

M.T. Clanchy describes how neatly early medieval understanding divided all people into two categories: the *litterati* and the *illiterati*. Synonymous with this were the divisions of *clerici* and *laici*.¹⁶² You were either one or the other, and although grey areas were known to exist between, these scholastic axioms remained, for the most part, universal rules.¹⁶³ On the one hand were the clerics or literate people, and the other was composed of illiterate laity. This understanding became less clear by the fifteenth century. Simple divisions were not as appropriate when the class system had become more complex, with a growing middle or mercantile class, and as books were becoming more commonplace and accessible, and as men and women alike were becoming increasingly literate, at least in the vernacular. Clanchy qualifies this by stating how, although divisions had lessened between the literate and illiterate:

¹⁶² M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 226 and 227. In the vernacular, distinctions were made between the 'lered' and the 'leued' in a similar way. See Peggy A. Knapp, *Time-Bound Words: Semantic and Social Economies from Chaucer's England to Shakespeare's* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 98-107. The MED includes the following definition for 'leued': '1. (a) Uneducated, ignorant; unlettered, unable to read Latin; lay, non-clerical'.

¹⁶³ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 231.

Real *litterati*, in the old sense of ‘scholars’, of course remained rare [by 1300]. Those who were totally ignorant, that is, those who could not pass a Latin reading test, were perhaps as rare.¹⁶⁴

This understanding of what it meant to be considered literate by the late medieval period, demonstrates both that, to be considered truly *litteratus*, one would need to be a scholar, and that basic linguistic skills were not so uncommon among the *laici* as they previously had been.

For the sake of a better modern understanding of late medieval literacy, a new terminology would be necessary. Firstly, a division between Latinate and vernacular literacy should be made. Secondly, terminology for the grey areas between the *litteratus* (possessing full grammar skills) and *illiteratus* (limited knowledge of a few words) in each language would be required, with further qualifying of such intermediary skills. It is important to bear in mind, for example, that the ability to read does not necessarily imply that one is also able to write. Also, as Parkes points out, there are different kinds of readers, from the professional (scholars), to the cultivated (recreational), to the pragmatic (business).¹⁶⁵ In a similar way there are different kinds of speakers, from those who can speak fluently in Latin, to those who can recite the *Credo* and *Pater Noster*, with a further distinction lying between those that can only speak, and those that can also read such texts.

The easiest way of making a further distinction between the literate and illiterate of both Latin and English, would be to label those in between the

¹⁶⁴ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 245.

¹⁶⁵ M.B. Parkes, ‘The Literacy of the Laity’, p. 555.

extremes as 'semi-literate'.¹⁶⁶ This division would then require further description to match more appropriately with the individual's skills. The semi-literate would surpass the illiterate person by having skills in reading and/or writing. However, an illiterate person might still be able to sign their name, or know their ABC, for example, without having acquired the ability to read or write a manuscript. The distinction may be made clearer by Clanchy's explaining how an individual might 'be able to read a little Latin, sufficient to get the gist of a royal writ or to understand a line in the Bible or in a chronicle.'¹⁶⁷ Such a person would, according to my definition, lie somewhere in the semi-literate, Latinate grouping. Their skill in the vernacular would likely, although not necessarily, match or exceed this level of Latin proficiency.

It is this kind of refined understanding of the terminology linked with literacy and illiteracy that led Josephine Tarvers to re-evaluate Margery's skills.¹⁶⁸ In her essay, Tarvers examines how being labeled as *lewed* or *unlettryd*, need not imply that an individual was not literate in the vernacular, nor that they did not possess at least a degree of skill in Latin. Tarvers goes on to argue that Margery was probably literate in the vernacular, and that she knew at least some Latin. Although Tarvers jumps to conclusions in regards to Margery's Latin

¹⁶⁶ Kaspar Elm demonstrated the existence of a middle way between lay and religious states called the 'semi-religious', the groups of which (such as the beguines) could possibly be paralled with the 'semi-literate'. See Kaspar Elm, 'Vita Regularis sine Regula: Bedeutung, Rechtsstellung und Selbstverständnis des Mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Semireligiosentums', in *Häresie und Vorzeitige Reformation im Spätmittelalter*, ed. by F. Smahel (Munich: Oldenburg, 1998), 239-73.

¹⁶⁷ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 246.

¹⁶⁸ Josephine K. Tarvers, 'The Alleged Illiteracy of Margery Kempe: A Reconsideration of the Evidence', *Medieval Perspectives*, 11 (1996), 113-24.

literacy skills, she makes a valid point in considering that there is nothing in the *Book* which states categorically that Margery could not speak Latin, but that there is, instead, evidence suggesting that she had a limited vocabulary.¹⁶⁹

Despite being unlettered, Margery could still be capable of maintaining a challenging level of dialogue with lettered men, and of following limited amounts of text read in Latin, if not reading the text herself in translation.

Felicity Riddy writes that,

we should not assume that women were merely passive recipients of books, or that they could not have taken the initiative in the process of translating from Latin into the vernacular.¹⁷⁰

The case of John Claydon, tried before archbishop Chichele in 1415 on charges of Lollardy, and examined by Anne Hudson in *The Premature Reformation*,¹⁷¹ provides a telling example of how an individual could still operate within the literate world, despite having limited personal skills. Although male, his being an illiterate merchant and yet the owner of a book, places him in a similar category to that of Margery. Claydon commissioned a scribe, John Gryme, to produce a

¹⁶⁹ Tarvers, 'The Alleged Illiteracy of Margery Kempe', p. 113. Instead of claiming complete illiteracy, Tarvers stresses how Margery describes herself as 'not lettryd' (p. 120, and *BMK* I.52.128), which instead designates that she is autodidact, or as she would describe it, taught 'Of þe Holy Gost' (*BMK* I.55.135). Tarvers pointing out that Margery never categorically denies any knowledge of Latin does not, of course, necessitate that she was therefore able to read or write in that tongue, or that she possessed such skills in the vernacular.

¹⁷⁰ Riddy, 'Women Talking About the Things of God: A Late Medieval Sub-Culture', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 104-127 (p. 107).

¹⁷¹ Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, pp. 211-13.

copy of the Lollard treatise the *Lanterne of Lizt*.¹⁷² Before the quires were bound into the book, Claydon had his servant, John Fuller, and John Gryme read the written work to him over the course of two days.

It is unclear what Claydon's involvement was in this proofreading process. As Hudson suggests, the two literate men read from the copy and the exemplar, while Claydon listened.¹⁷³ It is possible that he had memorized extracts, but more certain that he simply wished to officiate over the procedure. The resulting book was 'well bound in red leather, the text written on calfskin in a good English hand.'¹⁷⁴ Another intriguing observation Hudson makes is that arguments presented in the *Lanterne* are supported with quotations from authorities, cited first in Latin, before being translated into English.¹⁷⁵ The book's appearance, together with the fact that it was said to have been read to Claydon frequently, tells us both something of the availability of books to those not of the aristocracy or gentry, and of the value placed in them, even when their content was inaccessible without assistance. Also, the Latin quotations from authorities would suggest that the translations would not be considered as conclusive evidence or support, but that they required the authority of the Latin language, even if the book's owner was illiterate, in order to make it legitimate.

In regards to Margery's literacy, the example of Claydon demonstrates that owning a custom-made manuscript, with both Latin and English words, does

¹⁷² Lilian M. Swinburn, ed., *Lanterne of Lizt*, EETS o.s. 151 (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1971).

¹⁷³ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, p. 213.

¹⁷⁴ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, p. 212.

¹⁷⁵ Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, p. 213.

not necessarily imply that the owner can read or write in either tongue. It is therefore necessary to remain cautious about proclaiming any skills Margery may have possessed, solely on those grounds. However, we know that Margery did not merely listen to books being read. The reading priest of chapter 58 finds reciprocated the favour he extends to Margery in reading books to her, as she

cawsyd hym to lokyn mech good scriptur & many a good doctour whech he wolde not a lokyd at þat tyme had sche ne be.¹⁷⁶

Evidently, either Margery's knowledge of scripture and doctor's commentaries is very impressive, or her questioning on certain passages awakened a curiosity in the reading priest that inspired him to probe deeper. In either case, she is obviously more capable of engaging with the text in a literate way than Claydon was, judging from the available evidence.

A final telling detail that we can gather from the Claydon trial, is the fact that he was willing to die for his Lollard beliefs, and that he was not frightened of owning, indeed personally commissioning the making of, a heretical text. Margery, on the other hand, denies being a Lollard, is apparently hesitant in writing her book before the twilight of her life, and probably prevents its release until after her death. She may be read to, in the Norwich Lollard tradition, but she approaches it in an orthodox way—openly, sanctioned by men of religion, and using approved texts. Margery's literate connections are sound, but she may have feared reprisals for some of the claims that she makes in regards to her powers of prophecy, or her unconventional lifestyle.

¹⁷⁶ *BMK*, I.59.143.

From the evidence available in the *Book*, it would not be unreasonable to assume that Margery had at least a limited Latin vocabulary. As I have examined, several examples exist of her apparently knowing Latin prayers, some scripture, and of having books read to her that have Latin titles, although these could have been translated for her. Margery's Latin literacy would probably, at best, lie between the illiterate and the semi-literate states of my earlier discussed divisions. However, her skills in English would have had more chance of including some skills in reading or writing as well. It is important to maintain an impression of Margery as a woman that was not illiterate in the sense of having no reading or writing skills in either the vernacular or Latin. Her illiteracy was, according to the strict medieval definition, in not having full grammar in Latin, which did not imply she possessed no abilities whatsoever.

If we work from the assumption that Margery could recite from the Psalter in Latin, and speak the words of *Veni creator spiritus* with all the verses, her abilities must have included some understanding of that language, even if her learning was mostly achieved through rote learning. However, if she were able to follow books such as *Stimulus Amoris* and *Incendium Amoris* being read in Latin (as their titles have been given in Chapters 17 and 58), and to comment intelligently on passages from the Bible and doctor's commentaries (as suggested in Chapter 58), her abilities would have been significantly greater. This seems to be the less likely possibility, as there is not enough evidence in the *Book* to suggest such a high level of proficiency, although there do exist logical reasons as to why Margery might have desired to have masked such talents.

Firstly, Margery would not have been deemed so worthy a female holy person if she were able to speak, read, and write Latin. There would be fears of

being judged a Lollard, or at the very least of having overstepped her station. As I examined in my section *Women and Education*, women were not permitted in the universities and could therefore not be formally trained in Latin. However, they could receive skills in the language through a holy miracle. Christine Cooper observes how Elizabeth of Schönau, Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden (among others) all received a miraculous gift of the language.¹⁷⁷

Margery too, although far less revealingly, shares in this gift as she is often associated with the language through her knowledge of biblical passages and her listening to books (although her familiarity with the Bible and other books could have stemmed from English translations); added to this is her miraculous understanding of the German-Latinate priest. Margery does not have to learn Latin grammar in order to become associated with the authority such learning provides.

Secondly, Margery operates best through speaking and ‘writing’ in the vernacular. Her natural voice is in English, and as she wishes to reach ‘[all] synful wrecchys’, the ideal language to achieve this would be the vernacular.¹⁷⁸ This preference for reaching the general laity, or the ‘lewed’ rather than exclusively the ‘lered’, is exemplified in *Speculum vitae* with the words:

Bot lered and lewed, alde and younge

All understandes Inglysche toung.

¹⁷⁷ Cooper, ‘Miraculous Translation’, pp. 282-6.

¹⁷⁸ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.1.

The holy Latinate (and assumedly less sinful) clerics would not have been the primary intended readership of her book. Again, this distinction is made in the *Speculum vitae*:

And for all lewed men namely,
That canne na maner of clergy.¹⁷⁹

Margery may well be capable, therefore, of speaking or understanding some Latin, but chooses not to reveal or attempt to validate this skill. Instead, what she promotes is her sense of what Rebecca Krug calls a ‘literate practice’.¹⁸⁰ We cannot know exactly what degree of fluency Margery may have had in Latin, nor if she were able to read and write in English. What we can observe through study of the *Book*, however, is the extent to which she engages in literate practices: reading (or having books read to her), referring to the content of books, owning a book, advising on the purchase of a book, and maintaining contact with literate men. However, the term *illiteratus* does not seem appropriate to designate Margery’s apparent degree of skill. With some knowledge of Latin skills possible, and vernacular language skills more likely, Margery could more accurately be termed as ‘illatinate’, or ‘paraliterate’.

¹⁷⁹ The *Speculum vitae* is attributed to William of Nassington. The quotations are taken from: Wogan-Browne and others, *The Idea of the Vernacular*, p. 337. The verse version of the MS, held at the University of Liverpool (Rylands MS F.4.9), is unedited.

¹⁸⁰ Krug, *Reading Families*, p. 7.

(b) Orality

Margery Kempe's 'maner of leuyng' was indebted to a literate culture for its construction, and also for its endorsement by appropriate authorities. Margery's frequent exposure to books and their contents, through readings and interviews with men of religion, helped to develop her understanding of traits and beliefs that were of accepted orthodox practice. However, being described as 'not lettryd',¹⁸¹ Margery's primary learning and understanding is demonstrated in the *Book* as coming through oral and aural communication. Like Jesus in the book of John, Margery is shown in the *Book* to be capable of astounding others with her learning, despite lacking any knowledge of letters.¹⁸² Like Jesus, Margery did not record her devotional life, but had others copy her words down for her. Margery's 'ministry' was centred around a verbal delivery. It seems fitting, therefore, to conclude with a chapter examining orality and auralty, and the ways in which Margery Kempe's 'maner of leuyng' could operate from this background into that of a literate culture.

In this chapter section I will examine the type of communicative and expressive culture a woman of the late medieval period would have been exposed to when not being part of the literate world. Women seldom were considered literate as they were not trained in Latin, and even skills in reading and writing in the vernacular were often lacking.¹⁸³ They could feasibly be trained in the oral part of studying Latin, that is, learning to read and pronounce,

¹⁸¹ *BMK*, I.52.128.

¹⁸² John 7:15 and *BMK*, I.55.135.

¹⁸³ See, for example, de Hamel, 'Books and Society', pp. 32, 36.

while not understanding the grammar.¹⁸⁴ Books of knowledge were, strictly speaking, the domain of men, and although women could at times stray into this world, their role was often restricted to that of listener. Women's religious learning, then, often came from what they heard, whether, like Margery, from having books read to them, or, also like Margery, through dialogue with others, or listening to sermons and homilies.¹⁸⁵ But there is more than learning to this oral culture. The *Book* is also filled with examples of gossip, and slander, and reproof, there is language without understanding (Latin, German and Italian are referred to but not spoken by Margery), and there is language of the voice without words, exhibited through Margery's frequent outbursts of weeping and sobbing.

Women and Orality

As earlier explored in my sections on education and books above, women could, with the right background and determination, overcome the limitations placed upon them in regards to literate learning, but their commonly accepted, and habitual location, was within the traditions of oral culture, not of literacy.¹⁸⁶ Such traditions and prejudices involved an exclusion from gaining an education in

¹⁸⁴ de Hamel, 'Books and Society', pp. 32-3.

¹⁸⁵ See *BMK*, I.17.39 and I.58.143 for the readings. See also I.59.144: 'Thus, thorw heryng of holy bokys & thorw heryng of holy sermownys, sche euyr encresyd in contemplacyon & holy meditacyon'. Her conversations, such as with Richard of Caister, William Southfield, and Julian of Norwich in Chapters 17-18, occur throughout the book.

¹⁸⁶ On women circumventing such exclusions see, for example, Fiona Somerset, 'Eciam Mulier: Women in Lollardy and the Problem of Sources', in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2005), p. 247.

Latin, in particular its grammar, but also determined that the primary mode of communication and understanding for women was through verbal communication. The language of orality was the vernacular, the *lingua materna*, while Latin was the reserve of the educated, and of scholarly books.¹⁸⁷

Despite such a handicap, women of the late middle ages were able to merge with the world of books and literate men, as exemplified by Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Working from their oral traditions, such women were able to compose in the vernacular and either, in Julian's case, record their experiences themselves, or, as with Margery, do so through the assistance of a scribe.¹⁸⁸ However, differences could still occur between books produced by women or by men, through the influence an oral background, as opposed to a literate one, could and did have upon the writing:

orality and literacy are not only identifiable properties in books and manuscripts; they also indicate different theoretical ideas, social values, and ways of experiencing the world.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ See Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals, and Dissent*, p. 258.

¹⁸⁸ For medieval women and their dependence and influence on vernacular literacy distinct from Latinity, see D.H. Green, *A Room of Their Own? Women Readers in the Middle Ages*, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 17 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 2006), pp. 15-19. See also Bella Millett, 'Women in No Man's Land: English recluses and the development of vernacular literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries' in *Women and Literature in Britain*, ed. by Meale, pp. 86-103.

¹⁸⁹ Jesse M. Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century: Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics, and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. x.

Women used to learning and expressing themselves verbally would approach the recording of thoughts in books differently from the ways in which a literate man would. A background of strictly verbal training offered a distinctive perspective on life, with its own set of values, and its own approaches to the dissemination of memories and ideas:

orality and its attendant habits of mind not only played an important role in daily life but also exerted a powerful influence over the articulation of vernacular verse.¹⁹⁰

Medieval women were shaped by the limited role they were allocated to fill in society, by the part they were given within the Church, by the means by which they expressed themselves, and through the way in which they accumulated knowledge. They shared a unique perspective and means of understanding from their literate male counterparts, but this did not completely exclude them from influencing, or contributing to the written word.

A background in oral learning and communication meant that women (and many lay men) were completely reliant upon the spoken word, and upon memory. Lollard women were known to memorize prayers and passages of scripture, and could then vocally repeat them to others.¹⁹¹ Any knowledge gained was dependent upon women's capacity to register and store information in order to retrieve it at a later date, or by knowing whom they might approach to acquire

¹⁹⁰ Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, p. xv.

¹⁹¹ See McSheffrey, "Literacy and the Gender Gap", in *Women, the Book and the Godly*, ed. by Smith and Taylor, p. 164.

any lost information. Written work could obviously still be relayed, but this would entail its being read aloud, or re-told second-hand by others who were familiar with it. Also, although any written language may have been inaccessible to the illiterate, they could still gather information from illuminations.

Much information could be, and was, publicly disseminated through sermons, homilies, readings, and other oral forms of exchange.¹⁹² Living within an oral tradition did not necessarily imply ignorance of things literate, and in fact, it was often the case that verbal exchange was used as a more ready and practical means of transmitting written information.¹⁹³ However, there were certain disadvantages to being restricted to an acoustic rather than a visual mode of learning and information exchange, such as the limitations of time and place.¹⁹⁴ For anyone wishing their words to be captured for an indefinite period of time, and to be distributed among a wider audience, the written word had obvious advantages. Also, memory could be unreliable, even for those trained in such skills, and a chain of word-of-mouth exchanges could lead to disastrous corruptions of the original source.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p 159.

¹⁹³ For examples, as books were still relatively uncommon, memorizing and bringing back the words from the source, rather than the book itself, was a means of exchanging information. See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 161.

¹⁹⁴ See D.H. Green, 'Orality and Reading: The State of Research in Medieval Studies', *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 267-280, (p. 273).

¹⁹⁵ Jack Goody writes: 'The information stored in mnemonic systems is rarely verbatim, word for word, instead such systems present you with an object or a grapheme to remind you of an event or a recitation, which you then elaborate.' Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2000), p. 30.

Even within the male and literate world, oral traditions remained strong in the late medieval period. Monastery brethren often read aloud to one another, and reading aloud even in private was common practice. Speaking and listening were important faculties in learning and absorbing knowledge. Books may have become more common and accessible, but the spoken word was not replaced by them, but instead continued parallel with books as tools of learning and remembering.¹⁹⁶ Gellrich writes that ‘the practice of oral reading illustrates dramatically the controlling structure of the oral and aural word’, adding, ‘nor was composition a silent activity’.¹⁹⁷ He continues by observing how reading the written word ‘was synonymous with listening to the voice of its author: Spoken and written were recto and verso of the same communicative act’.¹⁹⁸

Oral communication remained a fundamental element of the medieval exchange and preserving of words, records, events and ideas. Although predominant among lay women as a means of expression, traditions of reading aloud, and delivering written words through speech were common to both genders and in all classes. Amodio writes how the medieval period ‘was a predominantly oral world’, and that ‘the vast majority of the population did not

¹⁹⁶ See, for example, Christel Meier who writes that ‘this does not mean to say that oral communication was succeeded or replaced by writing in some linear process, but that oral communication as well as literacy underwent a gradual process of mutual transformation.’ Meier, ‘Fourteen Years of Research at Münster into Pragmatic Literacy in the Middle Ages’, in *Transforming the Medieval World: Uses of Pragmatic Literacy in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Franz-Josef Arlinghaus and others, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy : 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), p. 25.

¹⁹⁷ Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion*, p. 14.

have access to the technology of literature'.¹⁹⁹ The fact that books were becoming cheaper, and more readily available was altering this, but it was a slow and gradual process that would continue until after the age of print. In this sense, women were not more disadvantaged than men, and the fact that Margery with relative ease was able to immerse herself in a bookish culture demonstrates that women were not entirely excluded from the literate culture either.²⁰⁰ As the oral culture was predominantly that of the vernacular, it did not therefore imply or demand any degree of skill in Latin.

Aurality

Oral communication requires an aural reception, and although the two are in this way interlinked, they remain unique functions with different, if complementary, roles to play in the exchange of words and meanings. Aural reception could apply to either words spoken from memory or free speech, or to words being read from a manuscript. To listen to words scripted in a book read aloud meant that one did not have to be literate to receive the information written within. While this does not necessarily imply that the information would always be understood (whether through language or content), it demonstrates that being illiterate did not necessarily imply a complete exclusion from the information contained in books. Both oral and literate practices could, therefore, be received through an aural context.

¹⁹⁹ Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, p. xv.

²⁰⁰ In fact Felicity Riddy argues how a document such as the Vernon manuscript can 'provide substantial evidence for the existence of a certain kind of female readership'. See Riddy, 'Women Talking About the Things of God', pp. 106-7.

Joyce Coleman writes about the significance of aurality in the medieval period as being ‘the modality of choice for highly literate and sophisticated audiences’, later adding that ‘it would seem logical to assume that less notable readers would also tend to read publicly, both because they too preferred that format and, possibly, in imitation of the habits of their social superiors’.²⁰¹ The relevance of this is that many books could be, and would have been shared through readings out loud, rather than being locked away for private, individual consumption. In fact, Coleman maintains that reading to oneself would have been considered abnormal, writing that: ‘Private reading emerged as dangerous unless practised by a reliable professional who would ultimately return his reading to a social context by preaching, teaching, or rewriting it’.²⁰² While Coleman’s study pertains mostly to an evaluation of aurality through the reading of secular books (for example: chronicles, romances, poetry and histories), evidence such as Margery Kempe’s listening to works by Rolle, Hilton and the pseudo-Bonaventura, demonstrates that religious books were shared in this way too.

There would be both advantages and disadvantages to acquiring learning through aural, as opposed to visual reception. For the illiterate the obvious benefit would come from being able to partake of words scripted on the page, and if a Latin text were used, to have a reader able to translate as they worked

²⁰¹ Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1-2, 110.

²⁰² Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public*, p. 179. I believe Carruthers best distinguishes the difference between reading aloud and reading to oneself as means of learning with the terms ‘viva voce’ (used in lectures and therefore meant for sharing with others), and ‘voce tenui’ (being used for memory and private meditation). See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 170.

through the text.²⁰³ Also, each reading would be unique, giving different stress to different sections, allowing for new insights and understandings. However, an aural reception is lost the moment it occurs, remaining only in the memory, while the words upon a page can be (theoretically, at least, as the book may not always be accessible) referred to often and will always remain constant (with the exception of annotations, commentaries, or deletions added later).

The still-pervading tradition of oral culture in the medieval period meant that preaching, teaching, readings, and the telling of tales were common and acceptable means of relaying information. However, boundaries existed in regards to who was allowed to do the speaking considering the context (who were the listeners and what was the setting), and whether or not the speaker's words might be considered heretical or seditious. Women might exchange knowledge with one another, and pass it on to their children, by word of mouth, without fearing the kind of reprisals they would suffer should they attempt to do so to an audience of men.²⁰⁴ Aural traditions meant that the learning of books could be shared with the illiterate, and that women, such as the fictional Wife of Bath, or the historical Margery Kempe, could by such means acquire knowledge, and the authority such knowledge carried with it.

Mark Amodio highlights the significance of aurality in the medieval period when he writes:

²⁰³ Although women could also take part in the translation of Latin into the vernacular, and not be 'merely passive recipients'. See Riddy, 'Women Talking About the Things of God', p. 107.

²⁰⁴ See, for example, how Margery's teaching/preaching is condemned by the friars at Canterbury, or by the Archbishop of York and his clerics in his chapel. *BMK*, I.13.27-29 and I.52.125-8.

Through the Middle Ages and beyond, information was for the most part received and processed aurally, not visually. Even as books came to be invested with more and more cultural authority and as that authority came to be widely recognized and accepted by the populace, the primary organs of transmission and reception remained, respectively, the mouth and ear.²⁰⁵

A woman like Margery would, according to such a formula, not be excluded from receiving information, and would still be able to stamp her authority vocally, without having to be literate. And yet we know that books were important to Margery, as the *Book* includes several mentions of different authors' works, and we see her actively (in Chapter 58) seeking their knowledge, and referring throughout the *Book* to matters in their content. And of course, the creation of *The Book of Margery Kempe* itself testifies to the importance set on having words recorded in script, in order to insure that the voice would continue to resonate through time.

Orality as a Manner of Living

[God] made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, p. 22.

²⁰⁶ II Corinthians 3.6.

These words of St. Paul express what many medieval people, from Augustine onwards, would have believed proclaimed the inferiority of writing over speech.²⁰⁷ In order to compensate for the lack of spirituality in the written word, a ‘text must be stripped of its literal layer, must be read allegorically for the philosophical or spiritual truths that lie concealed within it’.²⁰⁸ What is key in Paul’s understanding of the ideal method of communicating God’s truth, is that the spiritual ‘voice’ is predominant. Margery Kempe is described dictating her book to a scribe, she tells good tales to people, she wins arguments and teaches God’s will to others, and she hears the voice of God in her soul. It is Margery’s ‘wonderful spechys & dalyawns which our Lord spak and dalyid to hyr sowle’ that sets her apart as a blessed mystic, and gives her the voice of authority.²⁰⁹ Ironically, in order to proclaim this gift to others, to spread the knowledge further in time and space, it became necessary to use the written word.

The Book of Margery Kempe begins with an account of its production, which details how the subject of the book narrated her life story to a scribe that copied it down. Immediately a description of the two lifestyles, the oral and literate, is presented, and the relationship between the two is fraught with problems. Margery is said to relate her memories to the first scribe, whose insufficient skills in both English and German combine to produce a nearly incomprehensible confusion of words. The second scribe who is employed for the task of transcribing and completing the work of the first, refuses to finish the

²⁰⁷ See, for example, Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion*, p. 10. See also Copeland, ‘Why Women Can’t Read’, p. 256.

²⁰⁸ Copeland, ‘Why Women Can’t Read’, p. 257.

²⁰⁹ *BMK*, I.Proem.2.

assignment, while the priest-scribe who finally does manage to interpret it also, at first, declines to complete the task due to the difficulty of reading it, and because of the poor reputation of Margery.²¹⁰ What is apparent here is that there is a discrepancy between words that are stored in memory, which represent words once spoken and lived, becoming transposed into words upon a page. This apology for the inadequacy of such a process, suggests that written words detract from the credibility of the oral account, or at least that they cannot do them proper credit.

There are different moments in the *Book* where the ineffable nature of mystical experience is described. What this amounts to is how oral communication, or aural reception, whether heard as a spoken voice, or a voice inside the head (the *Book* describes it being heard ‘as pleylnly and as verily as o frend spekyth to a-noper be bodily spech’), is superior to anything recorded in writing. The books Margery heard read are listed as examples which do not match what she has experienced in her ‘wonderful spechys & dalyawns’ with God, we see this contrast marked in a distinct way.²¹¹ Even in the opening *Proem*, where an apology is also made for the difficulties experienced in constructing the *Book*, through the weakness of relying upon the workings of memory and an inadequate scribe, it is the language of the soul that is far superior to that which can ever be presented in words upon a page.²¹²

In Chapter 29 of the *Book*, when Margery is in Jerusalem taking communion on the Mount of Calvary, she receives ‘holy dalyawns þat owyr Lord

²¹⁰ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

²¹¹ *BMK*.17.39.

²¹² *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3.

Ihesu Crist dalyed to hir sowle', which is 'so hy & so holy', that she can never articulate the words again.²¹³ Experiencing the ineffable is nothing new for a mystic, but for Margery it may be seen as a means of strengthening her position in a faith where authority is largely maintained through interpreting the written word. God is said to speak directly to Margery (a fact we must take her word for, although 'proof' is given with tests of her revelations),²¹⁴ a gift given only to the truly blessed, and it becomes part of her agenda to prove the validity and authenticity of this contact. Margery's mystical gift of hearing God's voice, and speaking with him in her mind, sets her in a class with other holy women, and gives her a direct link to the highest authority.²¹⁵

In the medieval period, women were understood to read, when they did read, on a superficial level. This characteristic was also held to belong to those that communicated their thoughts vocally, rather than through writing. Walter J. Ong describes oral-based thought as 'aggregative' and 'situational thinking', rather than 'analytic, dissecting [...] and abstract thinking'.²¹⁶ Oral communication, as with how women were understood to digest the content of books, was deemed superficial and interiorized, but it was also a mode of exchange making use of 'maxims, riddles and proverbs' to generate ideas and to stimulate memory recall.²¹⁷ This is the type of language that Margery may have

²¹³ *BMK*, I.29.72.

²¹⁴ See, for example, the priest-scribe testing Margery in *BMK*, I.24.55-8.

²¹⁵ On the power of God's voice through revelation giving power to women over male literary authority see, for example, Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, pp. 34-40.

²¹⁶ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 73-74.

²¹⁷ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 141.



been exposed to through listening to sermons, exempla and homilies, and, in turn, is the language of her own tale of the bear and the priest in Chapter 52 of the *Book*.²¹⁸

In fact, Margery would seem, from the evidence present in the *Book*, to enjoy the telling of tales. In Chapter 13, when confronted by the angry monks at Canterbury, she begs leave to tell a tale, and then proceeds to tell a story of an individual that hired men to reprove him for his sins.²¹⁹ In Chapter 38 we hear of Margery meeting with a 'good man' in Rome, and during the conversation they strike up, she tells 'many good talys & many good exhortacyonys'. Indeed, they must have been very good stories, because not only does the man give her money, he responds with 'teryng of deuocyon & of compunccon', and is filled with 'comfort & consolacyon'.²²⁰ Again, in Chapter 43, we see Margery being paid for her 'good talys', this time to some fellow pilgrims on their return to England.²²¹ Similarly, in Chapter 44, Margery now exchanges 'good talys' with a 'worshepful man in Norwich', who later lends her money to buy white clothes.²²²

From such scenes we are shown how Margery manoeuvres her way through a male-dominated literate world with moral tales and stories from the scriptures. Her oral skills are refined enough to move people to tears and to generate a financial reward. In this way she can minister to others, using the

²¹⁸ *BMK*, I.52.126-7.

²¹⁹ *BMK*, I.13.28.

²²⁰ *BMK*, I.38.93.

²²¹ *BMK*, I.43.102.

²²² *BMK*, I.44.104.

Gospels, as she does in Chapter 52, for support of her actions. Her approach is similar to that of a priest giving a sermon, using textual support with the spoken word. She has no need of being literate to be familiar with the Bible; it is read aloud as part of the liturgy, and we know that Margery had it read to her together with doctors' commentaries.²²³ Repetition and learning by rote would be a common way of memorizing passages of scriptures.²²⁴

It is not so unusual that the spoken word plays such a vital role in Christian religion. Not only does it represent a significant part of the 'ceremonial and devotional life' within the community, it also has its highest example in Christ himself, who was not only described as 'the [spoken] Word', but, despite being able to read (and perhaps write?), recorded nothing in writing himself.²²⁵ Margery follows a precedent, then, set by the Church and the second figure of the Holy Trinity, of operating through the spoken word, whether through necessity or not. At the same time, however, her frequent references to books displays an ability to both acknowledge, and make use of the significance of the written word.

Oral traditions may retain a certain power, but there is permanence to the written word that does not apply to speech. 'Written words are residue. Oral

²²³ *BMK*, I.58.143.

²²⁴ Refer to my section on women and memory above for more on rote learning (pp. 53-6).

²²⁵ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 75. See especially 'though [Jesus] could read and write'. Reference is given by Ong for Luke 4:16, '[Jesus] went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read'. Ong seems to make the mistake of assuming that reading implies the ability to write. For Christ as the Word, see John 1:14. Christ did, however, write a message in the dust in the episode of the woman taken in adultery (John 8.8).

tradition has no such residue or deposit.²²⁶ Margery clearly respected this fact or would have found no need to have her own words and deeds committed to writing. The *Book* is proof of her confidence in the power of recording. Whatever her motivation, she was aware of how a wider audience could be reached this way. God says to Margery:

& so schal I ben worschepyd in erth for þi loue, dowtyr, for I wyl haue þe grace þat I haue schewyd to þe in erth knowyn to þe worlde þat þe pepil may wonderyn in my goodness[.]²²⁷

Without Margery's dictating this exchange to her amanuensis, having him transcribe it with pen and ink, God's revelation would have remained a secret verbal understanding unless she were present to relate it. Later, in the final chapter of the first book, we hear how 'þe writing of þis boke' was pleasing to many of the saints, the Virgin, and Christ himself.²²⁸ Margery may in many respects be locked in the world of oral traditions, but she is capable of stepping from it and of using the written word to her advantage.

Once her experiences had been recorded in the form of a book, it is likely that Margery assumed it would be read to others, just as she had heard works of Rolle, and Hilton, and St. Bridget of Sweden. Reading aloud was a common way of sharing the material in books, if not a means of entertainment or a stimulus for contemplation, and meant that a book-owner could possibly possess and enjoy

²²⁶ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 11.

²²⁷ *BMK*, I.84.206.

²²⁸ *BMK*, I.89.219.

the contents of a manuscript without being able to read themselves.²²⁹ Even in solitude reading vocally was not uncommon practice, and monastic readers would savour a sentence at a time, articulating the words and tasting their merit before continuing.²³⁰ Vocally expressing the words, rather than skimming across the pages in silence, no doubt aided such careful perusal. Ong states: ““Reading” a text means converting it to sound, aloud or in the imagination, syllable-by-syllable in slow reading or sketchily in the rapid reading common to high-technology cultures.”²³¹ Oral-based formulas continued to be used in late medieval texts, a possible clue to the intention, or habit of them being read aloud.²³²

Margery places great significance on the effect of the oral reception of holy words, whether through listening to books, or to sermons. She describes how they increase her contemplation and meditation abilities: ‘Thus, thow heryng of holy bokys & thow heryng of holy sermownys, sche euyr encresyd in contemplacyon & holy meditacyon’. In fact, so overwhelmed does Margery become by such inspirations that neither oral, nor literate skills are able to express ‘al þe holy thowtys, holy spechys, and þe hy reuelacyons which owr Lord schewyd vn-to hir’.²³³ Although Margery would have been considered to understand such readings in a literal, self-interested, ‘feminine’ way by literate

²²⁹ See, for example, de Hamel, ‘Books and Society’, p. 13.

²³⁰ de Hamel, ‘Books and Society’, pp. 6-7.

²³¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, p. 8.

²³² Parkes, ‘The Literacy of the Laity’, p. 572. The example given is ‘Lystenyth all and ye shall her’ being used as an opening formula.

²³³ *BMK*, I.59.144.

men of the period, it is clear from Margery's words that her response was deep and profound. Books (and sermons) were orally received, digested spiritually, and then transferred back into written form as a witness to such experiences.

Besides also listening to books and sermons, Margery is commonly shown conversing with learned religious men and women.²³⁴ Her frequent discussions with doctors of divinity and anchorites, bishops and archbishops, provides her with confirmation that her 'maner of levyng' is valid and not of the devil, as well as providing her with inspiration and support. Listing such meetings in the *Book* lends validation to her lifestyle, as both by her word, and by the fact that she was not charged with heresy, make her 'felyngys and hir revelacyons'²³⁵ appear to be true. Margery's actions demonstrate that a woman of the late medieval period, even in a time of Lollard persecutions and heresy trials, could actively seek meetings with high church authorities and speak with them in matters of Christian belief and lifestyle.

The oral world does not always work in Margery's favour, at least not to first appearance. Gossip and slander often rear their ugly face to her detriment, only to later be displayed as a kind of trophy of what she has endured in Christ's name. Margery is abused so frequently, in fact, that it becomes a running theme of the *Book*, where her (usually) verbal ill-treatment functions as a form of

²³⁴ See, for example, in the Proem, where, at the bidding of the Holy Ghost, Margery is said to seek the council of 'many worshepful clerkys, both archebysshoppys & bysshoppys, doctours of dyuynyte & bachelers also. Sche spak also wyth many ankrys'. *BMK*, I.Proem.3.

²³⁵ *BMK*, I.Proem.3. This terminology connects with Margery's 'maner of levyng' and will be explored later.

martyrdom, and Margery's endurance of such abuses appears next to saintly.²³⁶

In fact, a point is made of how she forgives her transgressors, and seems to invite, or at least welcome such assaults. Her resemblance to Christ's own suffering and forgiveness is highlighted in Chapter 44:

& þan wept sche ful sor for hir synne, preyng God of mercy &
forzeuenes for hem, seying to owr Lord, "Lord, as þu seydyt hanging on
þe Cros for þi crucefyerys, 'Fadyr, forzeue hem; þei wite not what þei
don,' so I beseche þe, forzeue þe pepyl al scorne & slawndrys & al þat
þei han trespasyd, 3yf it be thy wille, for I haue deseruyd meche mor &
meche more am I worthy."²³⁷

Margery is not always so magnanimous in her forgiveness, or in her desire to suffer oral abuse from others. In Chapter 33, she points out how it is her own countrymen that are stubborn in their scorn, and a particular priest is the worst offender. He dislikes her wearing of white, which she does more often than 'oper dedyn wech wer holyar & bettyr þan euyr was sche'. To this are added the words 'as hym thowt', implying, perhaps, that others, Margery included, may have thought otherwise. His malicious behaviour, as experienced by Margery, is given a different motive than merely disagreeing with her dress sense. This is that she will not obey him, as she 'wist wel it was a-geyn þe helth of hir sowle

²³⁶ She does suffer some physical indignities as well, for example having water poured over her head (*BMK*, I.55.137), and having her gown shortened (I.26.62).

²³⁷ *BMK*, I.44.107.

for to obeyn hym'.²³⁸ Margery is not afraid to confront authorities in oral exchanges, nor is she to be ruled by others (even priests) when it contradicts her own beliefs.

The reasons for Margery's taking so much abuse from others is the visual and vocal aspects of her manner of living. Her wearing of white may offend some, but it is her weeping and wailing, her speaking of the Gospels, and her rebuking of others (usually for swearing) that is the most frequent cause of prejudice against her. There appears to be something of the 'seen but not heard' attitude of many people towards her, and some would prefer she was not even seen in public. In Canterbury a monk wishes her to be 'closyd in an hows of ston þat þer schuld no man speke wyth þe', while in Beverley men say to her, 'forsake þis lyfe þat þu hast, & go spynne carde as oþer women don'.²³⁹ In both examples Margery is wished to be behind walls (in the first instance possibly an anchorage), behaving as a woman ought to behave, and not debating with men of religion in public places.

Accusations both false and true are made against Margery. Besides rebuking her for her weeping and teaching, people also accuse her of things she did not do. There is a particular description of such a moment in Book 2, Chapter 9, where the rumour of her selecting only the tastiest fish is refuted. In Chapter 44 another instance of slander occurs when people accuse her of 'þat sche seyð neuyr.' In fact, the entire section is worth reproducing as it neatly sums up the effect her vocal hysteria had upon some people:

²³⁸ *BMK*, I.33.84.

²³⁹ *BMK*, I.13.27, and I.53.129.

Sche howselyd euery Sunday wyth plentyuows treys & boystows
sobbyngys, wyth lowed cryingys and schille schrykyngys. & þerfor
many man & many woman wondyrd up-on hir, skornyd hir & despised
hir, bannyd hir & cursyd hir, seyde meche euyl of hir, slawndryd hir, &
born hyr on hande þat sche xulde a seyde thing wech þat sche seyde
neuyr.²⁴⁰

In the *Book* such moments work to her favour, as they appear to be manipulated towards promoting Margery as a saintly figure. In Chapter 63 there is an exchange of dialogue between Margery and God, where God reassures her after she has received abuse from a popular friar preaching in Lynn. She hears God tell her in her mind that the friar shall be chastised, and that his popular name will be thrown down while hers is raised up, that she shall be in church while he is outside, and that she will be loved by as many as have scorned her previously. To this is added:

In þis chirche þu hast suffyrd meche schame & reprefe for þe zyftys þat I
haue zouyn þe & for þe grace & goodness þat I haue wrowt in þe, and
þefore in þis cherche & in þis place I xal ben worschepyd in þe.²⁴¹

Margery may lose the war of words, or wills, with the friar in the minds of many parishioners of St. Margaret's in Lynn, but when the verbal promise from God is

²⁴⁰ *BMK*, I.44.107.

²⁴¹ *BMK*, I.63.156.

recorded in writing, her defeat is turned to lasting victory, at least for as long as the words remain upon the page.

Margery understands this oral communication with God as language similar to normal dialogue, rather than an ineffable kind of mystic communication. As Diane Uhlman observes, 'The contact is not *interpreted* as language, but *is* language'.²⁴² On different occasions Margery describes this communication as 'o man spekyn to an-oþer' and as 'pleynly and as veryly as o frend spekyth to a-noþer be bodily speche'.²⁴³ Margery understands God by the means she is most familiar with, and most skilled at. Since literate training does not pattern her thoughts, her verbal and aural contact with God is basic, direct, and suitable to her sensibilities. This aural communion with God is then orally relayed to her amanuensis, who commits it to written form. The comfort God offers Margery is extended to the readers of the *Book* as a 'comfortabyll for sinful wrecchys' with the hope of providing 'gret solas and comfort to hem'.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Diane Uhlman, 'The Comfort of Voice, the Solace of Script', p. 59.

²⁴³ *BMK*, I.81.195 and I.17.39.

²⁴⁴ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.1.

Chapter 2

Constructing a Book about Margery Kempe

Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* offers many elements of a devotional lifestyle that could be, and were indeed, introduced into *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

Each book set out to accomplish unique particular goals, and to reach a disparate kind of audience. They were constructed and presented in different ways.

Although each strives to be an inspiration or example for others, the paths taken to achieve this are significantly contrasting. An examination of who the books were addressed to, or what was their *raison d'être*, is significant in contributing to an understanding of Margery as a figure constructed from diverse written materials.

We learn from the respective authors who they considered their books to be addressed to in their prologue, or proem. For Rolle, although the *Incendium Amoris* is a 'dedicatory epistle',¹ he states that it is intended first to the 'simple and unlearned', and not to the 'philosophers and sages of this world', finally opening it up even to them, should they 'put behind them all those things that belong to the world'.² The *Book*, on the other hand, is described to be intended as:

a comfortabyll for synful wrecchys, wher-in þei may haue gret solas

¹ Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 117.

² Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trans. by Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 46-7.

and comfort to hem and vndyrstondyn þe hy & vnspecabyl mercy of
ower souereyn Sauyowr Cryst Ihesu [...]. Alle þe werkys of ower
Saviowr ben for ower exampyl & instruccyon, and what grace þat he
werkyth in any creatur is ower profyth yf lak of charyte be not ower
hynderawnce[.]³

Rolle begins with a narrow scope and then widens it out to potentially encompass all prospective readers. The narrative voice of the *Book*, on the other hand, aims directly for ‘all people’, that is to say, all sinful wretches (and since all people are sinful wretches since the Fall, therefore all are included). Where Rolle states a didactic intent and, for the most part, sustains it, the voice in the opening of the *Book* maintains that it is intended as an inspiration to others through the example of the mercy Christ showed to Margery, although there is no obvious, defining structure to the *Book* to support this particular purpose.

What makes the *Incendium* coherent, and the reason why it is relatively straightforward to interpret the intent of its author, is that we understand it to be the voice of one person. Furthermore, Rolle writes with experience and authority, in contrast to Margery, a lay secular woman, attempting to access spiritual authorization via a cast of (usually male) spiritual and ecclesiastical authorities. In contrast to Rolle’s *Incendium*, four people, the female subject and three male scribes, are collectively involved in putting the *Book* together. It is not always clear which voice we are hearing, as there are scribal interpolations, mixed usage of first and third persons, and moments where additions have almost certainly been made to the original copy. We have a mixture of what is understood to be

³ *BMK I.Proem.1.*

oral delivery and scribal recording. Furthermore, it is impossible to know when guidance may have been offered in the structuring of the *Book* and of the vita of its subject.

In this section I will examine the history of the title of the *Book*, and how this has contributed to our understanding, or interpretation, of its content. In the subsequent section I will look at the roles of the different scribes, and in what way each may have contributed in the process of converting speech into script. I will also be looking at the influence they may have had in the overall construction of the *Book*'s content. The final section will consider evidence existing within the language of the *Book* that reveals possible clues as to how the natures of the oral and the literal interacted in producing the description of a medieval mercantile woman's spiritual growth and experience.

(a) The Title of *The Book of Margery Kempe*

The Book of Margery Kempe is a title that would appear to relay obvious and essential information relating to the book that is credited as being the first autobiography in English.⁴ And yet the text now known as *The Book of Margery Kempe* did not have a title (as far as we know) from its inception, as it was added at a later date. The present title was introduced when a fragment of the book was printed in 1501 by Wynkyn de Worde with the heading informing the readership

⁴ See, for example, 'Margery Kempe's Own Story: The First English Autobiography', *The Times*, 30 September 1936, Special Articles, pp. 13-14. In this article, printed before the release of the Butler-Bowden edition, R. H. Chambers is quoted as saying that the *Book* is the 'first extant biography in the English tongue' (p. 14). Elsewhere it is said to be more accurately the first 'autohagiography': *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1250-1520*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and others (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), p. 84.

that it was ‘—taken out of the boke of Margerie kempe of Lynn’.⁵ That the book represents the religious life story of, a late medieval mercantile woman called Margery Kempe, is generally accepted. Although some, such as Lynn Staley, may question whether or not this Margery Kempe is the woman that both created and is portrayed in the book, the title is still generally considered to be a fair and correct representation of what the contents contain.

The obvious question is why is this significant? Is there any reason to challenge this title, or to attempt to deconstruct its meaning? To a modern reader it would appear to be very straightforward in meaning—this is a book purported to be dictated by a woman called Margery Kempe to three scribes, and whose content deals with her religious life. Not many would question the existence of the woman who is the subject of the *Book*. There is documentary evidence of a woman called Margery Kempe who was admitted to the Guild of the Holy Trinity in Lynn in 1438, and to her father and husband.⁶ What can be questioned about this heading, however, is the meaning behind the word ‘of’.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides sixty-three definitions for the preposition ‘of’, only one of which includes ‘[i]ndicating the maker or author of a work’.⁷ A near-contemporary example to that of the *Book*, which is provided by this definition, is that of a heading in the 1382 Wyclif *Bible*, ‘Heere bigynnith the epystle of saynt Jerom preest of alle the bokes of Goddis storye’. Another

⁵ *BMK*, p. xlvi.

⁶ See, for example, Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 10. Margery Kempe, *Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taught by her lorde Jhesu cryste, or taken out of the boke of Margerie kempe of lyn[n]* (London: Enprynted in Fletestrete by Wynkyn de Worde, 1501).

⁷ *OED*, ‘of’ 17. b.

definition gives a different meaning, and a very different understanding to the word ‘of’ in such a title: ‘Concerning, about, with regard to, in reference to’. This is further defined with: ‘In subject-headings, titles of chapters, etc., often without a vb’. In the case of Wynkyn de Worde, the selections of the *Book* are provided as a chapter in a collection of different writings. This interpretation can be validated by considering the use of the Latin ‘de’ in similar titles. Here, rather than ‘of’, the English translation is more correctly ‘about’.⁸ The *Medieval English Dictionary* too has a similar definition for ‘of’: ‘Concerning [...], with respect to, in respect of, with regard to [...] in chapter headings, introductory phrases, etc.’⁹

The incipit used by de Worde, as quoted above, introducing a quarto of seven pages of text, states: ‘a short treatyse of contemplation taught by our lorde Jhesu cryste, or taken out of the boke of Margerie Kempe of Lynn’. This selection of thoughts and sayings, taken from the complete *Book of Margery Kempe*, and eliminating the autobiographical detail, was re-printed by Pepwell twenty years later. In the Pepwell re-print, de Worde’s original title became paraphrased in the lines ‘Here endeth a shorte treatyse of a dououte ancre called Margery kempe of Lynne’.¹⁰ Perhaps it was merely assumed that she was an

⁸ For example in Wynkyn de Worde’s title, ‘Roberti Whitintoni Lichfeldiensis lucubrationes. De synonymis ... De epithetis ... De variandi formulis ... Experientiae ... De veterum Romanorum magistratibus’, in *Early English Printed Books in the University Library Cambridge*, ed. by Charles Edward Sayle, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), I, p. 44.

⁹ *MED*, 23b and 23b(b).

¹⁰ Extracts of *The Book of Margery Kempe* in: *Here foloweth a veray deuoute treatyse (named Benyamyn) of the myghtes and vertues of mannes soule, & of the way to true contemplacyon, compyled by a noble & famous doctoure a man of grete holynes & deuocyon, named Rycharde of Saynt Vyctor* (Imprynted at

anchoress, or for reasons of granting her spiritual gravitas, it was felt that this appellation ought to be assigned to her. There is, as Meech points out, no reference in the *Book of Margery*'s becoming an anchoress, nor is there any other written account of her having done so.¹¹

There are examples in other texts of both uses for the meaning 'of', whether as 'by' or 'about'. In the long list of de Worde's printed books we can see titles such as the 'Boke of husbandry', where the meaning is more clearly the latter definition, or similarly, 'The boke of good manners', or, '[...] the boke of keruyng'.¹² Examples of the other definition could include 'The meditations of saint Bernard', where the meditations are clearly understood to be 'by' Bernard.¹³ Here the meaning 'about' does not fit as it does for the *Book*, as we would not expect this to be a title dealing with meditations that were about Bernard. Rather, the expected and logical meaning, is that these are Bernard's meditations.

Besides titles, the text within medieval and early modern books and manuscripts similarly includes the use of the word 'of' meaning 'about'. In *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, Chaucer writes in the General Prologue,

For hym was levere have at his beddes heed

Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,

London: in Poules chyrchyarde at the sygne of the Trynyte, by Henry Pepwell, 1521).

¹¹ *BMK*, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

¹² *Early English Printed Books*, ed. by Sayle, I, pp. 50, 39 and 39 respectively.

¹³ *Early English Printed Books*, ed. by Sayle, I, p. 44.

Of Aristotle and his philosophie¹⁴

Although this might otherwise be construed to mean ‘by’ Aristotle, the meaning ‘about’ fits better because of the secondary link to his philosophy. These are books by, or about, Aristotle and his philosophy. The question then is, and it is a question that cannot be absolutely resolved, does the word ‘of’ in the *Book* refer to the author of the book, or the subject of it? Was the meaning of de Worde or of Pepwell (or associate) after him, that this was a book ‘about’ Margery Kempe, rather than the commonly understood ‘by’ her?

It is important that we recall the full title used by Wynkyn de Worde - *Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taken out of the boke of Margarie Kempe of Lyn.* Here the word ‘of’ is used to mean different things. It is a ‘short treatise’ because it is an edited selection of the original manuscript (as well as being the description it is given in the *Proem*), and what was selected were moments ‘of contemplation’, that is to say it deals with her contemplations, or is about them. They are taken ‘out of’ the book, or out from the book, that is ‘of Margery Kempe’, either by or about her, and she is ‘of’ Lynn, or from Lynn. A possible interpretation of this title could then be, written without using the word ‘of’: ‘Here begins a short treatise using contemplations taken from the book about Margery Kempe from Lynn’.

If we were to assume that the book’s title is meant to suggest that it concerns the woman Margery Kempe, rather than reflecting it is a book written by her, what might the implications of this be? Could it imply, for example, that the publishers had a problem with, or a misunderstanding of, who was the actual

¹⁴ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, lines 293-5.

author, or who it was that should be accredited with the writing of the book? Was their intention that the reader would approach this book (or parts of a book) knowing that they were to read something concerning Margery Kempe?¹⁵ Or was the word ‘of’, rather, used to intentionally cover both meanings—to designate that this was a book both authored by, and concerning, the woman Margery Kempe?

The idea of being the author of a book was not as straightforward in the fourteenth century as it is today. An author in the late medieval period could fill a combination of different roles:

Authorship in the Middle Ages was more likely to be understood as participation in an intellectually and morally authoritative tradition, within which [...] a writer might fill one of several roles, copying, modifying, or translating, as well as composing.¹⁶

Furthermore, it was often not so much the author as the material in the book they had prepared that was essential, and the true proof of a book’s value was the test of time:

¹⁵ It might be asked why the printer or editor(s) referred to above would not use the word ‘about’, or ‘concerning’, or ‘in regards to’, for example. Although I did find numerous other titles, besides those listed, printed by de Worde and using the word ‘of’ to mean ‘about’, I did not locate a single example where a replacement word was used. Notably, on the other hand, there is use of the word ‘by’ to mean ‘done by’ or ‘written by’ for example in the title, *Imitatio Christi. A full deuoute & gostely treatyse ... by ... John Gerson: and traslate ... by mayster wylyya atkynson ... at ye ... request ... of ... pryncesse Margarete ... Lodon by Wynkyn de worde. Early English Printed Books*, ed. by Sayle, I, p. 50.

¹⁶ *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by Wogan-Browne and others, p. 4.

Writerly authority also remained interdependent with that of the text, since texts were often recognized as *auctores* in their own right [...]. Well into the early modern period it was age, authenticity, and conformity with the truth, not individual genius, that was thought to confer authority on texts and authors.¹⁷

Devoting attention to the book and its content, rather than to the understood author, could lend strength to the belief that using ‘of’ in the title referred more to the meaning ‘about’, than that of ‘by’. What may appear more puzzling, perhaps, is that if we do assume that the title is intended to mean ‘about’ Margery Kempe, why did the first printed texts exclude the writing that was actually about her, that is to say, the autobiographical? It would seem that what was extracted from the *Book* were the words believed to be most inspirational and devotional. The printed abridged versions were treatises dealing with contemplations, not hagiographies or autobiographies.

The original de Worde heading is a sentence of two component phrases, that is, *Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon*, which describes the content of the new book, and, *taken out of the boke of Margarie Kempe of Lyn*, which denotes the source from which the material was extracted. It is the source text that is referred to as the *Book of Margery Kempe*, and it is that title for the text that was recycled by subsequent editors. For de Worde and later Pepwell, the subject matter of their books was not Margery Kempe, nor her life, but the contemplations that were attributed to her. It was this concentration on the more elevated style and thoughts of Margery that came to represent her until the

¹⁷ *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by Wogan-Browne and others, pp. 5-6.

discovery of the Butler-Bowden manuscript in 1934, and it was the fact that such a concentration was made, that the plainer, more self-absorbed sections that were later provided at first caused disappointment among some early scholars.

If compared with Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, we find the Cressy printed text of 1660 presenting the contents of the book, and the subject's role, in a more unambiguous way:

Revelations of Divine Love, Shewed to a Devout Servant of our Lord,
called Mother Juliana, an Anchorete of Norwich: Who lived in the Dayes
of King Edward the Third.¹⁸

Similarly, the scribal note to the only known manuscript of the short version introduces it as:

A vision schewed be the goodenes of god to a deuoute woman, and hir
name es Julyan, that is recluse atte Norwyche and zitt ys onn lyfe, anno
domini millesimo CCCCxiiij.¹⁹

In both instances, and the text appears to be following the manuscript as its example, we are told that what the book is 'about' is the vision, or revelations, shown to an anchoress known as Julian that was at Norwich. The subject of the

¹⁸ Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, 2 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), I, p. 6.

¹⁹ Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3.

book is directed away from the woman, and projected onto what she witnessed instead. Compare this with the Sloane 2499 long version in the British Library, which introduces the book with: 'These revelations were shewed to a simple creature that cowed no letter, the yeere of our lord 1373 the viiith day of May'.²⁰ Here Julian is referred to as 'a simple creature', similar to the usage of 'þis creatur' in the *Book*, but with the distinction of being simple, that is, unlearned or illiterate. *The Revelations of Divine Love*, then, is presented by the title to concern what God revealed to her (and how it was interpreted), while *The Book of Margery Kempe*, appears, in its 'final' form, to look more towards the life of the woman that is its subject.

I believe that it is a worthwhile endeavour to consider the *Book* from this different perspective, where 'of' means 'about' rather than 'by'. *The Book about Margery Kempe* shifts the emphasis and causes the reader to approach its pages with a different understanding of its focus. This focus is of a woman constructed from diverse materials which include: her memories, her direct and indirect knowledge of holy women with analogous experiences, and the interpretations provided by literate men, including the priest-scribe. Margery, as is shown throughout the *Book*, despite her being presented as an illiterate woman, is continually being associated with the literate world. Her identity depends upon books, and this association between the woman and books is a significant factor in understanding what *The Book about Margery Kempe* is about.

²⁰ *Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love*, ed. by Marian Glasscoe, rev. edn. (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1976), p. 2.

(b) The Scribes

According to the *Proem* of *The Book of Margery Kempe* there were four people involved, either in penning script onto the parchment, or in consultation of what had been, or was to be written. Besides Margery herself, whose role is said to be one of dictation, there were three male scribes, one of whom was paid for his services. What is not known for certain is if Margery Kempe is a reliable narrator, who the three scribes were, or how much influence they may have had upon the wording and structure of the *Book*. Because of this there has been, and probably will continue to be, a great deal of speculation as to who participated in the creation of the *Book*, and what its purpose might have been. In this section I will begin to explore the possibilities of how and why the *Book* took form.

Before Margery Kempe began to dictate her form of living to her first amanuensis she was, according to information provided in the *Book*, advised by others to do so. There are three occasions where such a recommendation is made to her, the first in the *Proem* where some ‘worthy & worshipful clerkys’ both attest to her being inspired by the Holy Ghost, and ‘bodyn hyr þat sche schuld don hem wryten & makyn a booke of hyr felyngys & hir reuelacyons’. Exactly who these clerics are is not said, but we do know that some of them even ‘proferyd hir to wrytyn hyr felyngys wyth her owen handys’.²¹ The second instance is when, in the *Preface* to the *Book*, ‘a Whyte Frer proferyd hir to

²¹ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3.

wryten freely yf sche wold'.²² Windeatt suggests that this White Friar might be her friend the Carmelite, Alan of Lynn.²³

The third proposal to have Margery's religious life recorded comes from no less than the Bishop of Lincoln, who grants her a meeting, listens to her relate something of her meditations and contemplations, and 'oper secret thyngys bope of qwyk & of ded', and then counsels her that 'hir felyngys schuld be wretyn'.²⁴ In each instance it is stated that it was too soon for her feelings and revelations to be written down, and that they would not be written for 'many zerys', or more specifically, 'xx zer aftyr & mor'.²⁵ Curiously, if in the *Book* it is stating that Margery would not have her manner of living recorded for over twenty years from her meeting with Bishop Philip Repyngdon in 1413,²⁶ than these offers and suggestions for her to do so are coming in the very early days of her 'conversion' and decision to live chastely. Although she has already begun her religious lifestyle, this would place the offers before her journeys abroad, before her prophecies and revelations, and before events such as her marriage to the Godhead, her wearing of white, and her intense weeping.

Perhaps an even more significant fact about these statements is, if Alan of Lynn was indeed the White Friar that offered to record Margery's vita, his writing experience is documented to have included preparing St. Birgitta's revelations and prophecies, as well as that of the pseudo-Bonaventura's *Stimulus*

²² *BMK*, I.Preface.6.

²³ Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 302.

²⁴ *BMK*, I.15.34.

²⁵ *BMK*, I.Preface.6, and I.15.34 respectively.

²⁶ For a chronology of Margery Kempe's life see *BMK* pp. xlviiii-li.

Amoris.²⁷ A more suitable man for the job could hardly be imagined. The question then arises as to why this offer was not sought again in twenty years time, when finding a scribe became so difficult. Also, why does the *Book* mention the fact that the offers or suggestions for recording were made three times? Despite the fact that an offer to write was already mentioned in both the *Preface* and in Chapter 15, the later-added *Proem* emphasizes this. And why does the White Friar remain anonymous, while Repyngdon is mentioned by name?

The biggest mystery concerning the copying down of the *Book* may well be that of the identity of the first scribe. The fact that has been noted is how similar the description of the first scribe in the *Proem* is to that of Margery's son in the beginning of Book II.²⁸ The *Proem* states that the first scribe was an Englishman by birth, who lived in Germany, was married and a father, knew Margery well, came to England with his wife, lived with Margery while acting as her amanuensis, and then died. All these details match with those given about Margery's son in Book II Chapters 1 and 2. The most telling clue may be found in these words:

²⁷ See, for example, Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 305. See also Allen's note in *BMK*, p. 259: 'Master Alan [...] made indexes to the *Revelations* of St. Bridget'. He also produced one index to the *Prophetiae Brigittae*—see Meech's note in *BMK*, p. 268.

²⁸ I will be considering, in particular, the comments and ideas put forward in this regard made by Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*'. In his essay, Watson refers back to John Hirsh who suggested, in 1975, that the first scribe was Margery's son (p. 397). See Hirsh, 'Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 171-200. Watson concurs and adds that the recording was probably done on his first visit, not the second, which was when he became ill and died, providing little time to accomplish the task.

sche openyd hir hert to hym, schewyng hym & enformyng how owr Lord had drawyn hir thorw hys mercy & be what menys, also how meche grace he had schewyd for hir, þe which he seyde he was vnworthy to heryn.²⁹

Watson refers to this section by stating ‘this passage reads like a veiled allusion to the composition of the first draft, one that movingly represents the *Book* as a mother’s confession to her son’.³⁰ In point of fact, it is not so terribly veiled at all. We could not expect much more explicit evidence without a direct ‘Margery’s son wrote the first copy of this book’.

The question arising from not coming out and speaking the plain truth is, ‘why would this be kept secret’? In a somewhat similar way we are kept from hearing what town Margery was from, the *Book* listing it only as ‘N’ at first, later revealing it as Lynn.³¹ One may wonder why her home town would remain anonymous, only to be revealed at a later date, in particular when Lynn and its internal social and religious structure comes to play a significant role in the *Book*. Two such examples of specific, revealing details about Lynn events are the squabble over the independence of St Nicholas Chapel from St Margaret’s Church, and the fire in the Guildhall.³² Even the protagonist of the *Book* is not at first exposed, as it is not until Chapter 11 that we hear the name ‘Margery’, and

²⁹ *BMK*, II.2.224.

³⁰ Watson, ‘The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*’, p. 399.

³¹ Lynn is mentioned by name, for example, in Chapter 61: ‘Than cam þer a frer to Lenne’, *BMK*, I.61.148. In Chapter 46 Margery refers to Lynn, her husband, and her father and their status (*BMK*, I.46.111).

³² *BMK*, I.25.58-60, and I.67.162-4 respectively.

much later in Chapter 45 that we learn she is John Brunham's daughter from Lynn.³³ Her 'full name' is not exposed until Book II Chapter 9, when she is recognised as 'Mar. Kempe of Lynne'.³⁴

The obvious reason why Margery might want her son's identity kept secret, is that it could seriously detract from any possible hopes of becoming beatified. To save a wayward son from a life of sin is one thing, but to refuse the services of a respected cleric such as Alan of Lynn, in preference to having a barely literate offspring record her vita, would not impress the cardinals in Rome. On the other hand, Margery's son probably understood his mother well, and despite not being a proficient scribe,³⁵ would have been a practical and affordable alternative to act on her behalf. However, by the end of the recording of the first Book, the first scribe, and Margery Kempe's son, are dead. Margery then takes the book to a second scribe, a priest whom she 'had gret affeccyon to',³⁶ and asks him to read it.

The second scribe is as much, or possibly more, of an enigma than the first. However, I will ignore him briefly to comment on the third, as his involvement amounts to the least of the three. This 'good man' had been 'mech conuersawnt' with the first scribe, and was familiar with his writing, having read correspondence of his sent 'fro be- zonden þe see whyl he was in Dewchland'.³⁷ And yet, despite this professed experience, and despite Margery's 'grawntyng

³³ *BMK*, I.11.23, and I.45.109.

³⁴ *BMK*, II.9.243.

³⁵ His lack of talent in either English or German being expressed by the second scribe in the *Proem*. *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

³⁶ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

³⁷ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

hym a grett summe of good for hys labour', he could not, or would not complete the task. The reason given is that 'þe boke was so euel sett & so vnresonably wretyn'.³⁸ And so, despite his familiarity with the first scribe's style, despite being well recompensed for his efforts, and despite the fact that the second scribe does eventually manage to read the original book, proving it is possible to decipher, this third scribe quits the responsibility. Again, as with so much of the *Book*, there appears to be more to this tale than is being told. His work amounted to no more than 'a-bowt a leef', and he succumbed to the difficulties of translating the first scribe's writing.

The second scribe, then, is the one that must have spent the most time working on the *Book*. His tasks would have included that of copying (the first scribe's writing, presumably in Margery's presence),³⁹ taking dictation (for Book II), and certain amounts of editing, if not also functioning on an advisory level. Some of these tasks will be considered in the next section on 'The *Book of Margery Kempe* in recognition of itself'. He also, according to the *Book*, experienced difficulty with his own feelings about Margery's authenticity as a holy woman, as he copied down those experienced by others. In this sense, his role shifts from passive to active.

The second scribe becomes part of the cause of Margery's suffering at the hands of doubters and ridiculers, and leaps from the pages, changing from an objective scribe into a priest of Lynn that doubts and ostracises Margery. This coming forth and becoming involved in the narration's action is made apparent

³⁸ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

³⁹ We learn in the *Proem* that she was 'sum-tym helping where ony difficulte was'. *BMK*, I.*Proem*.5.

already in the *Proem*, when it is revealed that the priest-scribe would ‘not for cowardyse speke wyth her but seldom, ne not wold wryten’.⁴⁰ Here, not only does he step forward as a character in Margery’s hagiography, he continues to record it as well, shamefacedly commenting upon his own cowardice in following others in their ‘euel spekyng’ of Margery ‘& of hir wepyng’.⁴¹ Watson even suggests that the two of them were not close friends, and that money may have been involved in his agreeing to provide services as an amanuensis, just as it was offered to the friend of the first scribe.⁴²

What the *Proem* tells us, in regard to the scribes of the *Book*, is how difficult it turned out to be for Margery to have her words transferred onto parchment, once she had felt that the time was appropriate to do so. And we must feel this to be significant, considering how much effort is exerted in describing the dictation and copying procedure. Why, in fact, was it deemed necessary to relate the sordid details of who copied what poorly, or who could not, or would not assist in the production of the *Book*? The simple response would be that it lent the added dimension of revealing how even her closest associates had doubts about her, doubts that, like Thomas before the resurrected Christ, become cast aside once convincing proof was provided. But perhaps of equal importance is the emphasis that is placed upon Margery’s situation within the aural and oral world, where her dependence upon men of literate skills is absolute. For twenty and more years Margery realises the necessity, the inevitability, of having her

⁴⁰ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

⁴¹ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

⁴² Watson, ‘The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*’, p. 408.

life and words preserved for posterity, but like so much of what happens to her, it does not come easily.

The question that Hirsh poses, and which Watson later addresses, is how deeply involved this second scribe becomes in editing or making additions to the *Book*.⁴³ Does the language of the *Book* divulge enough information to ascertain his role, whether as an indifferent, but perhaps slightly cynical employed cleric, or an enthusiastic devotee, or an intrigued yet undecided amanuensis? How important is it that we come to understand the voice of the book in order to comprehend the woman with the voice, and how this reflects upon her manner of living? This evidence of structure, or lack thereof, in the *Book* I will examine in the following section.

(c) *The Book of Margery Kempe in Recognition of Itself*

Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thing aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn. And þerfor sche dede no þing wryten but þat sche knew rygth wel for very trewth.⁴⁴

These words, along with the rest of the *Proem*, were added to the *Book* when the second scribe took over the task of copying. He did this in order to make clearer what was written in the earlier *Preface*. This we know from the lines that follow:

⁴³ See, in particular, Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', p. 400.

⁴⁴ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.5.

Whan he had wretyn a qwayr, he addyd a leef þerto, and þan wrot he þis
proym to expressyn more openly þan doth þe next folwyng, which was
wretyn er þan þis. Anno domini m.cccc.xxxvj.

A great deal of information is provided in these few lines about the production of the *Book*. We learn that there has been no attempt to construct it in chronological order, but instead that it is recorded as memory served the narrator. We learn that the narrator's memory, although seemingly good at remembering specific exchanges of dialogue (for example with the Archbishop of York in Chapter 52),⁴⁵ and certain dates and places, was apparently not trained or prepared for committing to memory the chronological order of details over twenty-plus years. And we learn that a long period of time has passed since some of the events occurred until the time when they were written down. Following a confession of an incomplete memory, it is then added that what has been remembered is not fabrication, but truth. This declaration of verity is added, presumably (and besides the obvious purpose of deflecting any notion that she is lying, or telling a story) to deflect any charges of recording incorrectly due to a faulty memory.⁴⁶

There are also those elements that may, with a reasonable amount of accuracy, be read into what is written. For example, it seems likely that the priest-scribe is the one that instigated this apology for lack of chronological order and incomplete memory. This likelihood is partly due to the fact that, in Chapter 16, the priest-scribe identified a serious error in chronological order, and added

⁴⁵ *BMK*, I.52.123-8.

⁴⁶ The fact that the narrator is unable to construct a sound chronological order can suggest that, because of not possessing the skills to put words to paper, notes were not made that could be referred to at a later date.

before the start of Chapter 17: 'Rede first þe xxi chapetre & þan þis chapetre aftyr þat'.⁴⁷ Another clue to the priest-scribe's becoming involved by editing the text he is copying, comes at the end of Book I, when an apology is made for the first scribe with the words:

þow þat he wrot not clerly ne opynly to owr maner of spekyng, he in hys maner of wrytyng & spelling mad trewe sentens þe wech, thorw þe help of God & of hir-selfe þat had al þis tretys in felyng & werkyng, is trewly drawyn owt of þe copy in-to þis lityl boke.⁴⁸

Despite being clearly disheartened by the first scribe having 'so euel wretyn'⁴⁹ the original version, the priest-scribe condescends to praise him for making 'trewe sentens', despite it being in his own manner of spelling and writing. By being *trewe* it is 'authentic' and 'genuine', but it is also 'proper' and 'correct', as well as possessing 'the expertise belonging to a particular craft or skill'.⁵⁰ The first scribe's *sentens* is his 'way of thinking', but it also 'a judgement', 'knowledge' or 'wisdom', or 'an authoritative pronouncement or teaching'.⁵¹ That is to say, as in the *Proem* where the narrator is said to 'no þing wryten but þat sche knew rygth wel for very trewth',⁵² the authority of the *Book* is attested

⁴⁷ *BMK*, I.16.38.

⁴⁸ *BMK*, I.89.220.

⁴⁹ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

⁵⁰ *MED*, *trewe* (*treue*) 9.(a), 10.(a) and (e).

⁵¹ *MED*, *sentens* (*sentence*) 1.(a), 2.(a), 3.(a), and 4.(a).

⁵² *BMK*, I.*Proem*.5.

by declaring the genuineness and authority of its content, despite the lack of skill of its original scribe.⁵³

The lines referring to the priest-scribe's writing of a quire, and then a leaf (see above), are similarly telling, and reveal aspects of the *Book's* production. Not only does this mention of his involvement in the production of the *Book* expose a moment when an error is discovered in the chronology,⁵⁴ it also enlarges the literate background of the amanuensis, using, as he does, the jargon of book production. The use of the words 'proym' and 'tretys' further suggest a literate contribution. The priest-scribe apparently does become involved in revising the original copy, and yet his contribution is limited; whether this is by his own choice or not is unclear. Uhlman suggests that maintaining the book on a level that best expresses the oral background of its subject indicates that this is a strategy contrived to emphasise that the *Book* contains exclusively the words of Margery Kempe, and that it has not been revised.⁵⁵ If this were true, it would certainly restrict the degree to which the priest-scribe could become involved.

However, it could also be that the priest-scribe simply did not care to become too involved, that he felt his current contribution put him in precarious enough a position, seeing that some influential people opposed her, and that he too had displayed doubts on more than one occasion. There can be no certainty

⁵³ Diane Uhlman further accentuates this by linking information given about the 'laywriter' (the first scribe), his 'good knowlach' of Kempe, and the fact that he worked very closely with her, as evidence of declaring the authenticity of the *Book*. Uhlman, 'The Comfort of Voice', p. 53.

⁵⁴ Watson calculates that a quire would bring us to Chapter 16, which is where the error in chronology is amended with an addition by the priest-scribe. Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', p. 400.

⁵⁵ Uhlman, 'The Comfort of Voice', p. 56.

as to the reason why the priest-scribe did not play a bigger part in respect of the structure and content of the *Book*, any more than there can be that the words within it belong entirely to Margery Kempe of Lynn. There is also the possibility, however, that the scribe-priest chose subtly to manipulate his particular skills and influence in order to substantiate the oral dominance of the voice of Margery Kempe.

Besides instances of the priest-scribe's intervention previously mentioned in this thesis, for example the parallel drawn between himself and the priest who doubted the authenticity of Marie d'Oignies' tears, there exist further moments in the *Book* where the priest-scribe intercedes in the narration. Book II of the *Book* also holds examples of the priest-scribe stepping directly into the frame of the telling of Margery's life, where his voice can be authenticated by the fact that the first amanuensis died after completing Book I.⁵⁶ For example, the priest-scribe expresses himself in Chapter 3 of the second book: 'Wyth swech maner of dalyawns, and mech mor hy and holy than evyr I coude writyn, owr Lord comfotyð hys creatur'.⁵⁷ Here a significant change of voice occurs, as the priest-scribe switches to the first person, and strengthens both the ineffable nature of Margery's gifts, and the weakness of his use of the written word.

Another moment when the priest-scribe intervenes in the narration of the *Book* comes in the following chapter. In Chapter 4 of Book II, the second amanuensis now refers to himself in the third person as he defends his literate

⁵⁶ *BMK*, I.89.220. 'Her endith þis tretys, for God toke hym to hys mercy þat wrot þe copy of þis boke [.]' As the first scribe did not participate in the recording of Book II, we can be certain of the amanuensis's voice being that of the priest-scribe.

⁵⁷ *BMK*, II.3.230.

skills by explaining why there may be misspellings in place names referred to in the *Book*:

Yf the namys of placys be not ryth wretyn, late no man merveylyn, for sche stodyid more aboute contemplacyon than the namys of the placys, and he that wrot hem had nevyr seyn hem, and therfor have hym excusyd.⁵⁸

Besides defending his own position, the priest-scribe also supports his subject, by explaining how literate things such as place-names were not important to Margery, as her concentration was more upon her contemplations.

The *Book* can be seen to display a ‘superiority of spoken language to communicate thought’, where there is a ‘grounding’ of ‘the credibility of writing on the spoken word’, a somewhat natural consequence, perhaps, of the fact that the subject is said to be an illiterate woman.⁵⁹ Naturally the spoken word, or her vocal crying or wailing, is Margery’s preferred, and only substantial mode of expression. Indeed, the very notion of using a literary device to centralize the authority of her speech, and reveal it to be a more powerful mode of communication than writing, would be more appropriate as a tool in the hands of the priest-scribe, working on her behalf. The more that the scribal literate authority was to tamper with the verbal narration, the more the ineffable nature of that voice would be lost, and with it, Margery’s strength and authority through her oral and aural communications with God.

⁵⁸ *BMK*, II.4.233.

⁵⁹ Uhlman, ‘The Comfort of Voice’, p. 62.

If we are to rank the importance of the oral word over that of writing, it is also necessary to bear in mind that there is a distinction between the oral word and the ‘holy medytacyon of hy contemplacyon & wonderful spechys & dalyawns which owr Lord spak and dalyid to [Margery’s] sowle’.⁶⁰ Although Margery seems, at times, to be understanding such contemplations as vocal speech, just as she appears to see meditations as real events in which she is physically partaking, the subject or writer of the *Book* is mindful enough to include phrases such as ‘to hyr sowle’. This communication between God and mortal is surely on a different level than that of everyday oral communication. Margery describes this ineffable experience by saying: ‘yf sche cowd or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt’.⁶¹ Margery’s words can be heard and understood, but only the select few can contemplate the will of the Almighty. Christ himself spoke directly with God, while others recorded his words. Margery lays claim to possessing such a skill. In fact, she is not always aware of the communication exchanged between them:

and I telle þe trewly, dowtyr, euery good thowt & euery good desyr þat þu hast in þi sowle is þe speche of God, al yf it be so þat þu her me not spekyng to þe sumtyme as I do sumtyme to þi cler vndirstondyng.⁶²

⁶⁰ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.2.

⁶¹ *BMK*, I.17.39.

⁶² *BMK*, I.84.204-5.

The closing two chapters of the *Book* are as consequential to the *Book* in recognition of itself as is the *Proem*. Once again we see the relationship between subject and scribe; this time it is the first amanuensis:

Whan þis booke was first in wrytyng, þe sayd creatur was mor at hom in hir chamber wyth hir writer & seyde fewer bedys for sped of wrytyng þan sche had don zerys be-forn.⁶³

Here it would appear that Margery is feeling that the writing process is obstructing her ability to worship, and therefore to please God. This interference of her writing upon her prayer is illustrated by her saying fewer beads than she had done for years. It is a somewhat curious detail as, earlier in Chapter 84, God had said to her that ‘þu maist ben an ypocrite yf þu wilt [...] in many bedys byddyg [...] þat men may se it’.⁶⁴ Clearly God is not interested in Margery’s praying with beads, which is done for her own satisfaction, and perhaps for being seen doing it. And yet Margery is apparently feeling uncomfortable about not being visible with her beads, that hidden away with her amanuensis, she is not only not heard, but not seen as well. But God provides comfort in his assurances that the writing of the book must take priority as, through it, ‘many man xal be turnyd to me & beleuyn þerin’.⁶⁵ And so it is revealed that the *Book* is not only to be a comfort for sinful wretches, but that it shall turn people to God as well.

⁶³ *BMK*, I.88.216.

⁶⁴ *BMK*, I.84.205. Earlier, in Chapter 5 (I.5.17), God had requested that Margery should desist with her praying of many beads.

⁶⁵ *BMK*, I.84.205.

It might be asked if this is a clue to an intent, or belief, that the *Book* would carry outside of the Christian realm and be read by, and influence the belief of, heathens. Perhaps this is why Margery is represented praying for the Jews and Saracens.⁶⁶ Of course, it could also signify intent to recover the souls of false heretics, thieves, adulterers, and other ‘Christian’ sinners (‘synful wrecchys’). The idea might be linked with the fact that the *Book* also seems to indicate a belief that Margery would one day become a saint, as God prophesies that one day he would be worshipped through her (in St. Margaret’s in Lynn).⁶⁷

In the episode of Chapter 88 we see the first scribe working intimately and intently together with ‘þe sayd creatur’. He is spending much time at her home, in her chamber. The image provided suggests devotion to the work exhibited by both. Not only are they linked in a close bond at work, but also at worship: ‘For, þow ze wer in þe chirche & wept bothyn to-gedyr as sore as euyr þu dedist, zet xulde ze not plesyn me more þan ze don wyth zowr writing—’.⁶⁸ Although the construction of the sentence does not declare that they actually *do* weep together in church, the bond between them is nevertheless deliberately stated. There is a congruence displayed here between laywoman and narrator and her scribe—oral with written traditions. It is of obvious importance, just as it was in the beginning of the *Book* with the priest-scribe, to conclude with an image of a good working partnership.

Despite this connection between the two, however, any strong bond between narrator and scribe does not always come across as convincing. Any

⁶⁶ See, for example, *BMK*, II.10.250.

⁶⁷ *BMK*, I.63.156.

⁶⁸ *BMK*, I.88.216.

doubt regarding a deep understanding between them is partly because we know the priest-scribe had doubts about her authenticity on different occasions (in Chapters 24 and 62). In fact, we are told in Chapter 24 that he tested her ‘many tymes’ about her feelings, requiring her to prove she was receiving revelations from God. Despite the chapter’s ending with the priest acknowledging that ‘þe forseyd creaturys felyng was trewe’, he nevertheless doubts her again when the preaching friar in Lynn sets people against Margery.⁶⁹ Watson argues that ‘they were not in fact close friends’, basing this assertion partly on the fact that the priest-scribe ‘cannot be identified with any of the named clergy in the *Book*’.⁷⁰ The anonymity of the priest-scribe, although it may serve the function of not detracting from the subject and her oral dominance, withholds from the *Book* the kind of support that Cardinal de Vitry gave to Marie d’Oignies’ vita, or Bishop Alphonse could lend to Birgitta. Of course, it may also be that he lacked such authority, and therefore, was not named.

And yet, this doubt and hesitation on the part of the priest-scribe is another example of one of the intriguing, beguiling, and frustrating aspects of the *Book*. Such a strategy of construction, where the priest-scribe is left anonymous, may seem a questionable tactic, where benefit is mixed with disadvantage. On the one hand the narrator and scribe relationship may appear weakened through his having doubts about her, while on the other we could see such a hesitation in a reinforcing sense, analogous to Thomas’s doubts about Christ. Margery’s character depends to a large degree upon her being a martyr to the doubt and persecution of others. When the priest-scribe also expresses reservations or

⁶⁹ *BMK*, I.24.55.

⁷⁰ Watson, ‘The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*’, p. 408.

misgivings, it appears to be more part of a tactical ploy than a lasting loss of his belief in her. Margery's lifestyle is hard to accept since it breaks the boundaries of what was acceptable practice, and even those close to her express hesitation about it. Also, the more Margery is shown to be alone and isolated, the stronger her Christ-like martyrdom becomes.

The first book of the *Book of Margery Kempe* ends in the way that it begins, with an apology for the difficulties experienced in relaying feelings, and yet asserting that a revelation Margery experiences 'was very trewth'. It also records, conversely, that 'sumtyme þat sche vndirstod bodily it was to ben vndirstondyn gostly'.⁷¹ The final chapter of what was the original close of the *Book* leaves the reader or listener wavering in the uncertainty that plagued Margery throughout her religious life, and sent her constantly in search of verification of her revelations and contemplations from those with authority. Where strength is sought by confessing to weakness, the reference to such weaknesses can detract from the desired effect. The *Book*, by exposing its own inadequacies in an attempt to confront them and thereby overrule them, may instead be seen to achieve the opposite and create more doubts than reassurances. However, as much as the *Book* can be seen as a confusion of voices and purpose, there is a final satisfying note in the closing part of the final chapter of Book I that may well be the voice of the priest-scribe: 'But euyr blissyd mote God ben, for he mad hir al-wey mor myty & mor strong in hys loue & in hys drede & 3af hir encres of vertu wyth perseuerawns'.⁷²

⁷¹ *BMK*, I.89.220.

⁷² *BMK*, I.89.220. Since the following final sentences certainly are those of the priest-scribe, it is feasible that he added these as well to build up the impression of Margery forever gaining in devotional strength through her constant adversities.

Finally, if we return to the idea of the *Book* being ‘about’ Margery Kempe, rather than interpreting it as being ‘by’ her, and the scribal activity was as I have described, then it follows we should regard the *Book* less as a dictated autobiography, and more as a confluence of the oral and the literate worlds. For Margery these worlds met within her own experience, partly through the books that she heard read, but also in the life, or ‘maner of leuyng’ that she led. Most significantly, however, the oral and literate worlds met in the creation of the *Book*, where Margery discovered her key encounter of this confluence in the writing of a book about her. Margery Kempe’s ‘maner of leuyng’ ultimately becomes the process of transcribing this experience.

(d) *The Book of Margery Kempe: A Mosaic of Genres*

Just as Margery Kempe, as a devotional figure, can be seen to be a construction inspired by different holy women, in addition to borrowing aspects of, or confirming herself, through various religious writings, so too can the *Book* be considered an amalgamation of different literary influences. There is, within the pages of the *Book*, mention of letters, a will written to God, and prayers, that reveal a familiarity with such forms of writing. But besides the ‘bookish’ references to be found, there are also aspects of different literary genres contained within the *Book*. Despres observes how there are ‘elements from hagiography, gospel harmonies, and mystical treatises’ within the *Book*’s ‘hybrid’ construction.⁷³ To this might be added a pilgrim’s, or travel book.

⁷³ Denise Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late Medieval Literature* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1989), p. 60.

Slotting the *Book* into an appropriate category is difficult, in part because the genre it is most commonly placed within, that of autobiography, was unique for writing in the vernacular at the time. In fact, the *Book* is commonly called the first autobiography in English.⁷⁴ However, other descriptions of the *Book* have been assigned to it, such as hagiography, which seems more appropriate to how it would have been received by Margery's peers. Boffey comments on how the *Book*, due to the priest-scribe's transcribing and occasional interventions, would have been seen more as biography than autobiography by medieval readers, making it 'a recognizable semi-hagiographic genre rather than an untrustworthy, possibly even a potentially vainglorious, outpouring of self'.⁷⁵ And yet the way in which Margery, or the priest-scribe, appear to have understood the writing they were creating, falls under yet another category, that of (mystical) 'tretys'.⁷⁶

Boffey writes about the popularity of the genre of the saint's life, and observes how, although the stories tend to end in the demise of their subjects, the saint can live on in miracles that are said to occur because of them.⁷⁷ She also states how 'the aim of these stories is less to warn, more to hearten and encourage'. When looking at the *Book*, we find that it is dedicated as 'a comfortabyl for synful wrecchys'.⁷⁸ We also see how Margery is told by God that:

⁷⁴ See, for example, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Windeatt, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Boffey, 'Middle English Lives', p. 630.

⁷⁶ *BMK*, I.Proem.1.

⁷⁷ Boffey, 'Middle English Lives', p. 618.

⁷⁸ *BMK*, I.Proem.1.

þer may non hert thynke ne tunge telle þe gret loue þat I haue to þe,
and þat I take witnes of my blissyd Modyr, of myn holy awngelys, & of
alle þe seyntys in Heuyn, for þei alle worschep me for þi lofe in Heuyn.
& so schal I ben worschepyd in erth for þi loue, dowtyr, for I wyl haue þe
grace þat I haue schewyd to þe in erth knowyn to þe worlde þat þe pepil
may wonderyn in my goodnes & merueylyn of my gret goodnes þat I
haue schewyd to þe þat hast ben synful, & be-cawse þat I haue be so
gracyows & merciful to þe, þei þat ben in þe worlde xal not dispeyrin, be
þei neuyr so synful, for þei may han mercy grace 3yf þei wil hem-self.⁷⁹

Further, Margery is associated with martyrdom on different occasions in the
Book, such as in Chapter 84:

Forþermor, dowtyr, I thanke þe for þe general charite þat þu hast to alle
þe pepil þat is now in þis worlde leuyng & to alle þo þat arn for to come
in-to þis worlde ende, þat þu woldist ben hakkyd as small as flesche to þe
potte for her lofe so þat I wolde be þi deth sauyn hem alle fro
dampnacyon 3yf it plesyd me, for þu seyst oftyn in thy thowt þat þer arn
j-nowe in Helle & þu woldist þat þer xulde neuyr mo men deseruyn for
to comyn þerin.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *BMK*, I.84.206.

⁸⁰ *BMK*, I.84.204. The image of Margery being chopped up as small meat for the pot, in a martyr-like gesture, is also seen in I.57.142.

Margery, then, can be seen as a saintly figure within the framework of a hagiography, as she imagines herself being offered as a martyr,⁸¹ inspiring others, and living on after death through miracles in her name.⁸²

Boffey also comments how popular the genre of the saint's life was, and how it became 'firmly established as recommended pious reading' in the latter part of the Middle English period.⁸³ Saints' festivals were an important part of the church calendar, and their assigned days were good memory guides for recalling significant events. Margery often refers to specific days in the church calendar, and to individual saints, an indication that she was familiar with saints' days, and saints' lives.⁸⁴ Such use of a 'spiritual time' gives Margery's devotional life order,⁸⁵ as well as providing the *Book* with structure that it otherwise lacks due to poor chronology.⁸⁶ This lack of a strong chronological order, which was not revised or improved by the priest-scribe, is ingeniously explained by Uhlman as being due to the need to 'preserve characteristics' of Margery's 'oral dictation process'.⁸⁷ However, there may be a more bookish

⁸¹ See also Margery's imagined beheading in *BMK*, I.14.29-30, and her willingness to be laid naked on a hurdle and have mud and slime thrown at her, for the rest of her life in I.77.184.

⁸² In *BMK*, I.63.156, God tells Margery that he will come to be worshipped through her in St. Margaret's church in Lynn.

⁸³ Boffey, 'Middle English Lives', pp. 618-19.

⁸⁴ For example, in Chapter 35, when Margery has her marriage with the Godhead, it is on St. Lateran's day. *BMK*, I.35.86.

⁸⁵ Despres, *Ghostly Sights*, p. 78.

⁸⁶ The idea of the *Book* having an order beyond that of a chronological one is something that I examine in the beginning of chapter 4, on Books of Hours.

⁸⁷ Uhlman, 'The Comfort of Voice', p. 56.

explanation to be found in the Gospel narratives tradition and hagiography, where ‘an otherwise disunified montage of events’ is transformed ‘into spiritual autobiography’.⁸⁸

This kind of working of ‘disparate narratives’ into hagiographic lives ‘purely about spiritual experience’ is in turn reminiscent of the Franciscan affective tradition, linking a life to scriptural events, and in particular the humanity and suffering of Christ.⁸⁹ Margery’s longsuffering nature,⁹⁰ witnessed throughout the course of the *Book*, together with her meditations on the Passion and life of Christ, easily fits into this Franciscan tradition, and provides the *Book* with a framework, or at least an organising principle, to compensate for the lack of chronological order. The two elaborately described meditations experienced by Margery concern the Nativity, and the Passion of Christ; both were significant elements within Franciscan spirituality.⁹¹ These meditations can be seen as the foundations from which the rest of the *Book* is supported, coming as they do at either end of the life described within its pages.⁹²

There is also the link between the *Book* and devotional treatises, firstly from the assertion made in the *Proem* stating that is what the book is meant to be,

⁸⁸ Despres, *Ghostly Sights*, p. 20.

⁸⁹ See Despres, *Ghostly Sights*, p. 16. See also Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics*, pp. 295-96.

⁹⁰ Boffey compares Margery’s trials and tribulations (or ‘life and revelations’) with the ‘most affecting and edifying of saints’ lives’. Boffey, ‘Middle English Lives’, p. 631.

⁹¹ See, for example, Despres, *Ghostly Sights*, p. 5.

⁹² The meditations upon St. Anne, the Virgin Mary, and the Nativity, are found in *BMK*, I.6.18-19, while the Passion sequence covers Chapters 79-81 (pp. 187-197). Margery also meditates on the offering of Christ in the temple by Mary in *BMK*, I.82.198.

and secondly from the similarities between the *Book* and other devotional treatises mentioned within its pages.⁹³ Unlike other mystical treatises, however, such as the Franciscan pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, there is little instruction or advice provided in the *Book* (not surprising considering Margery did not have the authority to bestow devotional education), but instead it is intended to be used as a ‘comfort’, and an inspiration, by following how ‘a synful caytyf’ was turned by God ‘to entren þe wey of hy perfeccyon’.⁹⁴

Finally, there is to be found in *The Book of Margery Kempe* the suggestion of a pilgrims’, or travel book, examples of which circulated in Margery’s lifetime.⁹⁵ The travels of the (most likely fictional) John Mandeville are an example of the latter.⁹⁶ Part of these travels includes a journey to the Holy Land,⁹⁷ which is almost certainly based on a factual visit by the true author of the book, while other elements are more obviously fictional. Interestingly,

⁹³ For example, the *Incendium amoris* and the *Stimulus amoris*: see *BMK*, I.17.39.

⁹⁴ *BMK*, I.Proem.1 and 2. The *Meditationes Vitae Christi* was addressed to a Poor Clare, but not strictly intended for the enclosed. In the Franciscan tradition, it proposes the *imitatio* as the true path of righteous living. See Despres, *Ghostly Sights*, p. 35.

⁹⁵ For more on Margery and female pilgrims see: Caroline M. Barron, *Pilgrim Souls: Margery Kempe and Other Women Pilgrims*, The Confraternity of Saint James Occasional Paper 6 (London: The Confraternity of Saint James, 2004).

⁹⁶ John Mandeville, *Mandeville’s Travels*, ed. by M.C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

⁹⁷ For books of the Holy Land, see, for example, *Guidebook to Palestine (ca. 1350)*, ed. by J.H. Bernard, 6 (London: London-Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society, 1897, nr. 3), and *John Poloner’s Description of the Holy Land (ca. 1421)*, trans. by A. Stewart, 6 (London: London-Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society, 1897, nr. 4). See also Hoade, Fr. Eugene, ed., *Western Pilgrims: The Itineraries of Fr. Simon Fitzsimons, O.F.M. (1322-23), A Certain Englishman (1344-45), Thomas Brygg (1392) and Notes on Other Authors and Pilgrims*, ed. by Fr. Eugene Hoade, O.F.M. (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1952).

Mandeville, like Margery, asserts that the book he has written is the truth.⁹⁸ The *Book* itself mentions a pilgrims' guide, *The Stacions of Rome*, which explained to the medieval religious tourist what pardon could be received through visiting the various holy places of Rome, and saying prayers, or performing tasks.⁹⁹ Saints play a significant role in this guide, as churches are often dedicated to them, or house relics or tombs belonging to them, while saints' days could increase the indulgences given.¹⁰⁰

While it could not be said that the *Book* attempts to be either a travel book or a pilgrim's guide, pilgrimage certainly plays a key part in its content, and Margery was unquestionably a well-travelled woman. Detail is scarce of places in the Holy Land, or of any of her travels, and its role is often incidental to what is happening to Margery. Nevertheless, elements, or qualities of travel and pilgrim books do exist in the *Book*, and contribute to the blend of other genres that lend to it a final shape. More certain are the influences of mystical treatises, saints' lives, and gospel harmonies upon the *Book's* construction and purpose. *The Book of Margery Kempe* is 'bookish' for the way it can be seen to bear 'analogies between contemporary literary genres and the modes in which [Margery] retrospectively constructs her life'.¹⁰¹ This assemblage makes it intriguing, but what makes the *Book* unique is the way an allegedly illiterate

⁹⁸ See, for example, P. Hamelius, ed., *Mandeville's Travels*, EETS o.s. 153 (London: Oxford University Press, 1919; repr. 1960), p. 4.

⁹⁹ *BMK*, I.39.95. Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *The Stacions of Rome, Pilgrims Sea-Voyage, and Clene Maydenhod* (London: N. Trübner, 1867).

¹⁰⁰ For example, visiting The Church of the Holy Apostles, which housed the tombs of many saints, granted 2,000 years pardon, which was doubled if the visit was on one of the apostles' days. See Furnivall, *The Stacions of Roms*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰¹ Boffey, 'Middle English Lives', p. 633.

woman is shown to construct it—a woman that maintains a predominately oral lifestyle, but works with literate men, skills, and examples, to achieve her goal of producing a book of her own.

Exactly how much Margery contributed to the elements of different genres that seem to exist in the *Book* cannot, of course, be proven. We witness through reading the *Book* how Margery seeks out men of learning to speak with, and how she listens to books being read. She may have learned much about the construction of books and the different types of writing from such meetings, although her understanding would most likely have been very superficial. What we do know is that a learned priest acted on her behalf both in the writing and the editing of the *Book*. The *Proem* informs us that while having difficulties reading it: ‘Neuyr-þe-lesse, he behyte hir þat if he coud redyn it he wolde copyn it owt & wrytyn it betyr wyth good wylle’.¹⁰² The words ‘copyn it owt & wrytyn it betyr’ would seem to indicate that the priest-scribe might be improving not just the handwriting, but also the construction of the words on the page, and perhaps to some extent, the overall presentation of the *Book*. Part of his contribution to the shape of the *Book*, whether deliberate or subconscious, may have come from his knowledge of hagiographies, pilgrim books, and mystical treatises.

¹⁰² *BMK*, I.*Proem*.4.

Chapter 3

Codes of Behaviour and Margery Kempe's Manner of Living

(a) *Meditatio* and 'Thynkyng'

Meditations on the Nativity

Meditation plays an important part in Margery Kempe's manner of living. The *Book* is rife with moments where Margery is either occupied in 'thowtys', or 'medytacyon', 'dalyawns', or 'felyngys', 'contemplacyon', or 'reuelacyons'. There is an obvious difficulty in the use of so many words with apparently similar meanings, and part of what I wish to examine is what she meant by such terminology, and how it may, or may not have differed from use in other medieval books on mystical experience. The books that I will be paying particular attention to are pseudo-Bonaventura's *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, and Nicholas Love's translation, or interpretation of that book, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*.¹ Although the *MVC* and its more modern equivalent were not mentioned by name in the *Book*, there are textual analogues that can be found relating to them; also, the importance they played in the development and understanding of meditative or contemplative disciplines in late medieval England is impossible to ignore.²

¹ For the sake of brevity, I will use the abbreviations *MVC* and *Mirror* throughout the rest of the thesis.

² These analogues will be examined later in this section. Examples provided by Windeatt fall in Chapter 81, following the crucifixion of Christ, when Mary is succoured by the reader in the *MVC* (and by Margery in the *Book*), and when Peter calls at the door. *BMK*, 81.195-6, and Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 326-7. For the significance of the *MVC* and *Mirror*, see, for example, Sargent: 'Nicholas Love's early fifteenth-century translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, was the most important literary

Of the words listed above, it is ‘contemplacyon’ and ‘medytacyon’ that might, at first, seem to be completely synonymous. In fact, the *MED* provides very similar definitions for both, with each being used to classify the other.³ However, the definition for ‘contemplacyon’ also includes ‘contemplation of the Divinity and the divine order’, as well as ‘to have a vision through ecstatic contemplation’. The latter would seem to put it in a similar category to ‘reuelacyon’. In comparison, the definition for ‘meditacyon’ includes ‘devout preoccupation’ and ‘devotions’ and ‘prayers’.⁴ Working from these definitions, the medieval understanding of contemplation would tend to appear more developed and mystical in nature than that of meditation.

Michelle Karnes makes this distinction between meditation and contemplation as used in Love’s *Mirror*, where the former is inferior to the latter, in that it represents a more fundamental level of piety.⁵ Karnes states how Love’s intention is to discourage his intended lay readers from reaching the higher state of contemplation; meditating on the life of Christ is only meant to awaken devotion through imagining Biblical stories, it is not intended to direct readers to attain levels of spiritual perfection by contemplating the Godhead. This type of restriction, where meditation may lead to contemplation but does not necessarily serve this purpose, and may in fact dissuade readers from attempting such a goal,

version on the life of Christ in English before modern times.’ Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Live of Jesus Christ: A Full Critical Edition*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), p. vii.

³ *MED*, *contemplacioun (contemplacyon)* 1., and *meditacioun (medytacyon)* (a).

⁴ *MED*, *reuelacioun (reuelacyon)* 1. (a).

⁵ Michelle Karnes, ‘Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ’, *Speculum*, 82 (2007), pp. 380-408.

is shared with other devotional books such as *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *The Book of Privy Counselling*, and Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection*.⁶

The boundaries between meditation and contemplation are much clearer in *The Cloud* than they are in the *Book* or the *Mirror*, where they can be used interchangeably. The anonymous English author of the *Cloud* reveals how meditation can lead to contemplation in chapter seven. The *Cloud*-author wishes his pupil to avoid dwelling on meditations of the Passion as it is a distraction from the higher contemplations on the ineffability of God. However, he is also careful to clarify the importance of using meditations to reach the state of contemplation:

what man or woman þat wenip to come to contemplacion wiþ-outyn
many soche swete meditacions of þeire owne wrechidnes, þe Passion, þe
kyndenes & þe grete goodnes & þe worþines of God coming before,
sekirly he schal erre & faile of his purpos [...] algates leue hem, & put
hem & holde hem fer doun vnder þe cloude of forzetyng, zif euer shcal he
peers þe cloude of vnknowyng bitwix him & his God.⁷

For a woman like Margery, looking to inspire others, follow the orthodox paths, and display her high status as a spiritual follower of Christ, it would be important

⁶ Karnes, 'Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ', pp. 400-1. I will in future refer to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, as the *Cloud*.

⁷ Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. by Phyllis Hodgson, EETS o.s. 218 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), pp. 26-7.

to demonstrate that she had followed the correct path to contemplation through meditation.

Another definition provided by the *Cloud* is for 'thinking', where it is part of the trinity of helpers an apprentice contemplative should employ. These helpers are: 'Lesson, Meditacion, & Oryson', or, 'Redyng, þinkyng & Preiing'. It is clear from the provided translation of the terms that 'Meditacion' and 'þinkyng' are synonymous. Vincent Gillespie examines the history of this monastic triad, looking back to Guigo II and his *Scala claustralium*, and linking it with English writings such as the *Cloud*, Hilton's Book I of the *Scale of Perfection*, and Rolle's Latin works.⁸ For Gillespie there exists an alteration in the understanding of reading, thinking and praying, where the increased level of vernacular literacy among lay audiences, and their interest in books, does not necessarily equate with their proficiency in Latin Scripture.⁹ For this reason, writers such as Hilton began to consider a lay, semi-literate audience, filling a role similar to that earlier taken by nuns and anchoresses in that they were in need of direction but were limited in their skills, and seeking to direct them towards prayer and meditation rather than a study of Scriptural exegesis:

Reading of Holy Writ may thou not well use, and therefore thee behoveth more occupy thee in prayer and meditation.¹⁰

⁸ Vincent Gillespie, 'Lukyng in haly bukes: *Lectio* in Some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies', in *Looking in Holy Books: Essays on Late Medieval Religious Writing in England*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie, Brepols Collected Essays in European Culture, Vol. 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 113-144 (115-6).

⁹ Gillespie, 'Lukyng in haly bukes', p. 117.

¹⁰ Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. by Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000),

Rolle, in his *Desyr and Delit*, while encouraging ‘medytacyons, and orysouns’, refrained from suggesting Scriptural study, but instead guided his audience towards ‘lukynge in haly bukes’.¹¹ This looking in holy books, Gillespie explains, has modified with the increase of vernacular spiritual material addressed to the laity, from the *lectio divina* of the monastic tradition, and the ‘essential first step envisaged by Guigo and others’, to that of ‘a means to eschew idleness’.¹² While accepting the need and demand for vernacular books of instruction, the ‘linguistic limitations’ of their readers and listeners, added to the fact that these readers were lay and therefore not kept under the watchful eye of a prior or abbot, and that a full Scripture may not be available either in Latin or the vernacular to them, led to texts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries stressing the importance of prayer, meditation and vernacular instruction over that of Scriptural reading.¹³

For the *Cloud*-author the refinement of the term ‘reading’ comes to include the hearing of words that come from books, so that the knowledge may come directly from the source, or be passed on by another means. In order to reach the level of meditation or thinking, it is first, according to the *Cloud*-author, imperative that the apprentice contemplative should achieve understanding through reading and hearing: ‘þinkyng may not goodly be getyn

<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/bestul.htm>, [accessed March 16, 2013], (Book I, Chapter 15).

¹¹ *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, ed. by Allen, p. 58.

¹² Gillespie, ‘*Lukynge in haly bukes*’, p. 118.

¹³ Gillespie, ‘*Lukynge in haly bukes*’, pp. 119-20.

wip-outyn reding or heryng comyng before'.¹⁴ Rolle divided contemplation into two parts, where reading of 'holy writyng, þat is Goddis word' came first, or was the lower part, while the higher part was a concentration on the heavenly, 'þe Holy Goost' and 'thynkyng of God'.¹⁵ The *Book* too refers to such a structuring, where God tells Margery in Chapter 88 that he will be pleased with her 'wheþyr þu redist er herist redyng', but that 'thynkyng is þe best for þe & most xal incresyn thy lofe to me'.¹⁶ Oral, aural, or visual reception are not as overwhelming, not as rewarding, and not as joyful as the love experienced by the 'praisynge [...] in þe soule', of 'praiers and meditaciouns and teris'.¹⁷

Reading, for the *Cloud*-author, can be accomplished either by reading a book, or by hearing the sermon of the cleric who has read it: 'Alle is one in maner, redyng & heryng; clerkes redyn on bookes, & lewid men redyn on clerkes, whan þei here hem preche þe worde of God'. What the *Cloud* provides us with here is a strong link between the oral and literate traditions within book culture. The cleric reads the book, and relays the information gathered there by way of his sermons. Margery, an avid fan of hearing sermons, could also have received such knowledge through conversations with the many clerics she confronts to find approval of her manner of living. Also, the *Cloud* provides a definition of thinking which equates to meditation. Between the three books (*MVC*, *Mirror* and *Cloud*), there is an understanding of meditation, or thinking, being inferior to contemplation, although at time the terms 'medytacyon' and

¹⁴ *The Cloud*, ed. by Hodgson, p. 71.

¹⁵ *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. by S.J. Ogilve-Thomson, EETS o.s. 293 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 24-5.

¹⁶ *BMK*, I.88.218.

¹⁷ Ogilve-Thomson, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, pp. 24-5.

‘contemplacyon’ are used interchangeably in both the *MVC* and the *Mirror*, as well as in the *Book*.

The *MVC* differs from the later *Mirror* in that, in its original form addressed to a poor Clare, it could be used to bridge the gap between the active and contemplative lives.¹⁸ For the Franciscans, to unite the *vita contempliva* with the *vita activa* was to reach spiritual perfection.¹⁹ The enclosed Clares would be unable to experience the active life, and so a tool such as the *MVC*, where a friar working in an advisory capacity would assist them in the ‘interactive and imaginative’ experiencing of elements of Christ’s life, could allow them to experience a type of ‘active’ living.²⁰ Unlike Love’s *Mirror*, the author of the *MVC* encouraged a direct and individual interaction with the Gospel stories through meditation. Although both accentuated the bodily, or ‘active’, form of meditation over contemplation, the *MVC* was more devoted to guiding its audience progressively towards the contemplation of Christ’s divinity.²¹

The difference in modes of address used by the two books was partly due to their intended readers or listeners, and partly a result of the demand for such devotional literature at the time. The Franciscan friar who wrote the earlier *MVC* in fourteenth century Tuscany, ‘distilled the biblical stories into accessible vignettes, blending them with paraphrases from patristic writings as well as his

¹⁸ Holly Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination: The Paris Meditations Vitae Christi and Female Franciscan Spirituality in Trecento Italy*, *Disciplina Monastica*, 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), p. 21.

¹⁹ Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination*, p. 20.

²⁰ Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination*, p. 18.

²¹ See Karnes, ‘Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ’, p. 388.

own imaginative embellishments'.²² The profusion of 'participatory commands and references to everyday life' made the *MVC* popular among the laity as well as the clergy, spreading across the Continent and into England.²³ The *Mirror* was originally licensed for publication by Archbishop Arundel around 1410, and was a translation and interpretation of the *MVC* written by the Carthusian, Nicholas Love.²⁴

The *Mirror* was, according to Sargent, 'the most important literary version of the life of Christ in English before modern times'. Sargent goes on to say that few books survive in greater numbers of manuscripts, but that one of these few was the Wycliffite Bible translation.²⁵ This is of great significance if one considers the fact that the *Mirror* has in the past, as examined by Karnes, been contested as an alternative to the Wycliffite Bible.²⁶ The above statistics would suggest that both books were popular, but with 200 manuscripts containing at least portions of the Wycliffite Bible, compared to only 64 for that

²² Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination*, p. 17. The friar is now believed to be, although this is still a subject of debate, John of Caulibus, from San Gimignano. For more on the dating of the *MVC* see Sarah McNamer, 'Further Evidence for the Date of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, *Franciscan Studies* 50 (1990), 235-61; and for a challenge to this see Peter Tóth and David Falvay, 'New Light on the Date and Authorship of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*', in 'Diuerse Imaginaciouns of Cristes Life': *Devotional Culture in England and Beyond, 1300-1560*, ed. by Stephen Kelly and Ryan Perry (Brepols, forthcoming 2013-14).

²³ Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination*, p. 21.

²⁴ See, for example, Michael G. Sargent, 'Introduction', in *Nicholas Love at Waseda: Proceedings of the International Conference 20-22 July 1995*, ed. by Shoichi Oguro and others (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer: 1997), p. xiii, and Michael G. Sargent, *The Mirror: A Reading Text* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), p. xiii.

²⁵ Sargent, *The Mirror: A Reading Text*, p. ix.

²⁶ Karnes, 'Nicholas Love and Medieval Meditations on Christ', p. 384.

of the *Mirror*, it becomes clear that Love's book did not replace the 'heretical' bible, that some owners probably possessed both, and even that the *Mirror* was not understood to be intended as a replacement for the Wycliffite Bible by contemporary readers and listeners.²⁷ The *Mirror* was intended for use as a guide to meditation, as the *MVC* was before it, not as a lay replacement for the Gospels.²⁸

This is relevant to Margery and her manner of living because we learn from the *Book* that she studied and had a reasonable knowledge of scripture, and that she meditated upon the life of Christ, in particular his nativity and passion.²⁹ We know this because in Chapter 58 we are told Margery had the bible read to her (with doctors' commentaries) over a period of seven to eight years. There is further evidence provided in her discussing scripture, for example when speaking with the Archbishop of York in Chapter 52.³⁰

We do not know which version of the bible was used, only that it had commentaries and that Margery assumedly understood it, whether through translation by the reading priest, or the compilers of the book. We can also not be certain if Margery used either the *MVC* or the *Mirror*, except by alluding to analogues in the *Book*. However, some of these analogues are very telling. For example, in Chapter 80 of the *Book* Mary and Margery follow Christ from the

²⁷ See, for example, Sargent, *The Mirror: A Reading Text*, p. ix, for the statistics on both manuscript extant copies.

²⁸ It is worth noting how this understanding of the *Mirror*, argued by Sargent, as being a guide to meditation rather than a replacement of the Gospels, is *contra* Nicholas Watson's seminal *Speculum* article, 'Censorship and Cultural Change'.

²⁹ The meditation sequences will be examined below.

³⁰ *BMK*, I.58.143, and I.52.126.

site of his scourging to that of his crucifixion: ‘hir thowt þat ovr Lady & sche went be an-oþer wey for to metyn wyth hym’.³¹ This is an echo of the *Mirror*’s and *MVC*’s account of the same moment in Chapter 42: ‘she toke a noþer wey more short in hast’.³² Besides such analogues, there remains the possibility of her being familiar with either, or both books, for a number of reasons. Chapter 58, with its list of books she had read to her, also states there were ‘swech oþer’, that is, more devotional books than those she listed. The scenes of meditation in the *Book* could suggest Margery’s familiarity with either book, and that she was following their example.

Besides the 64 manuscript copies of the *Mirror* still surviving in part or in its entirety, there are as many as 113 surviving copies of the Latin *MVC* in English libraries, which represent the largest single national group.³³ The fact that so many copies were available at the time, and that Margery was constantly seeking the advice and company of learned men of religion, would further strengthen the case for her being exposed to the methods used in either, or both books. Each time Margery sought to confirm the orthodoxy of her manner of living, she would be looking for support both verbally from respected clerics, and from their knowledge of the written word. It would therefore seem logical to assume she would not set out on a path of devotional meditation without first

³¹ *BMK*, I.80.191.

³² Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 171. The *MVC* has ‘she went quickly ... by another shorter route’. See John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. and ed. by Francis X. Taney, Anne Miller and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1999), p. 250.

³³ For details on these copies and other translations and interpretations, see Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, pp. 15-23.

seeking advice on how it ought to be done. The *MVC* and the *Mirror* were the popular late medieval guides to meditation on the gospel stories.

In Chapters 6 and 7 of the *Book* Margery meditates upon the nativity of Christ. She does this because God has earlier commanded that she desist praying with beads, and instead concentrate upon ‘swych thowtys as I wyl putt in þi mend’. He reinforces this by adding she should lie still and speak to him in thought, and he will provide her with ‘hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon’.³⁴ Margery is then instructed to seek out the anchorite at the Preaching Friars, and reveal to him ‘þe reuelacyons swech as wer schewyd to hir’.³⁵ This information provides us with the knowledge that Margery was not attempting to meditate on her own without spiritual direction from a religious mentor. God may be the initiator, but he himself prescribes that Margery reveal her meditations to the anchorite, and to then ‘werk aftyr hys counsel’. It is therefore God who is providing the ‘thowtys’, not the *MVC* or the *Mirror*, and yet the earthly guidance that she later receives from her confessor may well have developed from an education in such devotional approaches.

When Margery then attempts to begin her meditations, she appears to be at a loss how to proceed. As Chapter 6 opens, Margery endeavors to ‘zeue hir to medytacyon’, but does not know what to think upon.³⁶ God speaks to her and instructs that she ‘thynke on my Modyr’. This initiates Margery’s imaginings,

³⁴ *BMK*, I.5.17.

³⁵ This Dominican anchorite was Margery’s principal confessor before she travelled to Jerusalem, and was succeeded by Robert Spryngolde in that capacity. Hope Emily Allen points out (*BMK*, p. 264) that he too was likely a mystic; an example of a revelation of his is given in *BMK*, I.18.43-4.

³⁶ *BMK*, I.6.18.

which run through the birth of the Virgin, her childhood, her becoming pregnant, her visit to Elizabeth, and the birth of her son in Bethlehem. Although, as I will continue to examine, these imaginings follow a similar pattern to those of the *MVC* and the *Mirror*, the point is made that God is the true mentor of Margery, and that, according to the account in the *Book*, her meditations follow upon his direction. Her confessor provides the proof of Margery's legitimacy, but he is not the one that is ultimately in control of her devotional procedures.

In the second chapter of the *Mirror*, Love approaches the biography of the Virgin under the heading: 'Of þe manere of lyuyng of þe blessedde virgine Marie'.³⁷ It begins with a form of address, where the Virgin Mary speaks in a revelation to Elizabeth of Hungary. This revelation is taken from the *MVC*, and so both books include it.³⁸ Margery, as we know from the *Book*, was familiar with Elizabeth of Hungary. In Chapter 62 there is mention that Elizabeth, like Margery, cried 'wyth lowed voys', which is 'wretyn in hir tretys'.³⁹ Although Elizabeth's vita is not included in the book lists of Chapters 17 and 58, it is possible that it too was read to Margery, or that parts of it were, or that she was familiar with aspects of the saint's life from one of the numerous men of religion she kept contact with. It is also possible that Margery was introduced to Elizabeth through the *MVC*, or the *Mirror*.

There is nothing of particular relevance apparent in the opening segment to immediately remind one of Margery's own manner of living, beyond what might be expected of any Christian: to love God, love one's neighbours, and hate

³⁷ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 19.

³⁸ See, for example, Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination*, pp. 192-3.

³⁹ *BMK*, I.62.154.

one's enemies (sins and vices).⁴⁰ Margery may take these attributes to an extreme most Christians would never attempt to attain, but there is a generalized quality to these rules similar to those taught by Christ and quoted in the book of Mark.⁴¹ However, Mary's lifestyle of prayer, and devotion, and tears and afflictions, which lead to grace and virtue, are more directly pertinent to the themes of the *Book*.⁴² Also, Mary makes seven petitions to God, the fifth of which is a request asking:

þat he wolde let me se þe tyme in þe wech þat blessed maiden shold be
born, þat shuld conceyue & bere goddus son, & þat he wolde kepe myn
eyene þat I miȝt se hire[.]⁴³

This form of irony, where Mary expresses a desire to have a connection with the mother of God, is similarly displayed in the scene where Margery speaks with the Virgin in Chapter 6 of the *Book*.

In Margery's meditations on the nativity, her role becomes a very active one. She begins by playing as Anne's maid and servant, later caring for Mary until she is twelve years old. At this point in the meditation, Margery informs Mary that she will become the mother of God.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Mark 12:30-1.

⁴² Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 21.

⁴³ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 20.

⁴⁴ This differs from the account in the *Mirror* where Mary is fourteen when the Incarnation occurs and she marries Joseph. See Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 22.

“Lady, ze schal be þe Modyr of God.” The blyssed child answeyd & seyde, “I wold I wer worthy to be þe handmaiden of hir þat xuld conseive þe Sone of God.” Þe creatur seyde, “I pray 3ow, Lady, 3yf þat grace falle 3ow, forsake not my seruyse.”⁴⁵

The episode is reminiscent of the manner of living of the Virgin chapter in *Love*, as here too Mary speaks with modest irony, not realizing that her destiny is to become the mother of God. The scene is also of great consequence for revealing aspects of Margery’s vision of devotional self-worth. If Mary would be happy to serve the mother of God, and Margery is serving Mary, she is in a particularly enviable position. Also, there is a question of what Margery means when she says ‘3yf þat grace falle 3ow’. She is fully aware that it will befall Mary, but, we must assume, she does not believe she has convinced Mary of the fact. It would seem that Margery is making an agreement with Mary, while possessing a prescience of her fortunes. It is an unusual scene, as it lends a quality of realism, while in the next moment the bubble is momentarily burst when we return to Margery’s state of contemplation:

The blyful child passyd away for a certeyn tyme, þe creatur being style in contemplacyon, and sythen cam a-geyn and seyde, “Dowtyr, now am I be-kome þe Modyr of God.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *BMK*, I.6.18.

⁴⁶ *BMK*, I.6.18.

This pause in the meditational sequence comes at a pivotal moment in the *MVC*. It is at this point that the author instructs his reader or listener to become more involved in the action. They are to begin imagining they are actually present at the moment of the annunciation, rather than simply observing and imitating Mary.⁴⁷ Interestingly, there is no angel Gabriel in Margery's imagining. Instead, she has replaced him by telling Mary herself that she will be the mother of God. Margery does not simply insert herself into the action; she replaces other characters of great significance.⁴⁸ She is not one of the handmaids of the N-Town mystery play, functioning as an apocryphal character to enforce Mary's sanctity, but is an integral part of the revised nativity story.⁴⁹

By placing herself directly in the action of the nativity, Margery displaces more than just the angel Gabriel. Joseph too becomes next to superfluous in Margery's meditative rendition. Following the visit to Elizabeth, and the birth of John the Baptist, Margery and Mary carry on to Bethlehem. Here it is Margery, and not Joseph that secures lodging for Mary, begs cloth and kerchiefs to swaddle her son with, and begs food for her to eat. Joseph appears to have been left behind with Elizabeth.⁵⁰ In this respect Margery surpasses what the *MVC* and the *Mirror* both suggest of their readers and listeners. She is not simply

⁴⁷ Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination*, p. 100.

⁴⁸ In a similar manner, Margery replaces Paul at the moment where Mary takes a shorter way through the back streets of Jerusalem to the crucifixion. See above reference to this incident.

⁴⁹ See 'The Nativity' in, for example, Peter Happé, ed., *English Mystery Plays: A Selection* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 230-43. The handmaidens are called 'Zelomye' and 'Salomee'.

⁵⁰ *BMK*, I.6.19.

observing, nor is she observing and participating; Margery's unique form of meditation includes her in a reworking of biblical events.

This reworking continues into the following chapter as the holy family is visited by the three kings, and then is commanded by an angel to flee to Egypt. Joseph has returned now, but it is still the handmaid, Margery, who finds the Virgin lodgings. At this moment, another interruption occurs in Margery's musings. Her meditations and her waking life appear to overlap. While she is busy meditatively finding lodgings, Margery is simultaneously occupied with:

many swet thowtys & hy medytacyons & also hy contemplacyons,
sumtyme duryng in wepyng ij owyres & oftyn lengar in þe mend of owyr
Lordys Passyon[.]⁵¹

It appears that Margery has meditations while meditating. She considers the Passion while in the midst of a nativity meditation. In fact, while contemplating the flight to Egypt, Margery has sweet thoughts, high meditations, high contemplations, and extended periods of weeping. It is unclear exactly what each of these forms of devotional exercise entails, but it would seem that it is important the reader of the *Book* understands that for Margery the experience is not straightforward and rudimentary, but is multi-dimensional. The *MVC* breaks meditations into three varieties of contemplation: 2 for the perfect, and 1 for the imperfect. The perfect are contemplations of the majesty of God, and of the heavenly court, while the imperfect is of the humanity of Christ.⁵² It may be that

⁵¹ *BMK*, I.7.19.

⁵² *MVC*, ed. by Taney, p. 172.

Margery's meditations within meditations is an attempt to demonstrate that she is experiencing both perfect and imperfect contemplations. Although her meditations follow a similar pattern to those recommended in the *MVC* and the *Mirror*, Margery is demonstrated as excelling in the role she assumes, and the degree of devotion she attains while doing so.

This onion-layered construction of meditation, where Margery's thoughts on the Passion occur while deeply involved in a realistic imagining where she is already participating in the nativity story, adds a further degree of authority to her devotions. It lends her a kind of omnipresence, and the reader or listener to the *Book* may forget the fact that she is meditating on the original scenario, and think of her as actually being there, just as she would seem to be doing herself. It is an unusual presentation of a devotee's meditations, as it is not instructive, nor merely narrative, but instead serves the purpose of demonstrating the blessedness of the participant. This is further emphasized in the following chapter, when Margery is in prayer and is visited by the Virgin, who tells her that her place in heaven has been prepared.⁵³ As this blessing follows immediately after Margery's meditations, it appears to be a reward for her meditatively serving as the Virgin's handmaid.

Margery's meditations on the nativity may not appear to be strictly following the paths prescribed by the *MVC* or the *Mirror*. It is important to bear in mind, however, that such paths were suggestions rather than being strictly irrevocable, and that, particularly in the case of the latter book, the individual using them for meditation was able to adapt them to their own needs.

⁵³ *BMK*, I.8.20.

Wherefore it semeþ to me beste þat euery deuout creature þat loueþ to rede or [to] here þis boke take þe partes þerof as it semeþ moste comfortable & stiryng to his deuocion, sumtyme one & sumtyme an opere, & specialy in þe tymes of þe zere & festes ordeynet in holy chirche, as þe matires bene perteynent to hem.⁵⁴

Margery does let her meditations follow a pattern that is pertinent to her. She concentrates on her devotion to Mary, and ultimately, to Christ. She sees her role as one of great consequence, and lets her recording of the ‘event’ bear witness to this in the *Book*. Margery’s imagined association with Mary involves a relationship being made between their manners of living. Mary’s compassion is reflected in Margery’s weeping ‘sumtyme for þe synne of þe pepyl [...] þe sowlys in Purgatory [...] hem þat arn in pouerte er in any dysese’.⁵⁵

The tears Margery sheds while meditating might be seen not simply as her usual mode of devotional expression, but as an activity to be expected by readers and listeners of Love’s *Mirror*. Love, like the author of the *MVC*, thinks towards a female audience when he writes in his *Proem* of ‘symple creatures’ that require the ‘mylke of lyzte doctryne’ rather than the ‘mete of grete clargye & of h[ye] contemplacion’.⁵⁶ This milk of light doctrine could nevertheless have a powerful affect upon the recipient:

For to him þat wolde serche þe passion of oure lorde with all his herte &

⁵⁴ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 220.

⁵⁵ *BMK*, 1.7.20.

⁵⁶ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 10.

alle his inwarde affecione þere shuld come many deuout felynges &
stirynges þat he neuer supposede before. Þorh þe which he shold
perceyue him self turnede as it were in to a newe astate of soule[.]⁵⁷

Ryan Perry observes how Love's notion of 'sorrouful compassion'⁵⁸ might entail an actual outpouring of emotion, which might even be demonstrated on the pages of the devotional book. Perry, through examining pages of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library, MS 65, divulges how the manuscript has had liquid fall onto the document at instances of 'pointedly emotive points', and sometimes 'directly on top of text in which weeping or emotions are discussed'.⁵⁹ Whether these are deliberate (possibly 'forged') tears, or insuppressible releases of grief, in either instance they are committed onto the manuscript knowing that marks are being left behind. The inclusion of a mystic like Elizabeth of Hungary in the *Mirror*, whose tears of compunction were an important part of her devotional expression, furthers the argument for an overpowering emotional response to be expected from some of the audience experiencing the book.

For Margery, tears were a natural response to almost any emotive religious experience. Also, although she may have described herself as a 'symple creature', her religious behaviour was always more excessive than simple, with

⁵⁷ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 160.

⁵⁸ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 159.

⁵⁹ Ryan Perry, "Some Sprytual Matter of Gostly Edyfycacion': Readers and Readings of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*", in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition*, ed. by Ian Johnson and Allan Westphall, Medieval Church Studies 24 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 79-126 (p. 79).

her desiring and receiving daily confession and communion, her wearing of white garments, her ring with a Latin dedication to God engraved upon it. It would be anticipated that Margery would look for more than the usual or expected response to the kind of devotional exercises the *MVC* or *Mirror* present. It is therefore not surprising that the *Book* tells us how Margery was instructed by God to begin her meditations, and that he, rather than an earthly man of religion, was the one that was to guide her, with her confessor merely providing confirmation and approval of her activities. Margery was, despite being an unlearned woman, much more desirous to seek 'hye contemplacion' over humble meditation.

Meditations on the Passion

There is an element of theatricality to Margery's meditations and contemplations. Her meditations on the Passion tend to follow patterns seen in the mystery plays, as well as bearing resemblance to the *MVC* and the *Mirror*. There is a degree of physicality, both in relation to her own conceived presence, and in what is happening around her as she is reliving the actions in her mind. Her interactions with the holy family, as in her nativity meditations, are often extra-scriptural, as she allows her thinking to develop relationships between herself and the Virgin and Christ. Margery's mental imaginings seem to be sourced from different means, some from books, some from religious services and decorations within the church, and some from verbal exchanges, whether through readings, speaking and listening, or attending a performance.

Margery's Passion sequence opens with a procession around the churchyard on Palm Sunday, as she follows the priests, being mindful of their

religious observances as they bear the sacrament.⁶⁰ As she watches them, Margery seems to fall into a trance and her meditations begin:

It semyd to hir gostly sygth as þei sche had ben þat tyme in Ierusalem & seen owr Lord in hys manhood receyuyd of þe pepil as he was whil he went her in erth.

The experience is so convincing and lifelike, and Margery filled with such sweetness and devotion, that her outpourings of emotion are uncontrollable. There is no description of this moment in the churchyard, amidst her fellow worshippers, but it is easy to imagine the shock of her fellow congregation members as she, seemingly for no reason, bursts into weeping and wailing. For those of us that are experiencing the *Book*, however, the cause of her behaviour is provided, and we are able to witness her interpreting the sacrament as Christ's actual body, brought to life within her meditation. Margery takes the notion of transubstantiation a step further by witnessing the bread becoming the body of Christ.⁶¹

There follows mention of Margery's compassion for others, and how she would have all people saved. Her feelings for Christ's suffering at the Passion flood into those for 'al þe pepil þat was leuyng in erth'.⁶² However, many of the

⁶⁰ *BMK*, I.78.184.

⁶¹ There are textual analogues for the vision of transubstantiation; such visions were interpreted by theologians as 'sent to bolster or reward faith, or to cure doubt'. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 113-4.

⁶² *BMK*, I.78.185.

people do not interpret her bitter sobbing and cries and weeping as beneficial, and so they ‘bannyd hir ful fast’, causing Christ to console her by saying ‘þe more schame & mor despite þat þu hast for my lofe, þe mor joy schalt þu haue wyth me in Heuyn’. Margery’s manner of living becomes a persecution experienced through her feeling compassion for her fellow man, initiated by her thinking upon the Passion. In essence, she bears the cross of Christ by reflecting his love and generous nature, only to be punished for it by the world.

Christ himself bears witness to Margery’s reflection, or experiencing of his physical and emotional torment. He understands her generous and benevolent nature, as well as the suffering she endures on the behalf of others. He tells Margery what her ultimate role in life is to be:

I haue ordeyned þe to be a merowr amongys hem for to hang ret sorwe
þat þei xulde takyn exampil by þe for to haue sum litil sorwe in her hertys
for her synnys þat þei myth þerthorw be sauyd[.]⁶³

Margery is to become a mirror. Her opening meditations on the Passion of Christ have produced a promise from him that she will be responsible for the saving of ‘many thowsand sowlys’. Just as Christ was a mirror for her, and by following his example, through the inspiration generated by her meditations, she was able to portray his loving nature in her own life, so would Margery become a mirror for others. The *Book* might therefore have been called: *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Margery Kempe*.

⁶³ *BMK*, I.78.186.

Chapter 78 concludes as it began, with the ceremony of Palm Sunday being performed. The ‘action’ taking place in between, that is, Margery’s meditation and conversations with Christ (some of which are from memory, not of the moment), have all occurred in the time it took the congregation to traverse around the building and return to the doors of the church. It is a theatrical and well-composed chapter, the construction of which itself is like a mirror. The narration begins with a church service leading to a scene of meditation, continues with other thoughts and communications with Christ, and concludes back at the church service. The chapter is also important for presenting different definitions for terms referring to Margery’s ‘thinking’. She has ‘many an holy *thowt*⁶⁴ of owr Lordys Passyon’, which entails her seeing things in her ‘ghostly syght’ as if she were seeing them in the flesh.⁶⁵ She then speaks with Christ in her mind, something that is elsewhere described as ‘dalyawns’.⁶⁶ She also receives a vision of a forthcoming pestilence and the people it would kill, which would otherwise be called a ‘reuelacyon’.⁶⁷ Finally, she experiences:

many an holy thowt & many an holy desyr
 wech sche cowed neuyr
 tellyn ne rehersyn ne hir tunge myth neuyr
 expressyn þe habundawnce of
 grace þat sche felt [.]⁶⁸

⁶⁴ The emphasis is mine.

⁶⁵ *BMK*, I.78.185.

⁶⁶ See, for example, *BMK*, I.*Proem*.2.

⁶⁷ See, for example, *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3.

⁶⁸ *BMK*, I.78.187.

This expression of experiencing the ineffable nature of God, described by the *Cloud*-author as the ‘cloud of unknowing’, might otherwise be described as ‘contemplacyon’.⁶⁹ The *Cloud* states that intellectually God cannot be understood, but that in the soul, through love, he is completely knowable.⁷⁰ The love, or grace that Margery describes when she experiences ‘contemplacyon’ cannot be explained by the intellect as it belongs to the cloud of unknowing — that which pertains to the soul and not the mind.

The following three chapters of the *Book* are comprised of Margery’s meditations on the Passion and the Ascension.⁷¹ Other studies have found that her possible sources include, besides the *MVC* and the *Mirror*, her visit to the Holy Land and the sacred monuments, talks there with her Franciscan guides, attending the York Plays (or other dramatic representations), listening to books being read aloud and hearing sermons, speaking with men of religion, or observing artwork within the churches she frequented.⁷² Her inspiration and guidance would therefore be a mixture of verbal, written, and visual aids. With so many possible influences it is difficult to pin down where Margery’s inspirations are coming from, but certain key elements of her Passion meditations can be found in the particular sources she was probably inspired by.

⁶⁹ On the ‘cloud of unknowing’ (and the ‘cloud of forgetting’) see, *The Cloud*, ed. by Hodgson, Chapters 4-6, pp. 17-26.

⁷⁰ *The Cloud*, ed. by Hodgson, pp. 18-19.

⁷¹ Margery’s meditations on Holy Week are found in Chapters 72, 73, and 78-82.

⁷² See, for example, *BMK*, p. 333, and Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 326-7.

In Chapter 79 Margery continues her duties as the handmaid of the Virgin.⁷³ Again, as with the Nativity meditations, she takes an active role, as was part of the methodology of the *MVC* and the *Mirror*. Hope Emily Allen notes that the scene of the Betrayal follows closely to the biblical account.⁷⁴ However, the arrest scene is reminiscent of a medieval drama, with the soldiers bearing staves, swords, and ‘polexis’, and the inclusion of a scene where the Jews fall to the earth upon hearing they are facing Jesus of Nazareth.⁷⁵ There is a curious use of Latin when Christ asks the Jews come to arrest him, ‘Whom seke ze?’, to which they reply, ‘Ihesu of Nazareth’, and Christ says, ‘ego sum’. The scene takes a comic turn when the Jews fall down, then rise to their feet and the process is repeated. This time, however, Christ replies with ‘I it am’.⁷⁶ Perhaps the Latin is only used for the sake of a different reply, or perhaps the use of Latin was thought to give the words more churchly authority. It is also possible that ‘Ego sum’ was heard by Margery in a liturgical drama, although she twice uses ‘Whom seke ze?’ and not ‘*quem quaeritis?*’. A further curious detail is that the reply ‘I it am’ appears more a translation of the Latin than a standard English reply.⁷⁷

⁷³ *BMK*, I.79.189.

⁷⁴ *BMK*, p. 334.

⁷⁵ Poleaxes were part of medieval weaponry, not Roman. Although it would not be sensible to expect Margery to be historically accurate, the scene sounds like one she has seen portrayed in a drama, or on stained glass, for example. The *Ludus Coventriae* play of ‘The Betrayal’ portrays the Jews falling to the earth upon hearing Christ speak. See Happé, *English Mystery Plays*, p. 460.

⁷⁶ *BMK*, I.79.189. In ‘The Betrayal’, the Jews fall down twice as well.

⁷⁷ In ‘The Betrayal’, Christ says ‘I am he’, and Latin is not used. See Happé, *English Mystery Plays*, p. 460.

Following the kiss of Judas, the arrest then develops into a vicious game, where the Jews blindfold Christ and strike him asking, ‘Telle us now how smet þe[?]’.⁷⁸ This action again follows in the tradition of the mystery plays, as in the Towneley version of ‘The Buffeting’ the same torment occurs, with the question ‘Who smote the last[?]’.⁷⁹ The scene is similarly represented in *Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord*, probably translated from the abbreviated version of the *MVC (Meditationes de Passione Christi)* into English in the last quarter of the fourteenth century.⁸⁰ In this version, written in verse, the tormentors ask, ‘telle who þe smyt’.⁸¹ In both the Towneley and the Manning versions, the irony of the tormenters asking Christ to use his powers of prophecy to tell who is striking him is somewhat lost.⁸² In this respect, Margery’s telling of the event more closely resembles the earlier translation or the drama. It is uncertain if Margery attended any religious dramas, but as Windeatt observes, it is probable that she and her husband saw the York plays, as they were visiting the city when they were being performed.⁸³ With all her travels across England, and her apparent need to be at

⁷⁸ This scene can also be found in the *Mirror*, Chapter 20 (Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 166), and in Luke 22:64.

⁷⁹ See Happé, *English Mystery Plays*, p. 481.

⁸⁰ *Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord, and the Hours of the Passion*, ed. by J. Meadows Cowper, EETS o.s. 60 (London: N. Trübner, 1875, repr. 1987). For details on the dating and authorship of the *MSOL* see Ryan Perry, ‘Thynk on God, as we doon, men that swynke: the Cultural Locations of Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord and the Middle English Pseudo-Bonaventuran Tradition’, *Speculum*, 86 (2011), 419-54 (pp. 426-8).

⁸¹ *Meditations on the Supper*, ed. by J. Meadows Cowper, p. 14.

⁸² Compare with Love’s ‘Prophecie nowe, & telle vs who smote þe last’. Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 166.

⁸³ Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 305.

the centre of religious themed events, it is possible that Margery attended different performances in different cities. Richard Beadle highlights the impact the *MVC* had upon late-medieval drama, in particular the N-Town (or *Ludus Coventriae*) Plays.⁸⁴

Windeatt distinguishes scenes from Chapter 80 of the *Book* that are similar to those of different mystery plays, such as Mary offering to carry the cross, which is found in the Wakefield Scourging Play, and descriptions of the crucifixion, which liken that of the York Crucifixion Play.⁸⁵ These dramatic descriptions, in turn, may have been inspired by sermons, or by other verbal depictions, stemming from meditations inspired by the *MVC*, or they may have come from the author hearing a reading of Love, or the pseudo-Bonaventura. Gail McMurray Gibson makes the observation that the *MVC* was probably ‘the single most influential literary text upon the vernacular English drama’ with the exception of the Bible and apocryphal gospels.⁸⁶ Of even more significance, Gibson adds, is the fact that it provided ‘a basic religious aesthetic for vernacular devotional literature’. It would seem fair to say, therefore, that Margery’s *Book*, and her meditations in particular, bore the fruit of such an influence. Gibson later comments on moments when Margery seems at her most original, such as in Chapter 81 when she, while meditating, reports on a dialogue where the Virgin questions the resurrected Christ about his wounds, and then reluctantly agrees to

⁸⁴ Richard Beadle, ‘“Devoute ymaginacioun’ and the Dramatic Sense in Love’s *Mirror* and the N-Town Plays’, in *Nicholas Love at Waseda*, ed. by Oguro and others, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 326.

⁸⁶ Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 10.

release him so that he may appear to Mary Magdalene. ‘But in fact’, Gibson writes, ‘the whole scene and suggestions for mentally producing it existed in the [MVC], in the authority of a revered text and not in Margery’s own psychology.’⁸⁷

Two scenes identified by Allen and Windeatt in Chapter 81 further strengthen the argument for the influence of the *MVC* and *Mirror* upon Margery.⁸⁸ The first is when Margery prepares ‘a good cawdel’ for the Virgin to comfort her after the death of her son. But the Virgin cannot eat, and asks her to take it away as she wants ‘no mete but myn owyn childe’.⁸⁹ Love’s interpretation of the *MVC* tells the meditating novice:

And þou also by deuoute ymaginacion as þou were þere bodily present,
comfort oure lady & þat felawshipe praying hem to ete sumwhat, for ȝit
þei bene fasting[.]⁹⁰

The second comes moments after, when Peter comes to the door and John answers, and Peter is ashamed for denying Christ. In the *BMK* this episode reads:

And anon þe creatur herd Seynt Petyr knockyng at þe dor, & Seynt Iohn
askyd who was þer. Petyr answeyrd, “I, synful Petyr, þat hath forsakyn
my Lord Ihesu Crist.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, p. 49.

⁸⁸ See Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 326-7, and *BMK*, pp. 335-6.

⁸⁹ *BMK*, I.81.195.

⁹⁰ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 188.

In Love's imagining of the same scene it reads:

And þerwiþ þei herden one knokke at þe zate [...] Jone [zede] to þe dore
[...] Peter comyng in with grete shame wepinge & sobbyng [saying] I am
ashamede [...] & I sholde not by resone speke in zour presence or apere
in þe siht of men[.]⁹²

These two scenes occurring after the Passion are apocryphal, and so one must look outside of the gospels to find Margery's possible inspiration. The fact that they are both moments when Love and the *MVC*-author describe to their reader or listener, something that could not be imagined without their assistance, without risking sliding into heretical territories of random invention, lends an extra degree of certainty to the fact that this was Margery's source, whether directly from a manuscript, or circuitously by way of oral tradition. Margery probably heard dozens of versions of the Passion, both at home in Lynn, in churches around the country, and in the Holy Land. Whether it was a Franciscan guide in Jerusalem, or a confessor in Lynn that described such scenes to her, the ultimate source was, almost certainly, the *MVC* or the *Mirror*.

According to the *Book*, Margery Kempe experienced several different kinds of psychological religious devotion. Although the terminology is not maintained consistently, these ranged from speaking with God in her mind ('spechys & dalyawns'), to having heavenly secrets revealed to her ('felyngys' and

⁹¹ *BMK*, I.81.195.

⁹² Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 189.

‘reuelacyons’), to mental images and deeper imaginings based upon the life of the Holy Family (‘medytacyon’ and ‘hy contemplacyon’). As she received no formal education, we can only surmise, and work from textual analogues in order to ascertain where much of Margery’s inspiration came from for this aspect of her manner of living. Clearly, she had learned enough to understand that there were different forms of inner piety, and different names for them, although it must be kept in mind that the priest-scribe may have aided with the terminology. Regardless of whether it was Margery or the priest-scribe choosing the particular vocabulary, the *Book* is used to describe these different forms of communication and religious observance for the benefit of its protagonist.

Just as Richard Beadle observes in relation to Love’s *Mirror*, Margery’s *Book* ‘as a whole possesses a distinct dramatic flavour’.⁹³ Love’s ‘devoute ymaginacions’ were intended to stir ‘symple soules to þe loue of god & desire of heuenly þinges’.⁹⁴ They were further intended to inspire a ‘despysing of þe worlde, in pacience, suffryng of aduersitees, & in encrease & getyng of vertues’.⁹⁵ The *Book* contains a structure that begins and continues on with adversities and suffering for its protagonist, where Margery’s long-suffering nature is put repeatedly on display, and God ultimately rewards her patience with his goodness, and promises to hear her prayers and to grant her life-everlasting.⁹⁶

⁹³ Beadle, ‘Devoute ymaginacioun’, in *Nicholas Love at Waseda*, ed. by Oguro and others, p. 6.

⁹⁴ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 11.

⁹⁶ God’s gifts to Margery being, for example, her contrition, devotion, and compassion (displayed in the outpouring of tears). See, for example, *BMK*, I.62.154.

Margery's meditations can not only be seen to have been influenced by Love's *Mirror*, but her manner of living too appears to bear the fruit of Love's recommendations for how to make use of 'devoute ymaginacions'.

(b) *Discretio spirituum* and Codes of Behaviour

'Felyngys & Reuelacyons'

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, [...] to another gifts of healing [...] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits[.]⁹⁷

One of the greatest concerns expressed by Margery in the *Book*, is that of judging whether or not her 'felyngys & hir reuelacyons' were of God, or of the devil. In order to ascertain this, she sought the counsel of numerous men (and women) of religion, receiving positive, but also negative judgement from her meetings with vocational religious. However, already in the *Proem* we are told that all those she revealed her manner of living to, found her moved by the Holy Ghost, and not of any evil spirit:

And þei all þat sche schewed hyr secretys vn-to seyð sche was mech
bownde to louen ower Lord for þe grace þat he schewyd vn-to hyr and

⁹⁷ I Corinthians 12:7-10.

counseld hyr to folwyn hyr meuynggys & hyr steringgys & trustly
belevyn it weren of þe Holy Gost & noon euyl spyryt.⁹⁸

This response was the commonly held opinion of many of Margery's religious superiors, but she had her detractors as well; those opposed to Margery's manner of living are not shown in a favourable light. While abroad, it is often her own countrymen that are her harshest critics, but as commonly happens with Margery's enemies, both she and God make clear their scorn for such adversaries.⁹⁹ Margery's strategy can therefore be seen as twofold: either she is shown seeking out known and respected religious men and women, and receiving their sanction for her manner of living, or her detractors are shown to contribute to her meekness and forbearance through the way she tolerates their abuse.

Margery's method of either gaining ecclesiastical favour by revealing her manner of living, or strengthening her manner of living through exhibiting forbearance against those who persecuted her, presented her with a no-lose situation. Both her benefactors and her detractors contributed to advancing her religious lifestyle, whether through deliberate intent on their part, or not. Also, there is significance in the words used in the *Book* when it is stated: 'þei all þat sche schewed hyr secretys vn-to'.¹⁰⁰ Presumably, since all that Margery shows her secrets to declare them to be holy and authentic, she never revealed these secrets to her opponents. Therefore, her opponents never knew the full story

⁹⁸ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3.

⁹⁹ I am thinking in particular of the English priest in Rome from Chapters 33-4.

¹⁰⁰ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3.

behind Margery's tears and revelations, and were incapable of assessing her revelations legitimately. This, of course, is working from the premise that all we are told in the *Book* is accurate.

In fact, the *Book* manufactures a consistent narrative in which Margery resists revealing the secrets of her manner of living to people she found unsupportive. In Chapter 48, Margery has been taken to the church of All Saints in Leicester, and stands before the Abbot of Leicester, some canons, the Dean of Leicester, many friars and priests, the Mayor of Leicester, and numerous lay people. Margery is examined on the Articles of the Faith, and answers herself well, according to the attending clerics. She speaks of her beliefs on the Eucharist, dismissing possible fears of her being a Lollard by her view on transubstantiation: 'I be-leue þat it is hys very flesch & hys blood & no material bred'.¹⁰¹ When the Mayor then demands that she explain to the assembly her wearing of white clothes, fearing that she would 'han a-wey owr wyuys fro us', Margery refuses to answer him.¹⁰² Her reasoning is that 'ze arn not worthy to wetyn it'.¹⁰³ Instead, Margery declares that she 'wil tellyn it to þes worthy clerkys wyth good wil be þe maner of confessyon'.

¹⁰¹ *BMK*, I.48.115.

¹⁰² Knowing Margery to be a married woman living apart from her husband, the Mayor evidently fears she is starting some kind of cult for women, involving adopting a life of chastity and leaving their husbands. For further discussion see Allen, *BMK*, p. 311, see also Windeatt (trans., pp. 318-9), who links the fear of white garments with the Flagellant *Albi* or *Bianchi*, prohibited entry to England by Richard II in 1399. See also Mary C. Erler, 'Margery Kempe's White Clothes', *Medium Aevum*, 62 (1993), 78-83.

¹⁰³ *BMK*, I.48.116.

Margery is willing to disclose her manner of living, or at least parts of it, through the sacred and secret ritual of confession.¹⁰⁴ She will not discuss it with a lay authority that is antagonistic towards her. The scene reveals her orthodoxy, her devotion to the Church, her dedication to the clergy (at least when they are ‘worthy clerkys’), and her opposition towards secular authority in matters liturgical. It also empowers Margery, as her request for a private confession results in the dismissal of the Mayor, and other lay onlookers, from the hall. She is confident enough about the working of the spirit within her, that she can disclose to the Abbot and Dean of Leicester, as well as a worthy cleric, that God told her in a revelation she was to wear white garments. There is no indication at this moment that she suffers any doubt about the authenticity of her experience, nor that she fears her listeners may have any reservations about it.

Unlike the lay people gathered in the church of All Saints, Leicester, Margery does not hesitate to reveal the secret of her revelations to the readers and listeners of her book. We, the consumers of the *Book*, are permitted to hear God’s words to Margery. Not only in this instance, but also throughout the *Book*, Margery shares the things that God reveals to her, whether it is portents of the oncoming violence of nature, or advice to pass on about the purchase of a book, or concerning the food she eats and the clothes she wears, or whether or not she needs to pray with beads; in other words, in everything from the miraculous to the mundane, Margery shares her personal communications with God to her audience.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ For Margery and confession see my Introduction.

¹⁰⁵ Margery shares her revelations with her readers, with the caveat that she expresses the difficulty of always perfectly describing the ineffable communion that she experiences with God (*BMK*, I.78.187), or that listing them all would

However, Margery is not always presented as being completely confident in her ‘felyngys & hir reuelacyons’.¹⁰⁶ At times she wonders if they are truly inspired by the Holy Ghost, or if they may be of the devil. It is debatable whether this was how she actually felt, or if she was merely fulfilling an ad hoc protocol through which she might establish authorisation for her spiritual gifts. Chapter 83 provides an excellent example of her misgivings and strengths, when we hear what is the result of Margery doubting her feelings, and what is her reward for trusting them. When she doubted or mistrusted God’s goodness, ‘thorw steryng of any man er thorw any euyl spirit in hir mende [...] þan lakkyd sche grace & deuocyon’, while when, through God’s mercy, she was compelled to believe ‘wyth-owtyn any dowt-yng’, that it was God speaking to her, then she had ‘so many holy thowtys, holy spechys, and dalyawns in hir sowle [...] þat sche cowed neuyr rehersyn but fewe of hem’.¹⁰⁷

Similar to the *Book*’s habit of demonstrating how Margery is doubted by others, and how she perseveres through such tribulations with meekness and fortitude, it is also important for Margery to demonstrate how she, like others, is tempted by the Devil, and how she does not blindly accept that her feelings and revelations come exclusively from divine inspiration. It is another ticked box in her itinerary of achieving a recognized orthodox and deeply religious lifestyle. Christ himself, of course, was tempted by the Devil, and his overcoming such

detract from other benefits of the book (*BMK*, I.23.54). For examples of God’s revelations to Margery see: forewarning of approaching storms I.39.95-6; advising on the purchase of a breviary I.24.57-8; breaking a fast I.66.161; wearing of white clothes I.37.91-2; praying with beads I.5.17.

¹⁰⁶ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3.

¹⁰⁷ *BMK*, I.83.201.

temptations was seen as an important example for others to follow.¹⁰⁸ He also suffered from doubt and anguish, as demonstrated in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed for release from his sacrifice, if God willed it.¹⁰⁹ Margery too prays to God for release, asking that her cryings should cease during sermons, so that she might ‘hauyn hem be my-self alone’ as the pain is too great when she is ‘put fro þi holy worde heryng’.¹¹⁰ But Christ tells her she must be obedient to his will, and that her great cries and roarings, if emulated, will cause the people to ‘haue þe blys of Heuyn wyth-owtyn ende’.¹¹¹

Besides relating to the audience of the *Book* the numerous times Margery doubted, and sought the assurance and support of learned and respected religious men and women, and besides presenting them with examples of when Margery truly was tested by the devil, it is important to Margery’s possible hopes of sainthood, or of full recognition as a visionary, that details of her examinations are provided. This is imperative in order to demonstrate that a proper discernment of spirits has been conducted, and that Margery has been proven to be orthodox in her beliefs and behaviour. Testing an assumed prophet or visionary, however, was not a straightforward procedure. Guidelines could include a study of the visionary’s manner of living, as prescribed by Jean Gerson,

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 4:1-11, and Luke 4:1-13.

¹⁰⁹ Luke 22:41-4.

¹¹⁰ *BMK*, I.77.181.

¹¹¹ *BMK*, I.77.183. For temptations of the Devil being sent to cleanse and test the elect see, for example, Peter of John Olivi’s *Remedia contra temptationes spirituales*, a treatise addressed to advanced members of Beguine communities in Southern France. Reference taken from: Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 66-7.

for example; or, in a similar vein, discernment could be approached by looking to recognise three signs of wrong-mindedness demonstrated by the visionary, as set out by Jan van Ruysbroeck.¹¹²

Writings on *Discretio*

The example of the prophets goes back to the Hebrew Bible and carries on into the New Testament, where warnings of false prophets are given, as well as some basic guidance towards the discernment of spirits.¹¹³ Unfortunately, the guidance provided is not much more comprehensive than that of some later theologians, stating only that those spirits acknowledging Jesus Christ come from God, while those that fail to do so are the spirit of the Antichrist. There is no room given for the possibility of a Christ-acknowledging prophet who has been misguided by an evil spirit, or has misinterpreted their vision. It is the extreme difficulty (if not impossibility) of always discerning with total confidence through following such basic guidelines - where there exist numerous nuances of what kind of vision is experienced, by what kind of presumed prophet, and under what circumstances - which made the task of assessing visions a very daunting one.

As the monastic scholars and theologians strove to advance methods of *discretio spirituum*, they began to develop more elaborate rules pertaining to who was qualified for such a task, and how they should go about it. On the difficulty of making a foolproof rule for the discernment of spirits Anderson writes:

¹¹² See Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*. Both will be examined further below. For Gerson see pp. 187-8, and for van Ruysbroeck (also Ruusbroec) see p. 188.

¹¹³ See, for example, I John 4:1-3.

At no point in the late Middle Ages does anyone advance a *single* guideline for distinguishing between true and false revelations; they are always multiple guidelines, and at many points the very possibility of a single definitive rule is explicitly denied.¹¹⁴

The problem was, however, that as many examples of unique types of prophets and visionaries, along with their prophesies and visions that existed, the rule-makers would require a proportionate number of appropriate guidelines and rules for discernment.¹¹⁵ It is for this reason that van Ruysbroeck (1293-1381) presented three signs for recognizing wrong-minded individuals in his *Die geestelike brulocht*. These signs were: where the individual is unsteady and lacking unity, or they exhibit spiritual pride and lack in virtue or good practice, or they are lacking in humility or generosity.¹¹⁶ By the time of Margery's contemporary, Jean Gerson, guidelines for testing spirits involving multiple stages were introduced. In Gerson's *De probatione* he provides the following three means of discerning spirits: doctrinal (where erudition in holy Scripture is essential); experiential (where those testing have themselves experienced graces given by the Holy Spirit); and finally, through receiving the gift of the discernment of spirits by the Holy Spirit (from I Cor. 12:10).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, p. 11.

¹¹⁵ Anderson notes that the terms 'visionary' and 'prophet' were often viewed as interchangeable by medieval authors, while that of 'mystic' belongs to terminology that is more modern. See Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, p. 11.

¹¹⁶ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, p. 112.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, p. 202.

Not all methods of discernment would necessarily be readily available, or directly familiar to, a priest testing the powers of possible prophet. However, even if they had not been able to personally read a copy of Meister Eckhart, Henry Suso, or Johannes Tauler, there is good reason to believe they were familiar with the gist of many such writings, through their theological education and experience. It would hardly seem likely for a priest to be accepted and respected as a discerner of spirits without having familiarized himself with the subject. Information written in books travelled by word of mouth as well as through reading directly from the page, and not just between clergy, but from clergy to lay men and women as well. For example, Yoshikawa believes that Margery may well have become familiar with Gerson's treatise *De probatione spirituum* through the Carmelite Alan of Lynn.¹¹⁸ As James A. Wiseman points out, when explaining the difficulty of determining the influence of Ruysbroeck on subsequent Christian spirituality, oral traditions were a common means of transferring knowledge, making it difficult to ascertain the full extent of the transfer of such information.¹¹⁹

If Margery was familiar with the writing of Ruysbroeck, she would probably also be aware of the heresy of the Free Spirit that he warned against.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 64.

¹¹⁹ James A. Wiseman, trans. and intro., *John Ruusbroec: The Spiritual Espousals and Other Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), pp. 31-2. For more on the dissemination of Ruysbroeck's writing in English, see: Marleen Cré, 'We Are United With God (and God With Us?): Adapting Ruusbroec in *The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God* and *The Chastising of Gods Children*', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England VII*, ed. by E.A. Jones (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 21-36.

¹²⁰ See *The Spiritual Espousals (Die Geestelike Brulocht)* in Wiseman, *John Ruusbroec*, p. 9.

With both the movement and the opponent having connections with the Low Countries, the frequent trade between Lynn and this region would be a viable route for the transference of such knowledge, if not of the movement itself. Besides such a possible means of transferring this information, it is known that the *Chastising of God's Children* author was familiar with Ruysbroeck's thoughts on the Free Spirit movement through a Latin translation of his book, and that he felt women were in particular need of protection from such a system of beliefs. Further, as Kerby-Fulton argues, the *Chastising*-author was alert to the importance for his female audience to be aware of *discretio* issues, and delivered these issues from the background of Bridgettine defences presented on the Continent.¹²¹

Kerby-Fulton also makes the point that the *Chastising*-author devotes much more space to Free Spiritism (two chapters) than he does to that of Lollardy (one sentence).¹²² From this evidence, it would seem clear that he saw the Free Spirit heresy as a far greater threat than that of Lollardy. The Church's opposition to the Free Spirit movement dated back to the Council of Vienne's decree *Ad nostrum* (1317), which defined errors attributed to a group of German beguards and beguines that had adapted ideas from the beguine Marguerite

¹²¹ Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, pp. 261 and 263. For Bridgettine defences see, for example, Alphonse of Pecha, who was translated in the *Chastising*, and in 'a freestanding translation, heavily 'abridged'(in certain passages virtually eviscerated) for lay readers and, apparently, a female audience'. Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, p. 24. For the Middle English translation of Alphonse's *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, see Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, pp. 163-81.

¹²² Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, p. 265.

Porete.¹²³ The Church was clearly nervous about any followers of this heresy, and in particular of ‘lay female contemplative’s aspirations and heterodoxy’,¹²⁴ and it is such a tension that Kerby-Fulton associates with the question asked by a cleric in York of Margery in Chapter 51.

When Margery is asked what she believes the meaning of ‘Crescite & multiplicamini’ to be, the cleric is expecting God’s order from Genesis (Gen. 1:22) to be interpreted by Margery as free license to express her sexuality in an unrestricted way.¹²⁵ But Margery does not interpret the words to the cleric in this supposedly Free Spiritist way, but replies instead that it not only is understood to mean the ‘begetyng of children bodily, but also be purchasing of vertu, which is frute gostly’¹²⁶. She then develops the idea further by adding:

As by heryng of þe wordys of God, be good exampyl zeuyng, be mekenes & paciens, charite & chastite, & swech oþer, for pacyens is more worthy þan myraclys werkyng.¹²⁷

¹²³ See, for example, Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, pp. 88-9. See also, Bernard McGinn, “‘Evil-Sounding, Rash and Suspect of Heresy’”: Tension Between Mysticism and Magisterium in the History of the Church’, in *Catholic Historical Review* 90 (2004), 193-212.

¹²⁴ Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, p. 269.

¹²⁵ Allen, *BMK*, p. 312, and *BMK*, I.51.121.

¹²⁶ *BMK*, I.51.121. I use ‘supposedly’, as the notion of Free Spiritist ‘free love’ was probably a paranoid construction on the part of Continental Church authorities. See McGinn: ‘evidence for an actual movement of libertine heretics, an “elite of amoral supermen” [...] tends to dissipate when the sources are closely examined’, in ‘Evil-Sounding, Rash and Suspect of Heresy’, p. 196.

¹²⁷ *BMK*, I.51.121.

According to the *Book*, the ‘gret clerke’ that had posed the question of Margery is pleased with her response. It is, after all, a very considered and orthodox reply, which stresses the importance of virtues over the performing of miracles, averting another fear the cleric may have had—that Margery was prone to ‘enthusiasm’, or the aspiration of receiving signs and performing wonders, and therefore guilty of ostentation or vainglory.

This tendency for some female religious towards enthusiasm for spiritual extravagance was a particular apprehension felt by the authors of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Chastising of God’s Children*.¹²⁸ The revelations and euphoria experienced by such devotees of mystical experience may not always be against orthodox teaching, but their behaviour was seen as excessive, and they were felt to be seeking special notice and favour, rather than devoting themselves to charitable works and observing humility. Gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to the *Chastising*-author, should be received with ‘al mekenesse and gladnesse of spirity’, and the receiver should not ‘abide and reste upon suche comfortis, be þei neuer so faire’, but should instead return to God ‘wiþ worshippes and þankynges’.¹²⁹ In other words, the primary aim should be that of glorifying God, not reveling in, and displaying for others, the gifts being bestowed.

Bazire and Colledge examine how mystics like Margery Kempe would use language such as being ‘ravished into heaven’, and how the *Cloud*-author warned ‘þat may non do bot God [...] Þer is no man þat may assende vnto

¹²⁸ See Chapter 7 (‘The Repression of ‘Enthusiasm’) in *The Chastising of God’s Children: and The treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*, ed. by Joyce Bazire and Eric Colledge (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), pp. 54-61.

¹²⁹ *The Chastising*, ed. by Bazire and Colledge, p. 108.

heuen'.¹³⁰ In fact, the *Cloud*-author spends such an amount of time describing the unusual behaviour of those deceived by false spirituality, that he feels the need to explain why he devoted so much space doing so.¹³¹ The *Chastising*-author, who borrowed quite extensively from other writing on contemplatives, considered many ideas from Ruysbroeck's *Spiritual Espousals*, as well as Alphonse of Pecha's *Epistola Solitarii*.¹³² His stance on both was one of caution. Where Ruysbroeck looked upon the Free Spiritists with some suspicion and as 'contemplatives gone wrong', the *Chastising*-author became even more concerned with the difference between true and false contemplatives, and the *Cloud*-author labeled heretics as 'the devil's contemplatives'.¹³³

The *Chastising*-author made good use of Alphonse's *Epistola*, which was written to prove Birgitta of Sweden's revelations were of divine and not diabolical origin.¹³⁴ He did not share Alphonse's convictions of her authenticity, but instead, worked from the *Epistola* with the intention of demonstrating that all revelations needed to be tested for truth, regardless of who they were gifted to,

¹³⁰ *The Chastising*, ed. by Bazire and Colledge, p. 55 and *The Cloud of Unknowing: and The Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. by Phyllis Hodgson EETS o.s. 218 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 111.

¹³¹ *The Cloud*, ed. by Hodgson, pp. 97-100.

¹³² Some other sources include the *Ancrene Riwe*, the *Horologium Sapientiae*, the *Stimulus Amoris*, as well as work by St. Isidore, St. Gregory, St. Augustine, Aelred of Rievaulx, and St. Anselm. See *The Chastising*, ed. by Bazire and Colledge, pp. 44-5.

¹³³ *The Chastising*, ed. by Bazire and Colledge, p. 47.

¹³⁴ Yoshikawa writes about the significance of Alfonso's defence of Birgitta, as well as the two Councils of Constance, and Basle, upon Margery's own response to *discretio* in: Yoshikawa, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', 119-37.

and that they should be treated as suspicious until passing certain tests.¹³⁵

Another skeptic of mystical experiences was Walter Hilton, who wrote specifically against any sensory experiences,

either in sownyng of the eere, or saverynge in the mouth, or
smellynge in the nose, or ellis any felable heete as it were fier glowand
and warmand the breest, or any othere partie of the bodi, or onythinge
that mai be feelyd bi bodili wit[.]¹³⁶

Such experiences, according to Hilton, were nothing to do with proper contemplation, pleasing though they may be, and regardless of whether or not they were the work of a good angel. Hilton explains, ‘wherfore sithen thei moun be bothe good and yvel, it semeth that thei aren not of the beste’.¹³⁷ Hilton was skeptical of Rolle and his ‘emphasis on physical and supernatural experience’. Although such writings ‘aroused the interest of the less educated’, Hilton was concerned that the unlearned audience of such books would develop their ideas out of context, and interpret them too literally.

It was up to the soul to demonstrate discretion between good and evil, Hilton reasons, but this would only be possible if both had been experienced. His remedy for the handicap of not being able to make the distinction, is to judge the effect of the experiences, where any that lead to spiritual pride and false security, and make one believe they were feeling ‘a partie of heveneli joie and of angilis

¹³⁵ *The Chastising*, ed. by Bazire and Colledge, p. 57.

¹³⁶ Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. by Bestul, (Book I, Chapter 10).

¹³⁷ Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 94.

blisse, and for thi thee thynketh that thu schuldest never pray ne thinke not elles' would be diabolic.¹³⁸ Ruysbroeck warns about a 'natural state of internal restfulness [...] but forgetting God', which can lead to deceiving people into believing they receive rewards because of their holiness, when really it is 'by means of the fiend'.¹³⁹ In opposition to this, feelings that do not hinder the spiritual life, but make one pray more devoutly and fervently, causing love of your neighbour to increase and love of yourself to be lowered, are the agency of a good angel and therefore come from God.

William Flete, the author of *De Remediis contra Temptationes*, expresses how men and women both have two wills, that of good and that of evil.¹⁴⁰ The evil will comes from sensuality, according to Flete, while that of good comes from grace. To be tempted is not a bad thing, as long as it is against the will of the individual.¹⁴¹ As with Hilton, Flete is concerned that meditations may tempt the worshipper into believing that is his best form of worship, and cause him to 'leue theyr dyuyne seruyce that they be bounde to'.¹⁴² To avoid this, Flete advises that the individual should be 'gouerned by theyr confessour or some other dyscrete persone and fully put them to theyr rule'.¹⁴³ The sin of not doing

¹³⁸ Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. by Bestul, (Book I, Chapter 11).

¹³⁹ Anderson, *The Discernement of Spirits*, p. 112.

¹⁴⁰ I am using the Middle English translation of Flete: 'The Remedy Ayenst the Troubles of Temptacyons', in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers* Vol II, ed. by C. Horstmann (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1896), pp. 106-123.

¹⁴¹ Flete, 'The Remedy Ayenst', p. 114.

¹⁴² Flete, 'The Remedy Ayenst', p. 117.

¹⁴³ Flete, 'The Remedy Ayenst', p. 118.

so is pride and vanity—to believe one’s own wit is better than that of Holy Church.

We know from the book lists in Chapters 17 and 58 of the *Book*, that Margery was familiar with some of the writings of Hilton.¹⁴⁴ Although books such as those by the *Cloud*-author and *Chastising*-author, as well as those by Flete, and Ruysbroeck, are not listed, that does not exclude the possibility of Margery becoming familiar with some of the content of any or all of them, whether through a direct reading, a clerical friend citing them, in the context of a sermon, or by the transference of information by any other intermediary source. What is important to bear in mind is that the arguments presented in these books were being transmitted among spiritually ambitious communities, usually, but by no means always enclosed. Even if every spiritual advisor did not possess a copy, or had one available to read, the knowledge and ideas within them was being disseminated and developed in the context of other writings, or sermons, in debates or discussions, and especially through the porous links between houses of the professional religious and the outside world.¹⁴⁵ With friends such as Alan of Lynn and the reading-priest reciting to Margery from the Gospel and devotional books, the likelihood of her being aware of such books is especially good.¹⁴⁶ This is particularly true considering Alan of Lynn had written indexes on Birgitta of Sweden’s *Revelations*, and would therefore have an interest in

¹⁴⁴ *BMK*, I.17.39 and I.58.143.

¹⁴⁵ For some discussion of book traffic ‘across the divide of secular and religious life’, see Mary C. Erler, ‘Women’s Religious Communities’, in *Women Reading and Piety*, pp. 27-47.

¹⁴⁶ In Chapter 69 of the *Book*, we learn of Alan’s informing Margery in questions of scripture (*BMK*, I.69.168), and in Chapter 70 we are told that he told her ‘talys of Holy Scriptur’ (*BMK*, I.70.170).

following writing presented both in favour of, and in opposition to, her manner of living and canonization.¹⁴⁷

There are fourteen known manuscript copies of *The Chastising* surviving in part or in full, and seventeen of the *The Cloud*.¹⁴⁸ As mentioned above, we know that the *Chastising*-author made use of several different sources, including both the *Stimulus Amoris* and *Spiritual Espousals*. We also know how Richard Rolle, with his trinity of ‘canor, calor, dulcor’, the angelic song he heard, the physical heat in his heart, and the sweetness that overwhelmed him,

indicated a cult of these phenomena which disquieted many contemplatives of the succeeding generations, notably Walter Hilton and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*[.]¹⁴⁹

While some writings of medieval authors might be transmitted due to their capacity to serve an exemplary function, works could also be communicated for the purpose of refuting the beliefs or claims espoused within them. For Margery the task at hand would be to ascertain whether or not her manner of living remained orthodox in everything she did. Although her sensory experiences might not have been favoured by men such as Hilton, if they were proven not to be diabolical in nature, and so long as she otherwise met the standards expected of a true visionary and prophet, she would not be transgressing Church doctrine.

¹⁴⁷ See Allen’s note *BMK*, p. 259.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, *The Chastising*, ed. by Bazire and Colledge, p. 1, and *The Cloud*, ed. by Hodgson, p. ix.

¹⁴⁹ *The Chastising*, ed. by Bazire and Colledge, pp. 54-5.

The Holy Spirit

Margery's gifts of the Holy Spirit could be interpreted as those of wisdom, and knowledge; evidence of healing is also provided, but it is her gift of prophecy that becomes a core theme of the *Book*.¹⁵⁰ There are numerous examples of Margery's wisdom, her healing, her prophetic powers leading to fulfilled predictions, and the approval given following theologians' determinations found within her book. In all, there are forty-five uses of 'Holy Gost' in the *Book*, with thirty-seven in Book I, and 8 in Book II. Immediately in the *Proem* we are told how 'thorw steryng of þe Holy Gost' Margery was led 'to entren þe wey of hy perfeccyon'.¹⁵¹ Throughout the course of the *Book* the reader is made witness to the ways in which the Holy Spirit blesses Margery with various gifts, and how it directs her manner of living towards that of high perfection.

We learn more of Margery's bond with the Holy Ghost in the *Proem*, such as how her blessedness caused jealousy in others, leading to her being ostracized by them. We also learn of details of her blessedness, in how the Holy Ghost benefits her with prophetic gifts:

Sche was so vsyd to be slaundred & repreued, to be cheden & rebuked of þe world for grace & vertu wyth which sche was induced thorw þe strength of þe Holy Gost [...] Sche knew & vndyrstod many secret & preuy thyngys which schuld befallen aftyward be inspiracyon of þe

¹⁵⁰ Also, although Margery does not speak in tongues, and could not be said to truly possess the interpretation of tongues, she is described as miraculously understanding a German priest when she speaks no Latin or German, and he, no English. See, for example, C.F. Cooper, 'Miraculous Translation in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Studies in Philology*, 101 (2004), 270-98.

¹⁵¹ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.1-2.

Holy Gost.¹⁵²

There are several instances within the *Book* where Margery's gift of prophecy is displayed.¹⁵³ In Chapter 12, for example, a monk that had earlier despised her is amazed by her wisdom when she speaks (another gift of the Holy Spirit), and seeks an audience with her in private. He then asks Margery if he will be saved or not, and which of his sins displeases God the most. Margery weeps for his sins, prays to God, and is told that the monk's sins are that of lechery, despair, and of keeping worldly goods. She is further told that the monk will be saved if he gives up his sin and follows her advice. Her advice is that he should show contrition, be shriven, and cease to sin. Margery functions as a cleric here, giving priestly advice to a monk. His forgiveness comes from God by way of herself: 'God schal zeue zow grace for my lofe'.¹⁵⁴

Her revelatory gifts are not excluded to the reading of men's souls. Margery is also given portents regarding extreme weather and conditions of nature. In Chapter 20 God tells her that 'þer xal be an erdene', although no further mention of this earthquake is made.¹⁵⁵ In Chapters 39 and 42, there are forewarnings of storms. In the first of these, which takes place in Rome, it is reported that people cry on Margery to pray for them, and God withdraws the

¹⁵² *BMK*, I.*Proem*.2.

¹⁵³ Diane Watt writes on Margery Kempe's self-representation as a prophet in: Diane Watt, 'Political Prophecy in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 145-60.

¹⁵⁴ *BMK*, I.12.27. The Chapter is between pp. 25-7.

¹⁵⁵ *BMK*, I.20.47.

storms.¹⁵⁶ In the latter case, which takes place in Middelburg in Zealand, Margery is warned in time to take shelter from the inclement weather, and she and her companions reach their lodgings just as the storm breaks.¹⁵⁷ The weather can also function as a signifier of God's approval, as in Chapter 44 when Margery desires to know if God wishes her to wear white, and the thunder, lighting, and rain that comes within three days delivers his answer.¹⁵⁸

Chapters 23 and 24 of the *Book* contain some of the richest information regarding Margery's prophetic gift. Both chapters concern either examples of Margery's revelations, or the discernment of her gift by the priest-scribe seeking first-hand confirmation. In Chapter 23 she advises a vicar (at his bequest) whether or not he should leave his cure of souls and his benefice, or keep it. Margery, through God's word, advised him to keep his cure, and he did so, with the added advice of seeking the assistance of others to teach God's laws and commandments. There is no follow-up on this story, but it would be assumed that the advice proved to be sound and satisfactory to the vicar. Immediately following this anecdote, we are told how Margery, while praying in St. Margaret's in Lynn where 'a cors was present', is told by God that the dead woman's husband, who was then in good health, would be dead in a 'schort tyme'.¹⁵⁹ The *Book* then tells us: '& so it be-fel as sche felt be reuelacyon'.

There then follows, still in Chapter 23, an account of a woman Margery was asked by a priest to pray for, and, although God told Margery in her heart

¹⁵⁶ *BMK*, I.39.95-6.

¹⁵⁷ *BMK*, I.42.101.

¹⁵⁸ *BMK*, I.44.103-4.

¹⁵⁹ *BMK*, I.23.53.

that this woman was wicked and would die, she pleads for her soul and God grants her mercy.¹⁶⁰ Next comes a tale of Margery's confessor urging her pray for a dying woman, but God instructs Margery that the woman will live and thrive, '& so sche dede'.¹⁶¹ There then follows three further accounts of people that were believed to be at death's door that God reveals will survive despite the seriousness of their illness. The chapter draws to a conclusion with a powerful finish, where we are told:

Many mo swech reuelacyons þis creatur had in felyng; hem alle for to wryten it xuld be letting perauentur of mor profyte.

This declaration tells us that, although we have been presented with numerous examples (none attested by another, with the exception of her confessor), this is only a small part of Margery's oeuvre of revelations. The mention of this editing suggests a declared modesty; where first, to present more revelations would prohibit writing on other important subjects, and therefore, Margery is modestly ceasing in this narration listing her numerous revelations for the reader's benefit, and second, Margery is not writing about her revelations for her own glory, but to inspire the reader. Subsequent lines confirm this inspirational priority:

Þes be wretyn for to schewyn þe homlynes & þe goodlynes of owyr merciful Lord Crist Ihesu & for no commendacyon of þe creatur.

¹⁶⁰ *BMK*, I.23.53-4.

¹⁶¹ *BMK*, I.23.54.

Margery fulfills Ruysbroeck's (and others) account of how a true visionary should behave by demonstrating humility and selflessness. She is looking for no 'commendacyon', and is sharing her gift for the benefit of others, and is therefore not lacking in humility or generosity.

The substantial number of Margery's revelations is then reiterated, and we are told what 'gret peyn & ponyschyng' they were to her.¹⁶² In fact she would 'leuar a sufferyd any bodily penawns þan þes felyngys & sche mygth a put hem a-wey' [.] We learn by this, whether by device, or through genuine feeling and disclosure on Margery's part, that her experience of these revelations is more torment than blessing. She becomes a martyr for the gift she has received, as she would not suffer the torment she does, the 'dred þat sche had of illusions & deceytys of hir gostly enmys'. Again, Margery is fulfilling the role of a proper visionary. She doubts herself, rather than assuming her visions to be always of divine origin, and in this way also avoids Ruysbroeck's warning of displaying spiritual pride.¹⁶³

This doubt expressed by Margery runs throughout the first part of the *Book* in particular, and to allay her fears she is shown seeking the advice and support of respected theologians. Her trip to Norwich is especially full of references to the Holy Ghost. Just before this visit, Bishop Philip Repyngdon of Lincoln is one of the first to attest to the authenticity of Margery's manner of

¹⁶² *BMK*, I.23.54.

¹⁶³ See Ruysbroeck above. Expressing the need for anyone experiencing revelations to doubt their origin and seek advice is common among writers of *discretio*. See Henry of Langenstein: 'the visionary should show distrust of his or her own visions, and not exhibit lightness of judgement or credulity', and Jean Gerson: 'to seek advice at every turn and so remain immune to demonic blandishments', for example, in Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, pp. 174, and 192.

living. He tells her that her feelings and contemplations are ‘enspyred of the Holy Gost’.¹⁶⁴ Repyngdon is an important supporter, not just for his role as Bishop, but because of his background in Oxford, and past connections with Lollardy. Having abjured these connections, and instead become a persecutor of Lollardy, his approval of Margery would not go unnoticed by Church officials.¹⁶⁵ Also previous to her visit to Norwich there is an anecdote told about Margery’s return to Lynn following her visits to Lincoln, Lambeth and London. It relates to a meeting with her then confessor, the unnamed Dominican anchorite who supported her up until her return from the Holy Land (by which time he appears to have died).¹⁶⁶ The *Book* tells us that he describes for Margery how there was much evil talk about her while absent, and that he was urged to break his friendship with her, but that he resolutely defended her saying that she was a good woman, a lover of God, and ‘hyly inspired wyth þe Holy Gost’.¹⁶⁷

When Margery visits Norwich in Chapters 17 and 18, she meets with the vicar of St. Stephen’s (Richard of Caister), a white friar (William Southfield), and an anchoress (Julian of Norwich). All three are shown her manner of living, and all three find that Margery is moved by the Holy Ghost, and reassure her and allay her fears. These three well-respected religious figures contribute significantly to attesting for the proper conduct of the discernment of spirits on behalf of Margery. The first, Richard of Caister, is given excellent credentials in

¹⁶⁴ *BMK*, I.15.34.

¹⁶⁵ On Repyngdon see, for example, Meech, *BMK*, pp. 273-4.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p. 88. This incident actually takes place after her visit to Norwich, however, despite the fact it is listed before it. See *BMK*, I.16.38.

¹⁶⁷ *BMK*, I.16.37.

the *Book* when God says of him ‘he is an hey chossyn sowle of myn’.¹⁶⁸ When Margery finds him he is conversing with his own spiritual director, ‘a testimony’, Rosalynn Voaden writes, ‘to his virtue and an implication of his expertise’.¹⁶⁹ His initial skepticism that a woman could speak of the love of God for one or two hours makes him, according to Voaden, ‘the very model of a medieval spiritual director’. He begins by doubting and is swayed by the provided evidence. His evaluation of Margery is that ‘sche was wel lernyd in þe lawe of God & indued wyth grace of þe Holy Gost’.¹⁷⁰

Her next visit, to William Southfield, is important for attesting to the veracity of Margery’s visions, since he is himself known as a visionary, as he was said to have received supernatural visitations.¹⁷¹ Southfield tells Margery not to have concerns about her ‘maner of leuyng’, after hearing her tell him of ‘hir felyngys’, adding ‘it is þe Holy Gost werkyng plentyuowsly hys grace in zour sowle’.¹⁷² He tells Margery that she should give thanks, as all people should, that the Holy Ghost should ‘inspir hys grace in zow to þe help & comfort of us alle’.¹⁷³ Once again, it is stressed how Margery’s gift is for the benefit of others, not for her own glory. This is further emphasized when Southfield adds ‘I counsel zow þat ze dispose zow to receyuyn þe zyftys of God as lowly &

¹⁶⁸ *BMK*, I.17.38.

¹⁶⁹ Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*, p. 126.

¹⁷⁰ *BMK*, I.17.40.

¹⁷¹ See Allen, *BMK*, p. 278.

¹⁷² *BMK*, I.18.41.

¹⁷³ See Anderson on Gerson, who believed that all gifts of the Spirit were ‘given for the edification of the Church’. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, p. 210.

meekly as *ze kan*'.¹⁷⁴ It seems apparent that great pains are being taken to demonstrate in the *Book* that the doctrine of *discretio spirituum* is being properly observed, that a benevolent and not a diabolical spirit is indeed blessing Margery, and that she is observing meekness and humility for the gift that has been bestowed upon her. Finally, Southfield tells her that the Holy Ghost would not reside 'in a body soget to syn', and that 'he fleth al fals feynyng & falshede'.¹⁷⁵

Margery's third visit in Norwich is to the anchorite, Julian of Norwich. Julian is especially important to Margery in regards to *discretio* for being a highly respected female visionary. She is also important for the way she coaches Margery to discern the spirits on her own behalf, and for providing the support and guidance only possible from another woman. Voaden points out these advantages, as well as stipulating how the text of the *Book* indicates that Julian is an expert in *discretio spirituum*.¹⁷⁶ Julian states that the Holy Ghost never urges one against charity, that chaste livers are the 'temple of þe Holy Gost', that the Spirit makes one steadfast in faith, and that it is what provides tears of contrition, devotion or compassion; and therefore, all those that possess these qualities

¹⁷⁴ On *discretio spirituum* and humility and meekness see, for example, on Henry of Frieman "the Elder": 'Humility and meekness of heart, signs of the divine instinct', in Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, p. 85. For Jean Gerson, Anderson says that he felt 'the visionary's humility [...] is the single best guarantor of the truth of a revelation'. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, p. 196.

¹⁷⁵ *BMK*, I.18.41.

¹⁷⁶ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 127. *BMK*, I.18.42: 'the ankes was expert in swech thyngys & good counsel coud 3euyn.'

(charity, chastity, steadfastness in the faith, and tears) also possess the Holy Ghost.¹⁷⁷

Julian speaks specifically of Margery's tears, referring to both St. Paul and St. Jerome in defence of them.¹⁷⁸ Her words of support add to the benefits *discretio* provides in this chapter. Yoshikawa writes:

In a culture where *discretio* is crucial to spiritual life, the devil's influence is most feared by those who receive revelations. Margery must have been relieved to learn that tears release the soul from the devil.¹⁷⁹

Immediately following the commentary on the greatness of the conversations between Margery and Julian over several days, there is highlighted a brief, and unspecified list of other people, secular and religious, that Margery revealed her manner of living to. Their response was to advise her to 'not ben aferde', and that 'þer was no disseyte in hir maner of leuyng'.¹⁸⁰

The *Proem* describes Margery as being bidden by the Holy Ghost to seek confirmation of her spiritual gifts, and when she divulges her manner of living and the grace bestowed upon her to 'many worshipful clerkys', she is told to 'belevyn it weren of þe Holy Gost & of noon euyl spyryt'.¹⁸¹ By having her lifestyle ruled by respected theologians, she is observing the accepted procedure

¹⁷⁷ *BMK*, I.18.42.

¹⁷⁸ *BMK*, I.18.43.

¹⁷⁹ Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 67.

¹⁸⁰ *BMK*, I.18.43.

¹⁸¹ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3.

of *discretio spirituum*, and not only allaying her own fears about the possibility of evil influence, but striving to put to rest any doubts expressed by others. Liz Herbert McAvoy writes on the subject of Margery's acquiring the status and respect of the religious men and women she visits:

By populating her text with an array of local anchorites of various levels of repute, Margery could appropriate the exceptional esteem in which they were held within contemporary urban spirituality and cast herself as an equally exceptional holy woman within the light of that spiritual elitism.¹⁸²

Due to the subject matter of her writing, it is understandable that McAvoy used the word 'anchorites', when she could have broadened it out to 'theologians'. Margery does, in essence, accumulate the respect and experience of the religious personages that she visits. But this is an added benefit, rather than her principal interest. As Raymond Powell states in his essay on Margery Kempe as an example of late medieval English piety: 'modern scholars do Margery Kempe a disservice by ignoring the context in which she wrote'.¹⁸³ Powell rightly indicates that Margery's purpose is primarily to seek the aid of *discretio spirituum* in order to verify the veracity of her revelations and gain acceptance of her manner of living.

¹⁸² Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2011), p. 125.

¹⁸³ Powell, 'Margery Kempe: An Exemplar', p. 2.

Margery's *Book* testifies to a subtle understanding of *discretio spirituum* and the codes involved in living the life of a spiritual visionary. As a record of myriad conversations with learned men and women of religion, of recitations of devotional books, sermon attendance, and as part of the history of its own composition, Margery's *Book* reveals that the complex and unstable regulations of spiritual validation were fundamental to her self representation. If she were versed in how to reply to the question what God meant by '*Crescite et multiplicamini*', it seems only reasonable to assume that she had absorbed the means through which she might defend her revelations, observing the rites of *discretio*.¹⁸⁴ Voaden has the following to say about Margery's education in discernment:

What she pursues is not spiritual guidance from learned holy men, expert in discerning the spirits, but official endorsement of the idiosyncratic path she feels herself called to follow.¹⁸⁵

While Voaden may be correct in believing that Margery's ulterior motive was endorsement of her manner of living, rather than guidance in *discretio*, she could not have hoped to achieve any status as a visionary if she did not first answer to the demands of the Church in regards to endorsing the veracity of her visions. In order to have any basis for a claim to prophetic powers, in order to have a foundation on which to build her manner of living into one that might later

¹⁸⁴ *BMK* I.51.121.

¹⁸⁵ Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 132.

achieve the ultimate religious ‘award’ of sanctity, Margery was required to demonstrate that she had, in fact, received gifts from the Holy Spirit.

(c) Tears and Compunction

A Manner of Tears

Closely linked with Margery’s need to demonstrate how she is correctly observing the process of *discretio spirituum*, is that of verifying the authenticity of her holy tears, and her dramatic and disruptive outbursts of compassionate emotion. Just as she was required to verify that her prophecies and revelations were considered true and holy by respected men of religion, it was equally important that she have her most demonstrative expression of her manner of living validated. Margery weeps throughout the book, but it is following her visit to the Holy Land that her ‘krying & roryng’ first begins, ‘þe first cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon’.¹⁸⁶ Margery’s emotional outburst follows upon a vivid image of Christ’s Crucifixion seen ‘in hir gostly sygth’, where the ‘gret compassyon’ she experiences overwhelms her, ‘as þow hir hert xulde a brostyn a-sundyr’. Besides her ‘normal’ weeping then, which was a familiar part of her devotional expression, we learn that this more dramatic manifestation of passionate empathy continued ‘many zerys aftyr þis tyme’.¹⁸⁷

When Margery visits Julian of Norwich and reveals the details of her manner of living to her, because ‘þe ankres was expert in swech thyngys’,

¹⁸⁶ *BMK*, I.28.68. Margery’s calmer ‘teerys of contricyon’ begin a short time after her ‘conversion’, and continue ‘day be day’. See *BMK*, I.Proem.2.

¹⁸⁷ Sanford Brown Meech chronologically places the incident of Margery’s dramatic emotive outbursts in Jerusalem somewhere between autumn 1413, when she departs from Lynn en route to the Holy Land, and 1 August 1414, when she visits the Chapel of the Portiuncula in Assisi (*BMK*, p. xlix).

besides showing the ‘holy meditacyon & hy contemplacyon’ that God put in her soul, Margery also reveals the ‘compunccyon, contricyon [... and] compassyon’ that she is blessed with.¹⁸⁸ Julian’s analysis and judgement of Margery’s emotive qualities, as with her other spiritual gifts, is favourable. Julian says to her:

Whan God visyeth a creatur wyth terys of contrisyon, deuosyon, er
compassion, he may & owyth to leuyn þat þe Holy Gost is in hys
sowle.¹⁸⁹

We learn from this not only that Margery’s tears are, according to Julian, proof of the Holy Ghost being in her soul, but also that there are three types of tears: those of contrition (compunction), those of devotion, and those of compassion.

In fact, early medieval theologians like Hrabanus Maurus and Gregory the Great wrote of four kinds of lamentation.¹⁹⁰ These different categories were: tears shed for past sins, tears lamenting the fall of man, tears for living amongst sin, and tears of longing for heaven. Gregory saw these different categories of devotional tears as a progression from the compunction of fear (knowing the fate of hell because of our sins) towards the compunction of love (empathy for others leading to a longing for the promise of heaven). The desert monks and early saints, who saw tears as central to daily spirituality, were the inspiration for

¹⁸⁸ *BMK*, I.18.42.

¹⁸⁹ *BMK*, I.18.42-3.

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, Sandra McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction in Medieval England: Holy Tears*, ‘Studies in Medieval Literature’, Vol. 8 (Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), pp. 48 and 50-1.

succeeding theologians like Hrabanus and Gregory.¹⁹¹ The principal source for the doctrine of tears came from the Gospel Beatitude found in the book of Matthew: ‘Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted’.¹⁹²

Tears of regret for one’s sins, or for those of others, were necessary to reach a higher level of compunction; but the primary font of devotional tears was meant to be the meditation upon Christ’s human sufferings.¹⁹³ Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux, setting a precedent for future *vitae Christi* such as the MVC, produced descriptive writings of imaginative Passion re-enactments.¹⁹⁴ Of the numerous Church fathers that experienced or wrote about the grace of tears, however, Francis of Assisi was perhaps the most significant, particularly as a probable influence upon Margery Kempe.¹⁹⁵ Thomas of Celano depicted Francis as following a lifestyle that was a ‘personal imitation of the Gospel’, and as ‘a saint whose tears frequently interrupt his prayer and efficaciously result in healings’.¹⁹⁶ Francis’s tears often came from his compassion for the suffering of Christ. Sarah McNamer writes how Francis and his Order took the affective prayer presented by Anselm and Bernard, and

¹⁹¹ McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 4.

¹⁹² Matthew 5.5. See also, Luke 6.21.

¹⁹³ McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 115.

¹⁹⁴ McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction*, pp. 115-7, and Sandra McNamer, ‘The Origins of the Meditationes Vitae Christi’, in *Speculum* 84 (905-55), pp. 913-14.

¹⁹⁵ Other examples of theologians writing on the benefit of tears being, for example, Antony, Augustine, Cassian, and Cassiodorus, as well as the monastic rules. See McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction*, pp. 19-26.

¹⁹⁶ McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction*, pp. 112 and 30.

‘reinvented it, promoting compassionate devotion to the Passion with unprecedented zeal and bringing it out of the cloister and into the world.’¹⁹⁷

Margery’s tears were very much in the world. However, she also took her emotional devotion into the cloister, as she did when visiting Canterbury. In Chapter 13, we hear how she was ‘gretly despised & repreuyd for cawse sche wept so fast’.¹⁹⁸ Not only does this weeping and protest continue throughout the day, ‘boþe a-for-noon and aftyr-noon’, but it causes her husband to walk away as though ‘he had not a knowyn hir’ and leaving her ‘a-loon a-mong them (the priests and monks and secular men)’. We are not, at once, told the particular source of inspiration for these tears, but we do learn of the outcome. Margery becomes embroiled in a confrontation with some of the men and teaches them, through the telling of a story, how her tears cause her ‘schame, skorne, & despyte’.¹⁹⁹ By reproving her continually as they have done, the monks satisfied her need for chastisement. In other words, Margery’s tears were caused by not having suffered sufficient shame as a sinner; the violence of her guilty emotional eruption caused the monks and others to rebuke her, which in turn provided her with the punishment she so desperately sought, for which she thanks them all.

This incident provides the reader of the *Book* with one of Gregory’s four kinds of tears—that of grief for one’s sins. Margery expresses her need to feel chastised, presumably for her past iniquities of pride and lechery that are revealed early in the *Book*. But there is another element present here, and that is

¹⁹⁷ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 58.

¹⁹⁸ *BMK*, I.13.27.

¹⁹⁹ *BMK*, I.13.28.

how her tears function to her advantage on a social level. Karma Lochrie examines how Margery's tears not only express her emotion concerning her own sins, but how they remind others of Christ's Passion and their own sins.²⁰⁰ Lochrie also writes how Margery's 'discourse of tears cuts through language and silences it'.²⁰¹ Not only would Margery's tumultuous outbursts stun others into silence, demanding their attention, but her quieter tears would also have an effect. Their language, remonstrating guilt of sins with the memory of Christ's suffering, could inspire others to experiencing a similar compassion. There are far more examples of her tears provoking people, although some witnesses may certainly have held her in awe and respect for her outcries of passionate emotion. To some degree, at least, her tears might be seen as being shed on behalf of both her sins, and those of others. However, while her tears may threaten to silence, or at least interrupt a sermon or a service being conducted, their ultimate function proves to be very different.

Margery's tears and cries are inescapable for those around her. For some they may be ostentatious, for others the sign of a holy woman. But besides the emotion they generate in others, their key consequence, on numerous occasions, is shown to be that of provoking confrontation. In Canterbury, Margery would have had difficulty gathering an audience of distinguished members of the monastery for a debate, simply by requesting it.²⁰² However, by attending the

²⁰⁰ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p. 196.

²⁰¹ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p. 197.

²⁰² One of the monks is said to have been 'tresowrer wyth þe Qwen' and was probably, according to Allen, John Kynton who was chancellor to Henry IV's wife, Queen Joanna, and later a monk of Christ Church, Canterbury. See *BMK*, p. 270.

Cathedral throughout the day, and weeping continuously, she appeals to their curiosity, incites indignation, or inspires goodwill, but in almost every case, demands an explanation or clarification. Margery's tears are a generator of dialogue, a means of attracting discussion or debate. They provide her with a pulpit from which to present her manner of living and deliver her devotional rhetoric. Without her tears, it is debatable whether or not Margery would have attracted any interest or support.

One way in which Margery does receive support is from people seeking the intercession of her tears. When, in Chapter 67, we are told of a fire that destroys the Guildhall of the Trinity, Margery is said to have 'cryed ful lowed [...] & wept full habundawntly, preyng for grace & mercy'.²⁰³ The people, who could not endure her tears before, but fearing that the fire might spread and destroy Saint Margaret's church, if not the entire town, 'preyn hir of contynuacyon', that her tears might save them.²⁰⁴ Margery's tears as intercessor, then, function both in the capacity of the miraculous, and the more mundane—when she is not having snow fall to put out the Guildhall fire, she is crying for the sins of herself, and others:

& Lord, þu knowist þat I haue wept & sorwyd many zerys for I wolde be sauyd, & so must I do for myn euyn-cristen.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ *BMK*, I.67.162-3.

²⁰⁴ *BMK*, I.67.163.

²⁰⁵ *BMK*, I.64.159.

Margery's tears of intercession are also, according to the *Book*, capable of saving souls. In Chapter 22, for example, God tells Margery that 'þu wynnyst many sowlys fro hym [the Devil] wyth þi wepyng'.²⁰⁶ In fact, Margery is told earlier in the *Book* that as many as a 'hundryd thowsand sowlys' would be saved by her prayers.²⁰⁷

Tears of intercession are not the only type of tear Margery sheds. She also reaches the higher level of compunction through contemplation on the Passion. Besides the moment in Jerusalem when she first experiences violent cries, her outbursts continue whenever she is reminded of Christ's sacrifice. Her moment on the Mount of Calvary represents for Margery, according to Windeatt, 'the culmination of all her preceding absorption in hearing and practicing meditation upon the Passion'.²⁰⁸ However, even after leaving the Holy Land, Margery continues to re-live such irrepressible outpourings whenever she is reminded of Christ's sacrifice:

& sumtyme, whan sche saw þe Crucyfyx, er yf sche sey a man had a wownde er a best whepyr it wer, er 3yf a man bett a childe be-for hire er smet an hors er an-oþer best wyth a whippe, 3yf sche myth sen it er heryn it, hir thowt sche saw owyr Lord be betyn er wowndyd lyk as sche saw in þe man er in þe best, as wel in þe feld as in þe town, & be hir-selfe [a]lone as wel as a-mong þe pepyl.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ *BMK*, I.22.51.

²⁰⁷ *BMK*, I.7.20.

²⁰⁸ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. and ed. by Windeatt, p. 313.

²⁰⁹ *BMK*, I.28.69.

It is significant that her experience is the same whether in the town or the country, whether alone or in the company of others. The fact that Margery's tears are uncontainable is returned to later in the *Book*, for example, when she is taken to an empty church to pray to test if she cries with equal violence without an audience.²¹⁰ Just as it is necessary that the *Book* strives to confirm Margery's revelations are God-given, so too is it imperative to demonstrate that her tears are a heavenly gift, and beyond Margery's control.²¹¹

Margery's Passion meditations concentrate on two female biblical figures that had gained prominence in the later medieval period—the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. Both women became associated with the tears shed at the Passion, and were frequently portrayed weeping both in figurative, and iconographic arts. McNamer writes that:

By the early fifteenth century, laments of the Virgin in lyric, prose and dramatic form have become one of the most abundant, elaborate, and intensely emotional kinds of Passion literature.²¹²

Although only one Gospel places Mary at the Crucifixion, and it is the Magdalene that weeps at the tomb, and who earlier bathes Christ's feet with her tears, both women became associated with weeping.²¹³ Both are 'models of

²¹⁰ *BMK*, I.83.200.

²¹¹ The possibility of Margery's tears being 'forced' is examined below.

²¹² McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 156.

²¹³ Mary is in attendance at the crucifixion in John 19.2. The Magdalene washes Christ's feet in Luke 7.36-8, and weeps at the tomb in John 20.11.

compassionate beholding' in Love's *Mirror* and the *MVC*, where the Magdalene is even seen washing Christ's feet with her tears after the Deposition.²¹⁴ The two Marys' tears are also seen as a sign of confession ('the signifier'), or the confession itself ('the signified'), as well as being seen as a blessing, where the tears are a symbol of Christ's sacrifice washing away our sins.²¹⁵ The Magdalene was seen as offering her tears as a sign of repentance, and for some, such as Geoffrey of Vendôme, her tears became words—a part of her confession.²¹⁶ Marina Warner writes of Mary's tears:

[they] course down her cheeks as a symbol of the purifying sacrifice of the Cross, which washes sinners of all stain and gives them new life[.]²¹⁷

Warner emphasizes the power of Mary's tears through her observation that water was a symbol of life and purification in the Christian Church.²¹⁸ Margery's tears,

²¹⁴ See McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 137. For the Magdalene washing Christ's feet post-mortem see Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 184.

²¹⁵ For tears as confession see Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 215, and for Mary's tears as blessing see Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 223.

²¹⁶ Later, however, this was demonstrated with words, for example in the *MVC*. See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 214-5 for tears as repentance and as words of confession. See *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated manuscript of the Fourteenth Century, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS. Ital. 114*, ed. by I. Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 170-1 for the Magdalene's tears becoming words.

²¹⁷ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 223.

²¹⁸ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 222.

following the example of the Marys, could therefore be interpreted as confessional, as a sign of repentance, as purifying, or as fecund.

Margery's gender made her empathy for, and emulation of, the Virgin Mary and the Magdalene an obvious choice. Women were, according to Katherine Ludwig Jansen, cast by the tenets of medieval science as creatures of 'wetness or liquefaction'.²¹⁹ Margery would no doubt have absorbed the iconographic and figurative associations of the two Marys through multiple media: through literature such as the *MVC*, through religious drama, sermons, lyrics, wall paintings, and so on.²²⁰ Jansen comments on how the efficacy of the Magdalene's tears was repeatedly emphasized in medieval sermons, and how she was cast 'as the lachrymose exemplar of contrition'.²²¹ At the same time, the cult of the Virgin as the *Mater Dolorosa* had reached its peak in England in the fourteenth century, and her tears were the expression of her motherhood of men.²²²

In Chapter 80 of the *Book* Margery is presented in attendance at the Deposition of Christ from the cross, where the Virgin crumples and lies still as if dead, while Margery runs about hysterically like 'a mad woman, crying & roryng'.²²³ Margery then suggests to the Virgin, in her thoughts, that she has suffered enough and should cease from sorrowing, and that 'Lady, I wil sorwe

²¹⁹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 210.

²²⁰ We know from *BMK*, I.81.197 that Margery wept every time she heard in a sermon of the moment Christ said to the Magdalene 'touch me not'.

²²¹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, p. 207.

²²² Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 205.

²²³ *BMK*, I.80.193.

for 3ow, for 3owr sorwe is my sorwe'. Here Margery is seen to reverse the roles presented in the religious lyric *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, the translation of which was attributed to a saint that Margery was almost certainly personally familiar with, the Prior of Bridlington, John Thweng.²²⁴

O þou virgyne mylde & meke,
Make me to weepe and wayle,
By childes peyne and þine eke,
Þat I no love chaunge for his.²²⁵

Rather than praying to the Virgin for tears, Margery is shown pleading with her to cease from weeping, so that she might weep in her place. In a sense, Margery seems to impeach, or at least temporarily relieve, the Virgin of her role as mourner.²²⁶

The scene continues with Christ's body being laid on a marble stone and the Virgin weeping so profusely that she washes the blood from his face with her tears. The Magdalene takes her place of reverence at Christ's feet, weeping and kissing them, as the Virgin's sisters do the same for his hands.²²⁷ Margery, while

²²⁴ Margery travels to Bridlington from York, and the tomb of Saint John would be an obvious reason for such a visit. See *BMK*, I.11.24. Also, Margery's confessor when in the area was William Sleightholme, who had also been confessor to John Thwing. See *BMK*, I.53.128. For the poem, and note on the attribution, see Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), pp. 22-5.

²²⁵ Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, p. 23.

²²⁶ In *BMK*, I.77.183 Christ tells Margery that 'I wil þat my Modrys sorwe be knowyn by þe þat men & women myth haue þe mor compassion of hir sorwe'.

²²⁷ *BMK*, I.80.93-4.

this is happening, is described as running back and forth ‘as it had be a woman wyth-owtyn reson’. Her greatest desire, even in this self-generated scene of meditation of the Passion, is to be alone with the body of Christ, to weep and mourn for his death. While the biblical figures appear to be presenting a kind of stop-action, animated tableau of the disposition, Margery’s stimulated and hysterical figure dominates the scene, and her cries and roaring outplay the tears of the Marys.

Margery’s association with both the Virgin and the Magdalene is repeated many times throughout the *Book*. Her correlation to the Magdalene binds the two women’s pasts, of a connection with lechery or sexual misconduct, and of finding forgiveness in Christ and rising to become dearly loved by him. In Chapter 84, the *Book* presents God thanking Margery for her prayers for lecherous people, as she requests that he be as gracious to them, as he was to Mary Magdalene.²²⁸ In Chapter 86, Margery is seen calling the Magdalene into her soul, because she feels her to be the worthiest to reside there, trusting her intercessory prayers the most, next to those of the Virgin.

Also, dowtyr, I knowe [...] how þu clepist Mary Mawdelyn in-to þi sowle [...] Þu thynkyst þat sche is worthiest in þi sowle, & most þu trustyst in hir preyerys next my Modyr[.]²²⁹

²²⁸ *BMK*, I.86.210.

²²⁹ *BMK*, I.86.210.

Tears and prayers bind the three women together. The *Book* ends with an extended prayer, part of which is a separate appeal given to the Virgin to offer her ‘thankys & preysyngys’ to the Trinity on Margery’s behalf; there is also a separate thanks for Mary Magdalene, asking that God show Margery the same mercy he showed to her.²³⁰ Just as Margery seeks the aid and example of the two Marys for their intercessory tears and prayers, she offers her own to the people around her, and to those that might follow the words of her book.

And I prey þe, Souereyn Lord Crist Ihesu, þat as many men mote be
turnyd be my crying & my wepyng as me han scornyd þerfor er xal
scornyn in-to þe werdys ende & many mo yf it be 3our wille.²³¹

Tears and the Books of Margery Kempe

‘A, Lord, what xal I mor noysen er cryen?’²³²

Of the books listed by name in the *Book*, there are only two referred to three times—the *Stimulus Amoris*, and Richard Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris*.²³³ The *Incendium Amoris* was Rolle’s most famous and widely disseminated book,

²³⁰ *BMK*, II.10.252-3.

²³¹ *BMK*, II.10.249.

²³² *BMK*, I.62.154.

²³³ *BMK*, I.17.39; I.58.143; I.62.153-4.

evidenced through the numerous extant manuscripts.²³⁴ Chapter 62 of the *Book* refers to the *Incendium* in the context of Margery's tears, following a citation from *De Prykke of Lofe*, which is provided in order to justify her crying out.²³⁵ Rolle's writing is said to have 'leche mater'.²³⁶ Such a context referring to tears in the *Incendium*, is found in Chapter 15 when Rolle presents tears in a positive way, combining them with meditation and prayer as a means of exercising, that is, strengthening, holy desires:

god schedis in bryghtnes of holy desyrs, / þat if þa manly þam-self vse in wepyng, þinkyng & prayng, cristis lufe onely sekand, After a litill whyle to þam-self more sall þai be sene to lyue in likyn[ges] þen in wepeyng or straytnes of labour.²³⁷

Rolle also refers to crying out in Chapter 2 of Book II, when the contemplative is filled with the love of God, so that their whole being is absorbed in loving him, everything within him cries out to God, and 'þis cry is lufe & songe, þat a grete voys raisys to godis eris'.²³⁸ The use of tears and of crying out would then seem, according to Rolle, to be a positive thing for the contemplative.

²³⁴ See, for example, Hope Emily Allen, *English Writings of Richard Rolle: Hermit of Hampole* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931; repr. 1963), pp. x-xi. See also Ralph Hanna, *The English Manuscripts of Richard Rolle: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2010).

²³⁵ *BMK*, I.62.153-4.

²³⁶ *BMK*, I.62.154.

²³⁷ Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love and The Mending of Life or The Rule of Living*, ed. by Ralph Harvey EETS o.s., 106 (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), p. 32.

²³⁸ Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, ed. by Harvey, p. 72.

However, in one of the concluding chapters of the *Incendium*, where a central theme of the chapter deals with tears, this notion is altered. Instead, Rolle asserts that tears may come before the highest contemplative state, that of complete rapture in joy. Where there were tears, there is now song:

Teris fro defaultis ar wont to wasch vs & heuynes of hart putis by
dampnacione, bot byrnynge lufe all odyr passys [...] Perfore before all
þinge þat we may do [...] Ioyfull songe is worþi to be seyn.²³⁹

For Rolle then, the idea of compunction, as, he remarks, supported by ‘owr doctors’, is necessary to purge our sins, but the highest state a contemplative can reach is that beyond the need of tears. Although such a declaration may not have been the most inspirational for a woman like Margery, whose tears were what identified her as a mystic and holy woman, at the same time they are hardly negating the sanctity of, and need for, purifying tears. One might feel that had Margery been so inspired by Rolle’s words, she would have sought to demonstrate she had reached the highest level a contemplative could reach, that is, no longer requiring tears of remorse for her sins. What it might instead prove is that Margery was happy to make selections—to construct a religious identity from a number of different sources, combining various aspects of others’ lives, and of others’ words.

A second title on Margery’s two lists of Chapters 17 and 58 is that of Walter Hilton (‘Hyltons boke’).²⁴⁰ According to Meech, this book is *The Scale of*

²³⁹ Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, ed. by Harvey, p. 97.

²⁴⁰ *BMK*, I.17.39 and I.58.143.

Perfection, written in English between 1395-6, and apparently addressed to an anchoress.²⁴¹ Meech further states in his footnote that, ‘Margery profoundly violated the principles of contemplation laid down by Hilton in his *Scale of Perfection*’.²⁴² If this is true, one might wonder why it was incorporated in her list; she could have refrained from including this title, or inserted another in its place that was more appropriate—one of the ‘& swech oþer’ books the reading-priest shared with her.²⁴³ Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that Hilton’s book was a significant element of the manuscript collection the priest-scribe read from, or perhaps it was due to Margery’s awareness of the *Scale*’s popularity within influential circles—as Vincent Gillespie argues, the text reached religio-literary consumers that included ‘Carthusians, Birgittines, and the royal family’.²⁴⁴ Margery’s imitation of Birgitta’s manner of living and her visit to Syon Abbey, her association with Joan Beaufort, and her frequent discussions with men of religion, may have played a part in her becoming exposed to, and realising the significance placed on Hilton’s book within spiritually ambitious reading communities.²⁴⁵ The fact that the *Scale* was also approved and appreciated by Arundel may have made it an attractive book to be associated with, if only for the surface value of it being popular, sanctioned, and addressed

²⁴¹ See *BMK*, p. 276, and, McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 144, and, *English Mystics in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 149.

²⁴² *BMK*, p. 276.

²⁴³ *BMK*, I.58.143.

²⁴⁴ Gillespie, ‘Idols and Images: Pastoral Adaptations of *The Scale of Perfection*’, in *Looking in Holy Books*, ed. by Gillespie, pp. 49-78 (50).

²⁴⁵ For Margery’s visit to Syon Abbey see *BMK*, II.10.245.

to a woman.²⁴⁶ Perhaps Margery saw Hilton's *Scale* as a balancing counter to Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*, and wished to display for her readers and critics that she was aware of both works, and therefore had not rushed naïvely into her own mystical experiences in simple imitation of Rolle's example.²⁴⁷

Despite the fact that Margery may appear not to have observed Hilton's code of discretion and moderation in bodily devotions and feelings,²⁴⁸ his defence of the need for compunction may have merited the inclusion of his book. In the second book of the *Scale*, Hilton writes of the nature of the human soul being that which is 'bothe cold and drie', something that the heat and moisture of tears could complement.²⁴⁹ Hilton then goes on to state that compunction and contrition are a grace provided by God, the first delivered to a beginner, and that this gift of tears and remorse, with development, could lead to the believer becoming by grace, what God is by nature:

the firste feelynge of special grace of conpuccion and contricion for synnes is verili Jhesu [...] aftirward yif the soule profite and encrese in vertues and in clennessse [...] it myght be maad goostli and godli in sight and in love, like to Hym in grace, to that that He is bi kynde[.]²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Gillespie, 'Idols and Images', p. 51.

²⁴⁷ See, for example, Windeatt, *English Mystics*, pp. 2-3, for Hilton's stance in the *Scale* on Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*, as well as on Rolle's work influencing Margery.

²⁴⁸ Hilton, *The Scale*, ed. by Bestul, (Book I, Chapter 22).

²⁴⁹ Hilton, *The Scale*, ed. by Bestul, (Book II, Chapter 42). See my section 'The Exercise of Compunction', below, for more on the qualities of tears.

²⁵⁰ Hilton, *The Scale*, ed. by Bestul, (Book II, Chapter 42).

Margery's tears, following meditations on the Passion, and generated by contrition and devotion, comply with this description by Hilton. While her response may be more extreme than Hilton would have approved of, the basic procedure is correct. The important lesson to be learned here, in respect to Margery's constructed manner of living, may be that no one guide to spiritual living can be said to perfectly match that created by Margery. Instead, she can be seen to be seeking approbation wherever it is convenient to her own interpretation of an appropriate religious lifestyle, fitting together different and, at times, disparate pieces, yet always intending to prove she is following an orthodox and previously recorded manner of living.

Although not included in the two lists of books read to Margery provided in the *Book*, there is a later, separate reference to the *vita* of Marie d'Oignies, a twelfth-century beguine from the Low Countries. In Chapter 61, we have the first clue to Margery's knowledge of Marie, when we are told of 'a good preyste which had red to hir mech good scriptur & knew þe cawse of hir crying'.²⁵¹ In the chapter immediately following the mention of a priest reading to Margery, and knowing of the case of her cries, we are presented with Marie d'Oignies.²⁵² Here we learn how the priest-scribe is introduced to Marie's *vita*, a point which is later enforced, in Chapter 68, by a further apparent reference to the beguine, when a Dominican says:

"Margery, I haue red of an holy woman whom God had zouyn gret grace

²⁵¹ *BMK*, I.61.150.

²⁵² *BMK*, I.62.152-4. More reference will be made to this chapter below.

of wepyng & crying as he hath don on-to 3ow.²⁵³

Marie's religious biography, recorded by Jacques de Vitry, is found in English translation in MS Douce 114.²⁵⁴ Besides that of Marie, the codex also contains *vitae* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek and Christina *Mirabilis*, a letter concerning Catherine of Siena, as well as a translation of Suso's *Horologium*. It is the type of miscellany that would have been inspirational for a woman interested in following a devotional lifestyle, one that Windeatt describes as 'a collection which in itself suggests the kind of reading that some of Margery's advisers would draw upon'.²⁵⁵

There are numerous similarities between Margery and Marie that can be found when examining the two lives presented in their respective books. The primary shared characteristic is that mentioned in Chapters 62 and 68 of the *Book*, which is the gift of weeping and crying. Moreover, the lives of Margery

²⁵³ *BMK*, I.68.165-6. This Dominican is named as 'Maistryr Custawns', who is identified by Allen and Windeatt as Thomas Constance (Thomam Constantii). See *BMK*, p. 327 and Windeatt, trans. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 324.

²⁵⁴ There are two recent theses written on MS Douce 114: one by Sarah M. Macmillan, *Asceticism in Late-Medieval Religious Writing: Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114* (University of Birmingham, 2010), and the other, by Brian C. Vander Veen, *The Vitae of Bodleian Library MS Douce 114* (University of Nottingham, 2007). See, for example, Vander Veen, 'The *Vitae* of Bodleian Library MS Douce 114', <http://etheses.nottingham.ac.uk/1455/>, [accessed March 28, 2013], (pp. 3-5), for details of the manuscript's contents. See also Jennifer N. Brown, 'Gender, Confession, and Authority: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114 in the Fifteenth Century', in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, *Medieval Church Studies* 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 415-28. See also Macmillan's article: 'Mortifying the Mind: Asceticism, Mysticism and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition*, ed. by E.A. Jones, *Exeter Symposium VIII* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013) 109-23 (117-20 on Marie).

²⁵⁵ Windeatt, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 20.

and Marie correspond in that they were both married lay women that lived in chastity with their husbands (each of them wore hair shirts while still living with their husbands); they similarly wore white garments, worked with lepers, experienced visions, and both were assured they would go straight to paradise upon death. There are, however, significant differences too, as Marie practised a more rigorous and self-violating form of devotion than did Margery. Marie mutilated herself with a knife in a frenzied trance, suffered violent nosebleeds when in ecstasies during the Eucharist, and would genuflect 1,200 times daily, striking herself with a discipline for the final three hundred.²⁵⁶

As Atkinson has pointed out, Marie played a very significant role for Margery and her scribe, but her tears in particular were vital to the completion of the *Book*.²⁵⁷ For the priest-scribe, Marie's shared experience of compunction demonstrated that such holy tears were irresistible, and this persuaded him to continue in his support of Margery, and therefore, in his copying of the *Book*. In Chapter 62 of the *Book*, the priest-scribe at one moment is described in the following way: '[he] þat aftirward wrot þis boke [...] was in purpose neuyr to a leuyd hir felyngys aftyr' because he feels pressured by those that rebuke Margery for her tears.²⁵⁸ This spirit is converted to one where he 'louyd [Margery] mor to hir wepyng & hir crying þan euyr he ded be-forñ', upon discovering Marie too wept tears of compunction, and was at one time doubted by her priest.²⁵⁹ We

²⁵⁶ See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 209, 123, and Kroll and Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind*, p. 21.

²⁵⁷ Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p. 33.

²⁵⁸ *BMK*, I.62.152.

²⁵⁹ *BMK*, I.62.152.

cannot know how long Margery may have been aware of Marie's religious habits and circumstances, but besides the role-model of Birgitta of Sweden, the tears of Marie, and her lifestyle of living both in and out of the world in particular, would undoubtedly be inspirational for a woman seeking an acknowledged and, for the most part approved, example. Perhaps the greatest clue to such a connection, besides the obvious reference to Marie in the *Book*, comes with the words: 'he red of a woman clepyd Maria de Oegines & hir maner of leuyng'.²⁶⁰ Margery's manner of living is a key element to the *Book*, and is mentioned several times, starting with the *Proem*, where she approaches archbishops, bishops, doctors and bachelors of divinity, and anchors, 'and schewed hem hyr maner of leuyng'.²⁶¹

The words in Chapter 62 that immediately follow the mention of Marie d'Oignies, and her manner of living, are what provide information about Marie's lifestyle. First, there is mention of a wonderful sweetness, coming from hearing God's words. Then, there is a wonderful compassion when meditating upon the Passion. Finally, come the plenteous and uncontrollable tears, which, upon looking at the cross, or hearing of the Passion, would cause an outpouring of tears of pity and compassion.

þe wonderful swetnesse þat sche had in þe word of God heryng, of þe wonderful compassion þat sche had in hys Passyon thynkyng, & of þe plentyuows teerys þat sche wept[.]²⁶²

²⁶⁰ *BMK*, I.62.152, 153.

²⁶¹ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.3. See my Appendix I (pp. 338-9) for a list of references to Margery's manner of living in the *Book*.

²⁶² *BMK*, I.62.153.

This description of Marie's particular form of piety could easily be describing that of Margery. As examined in my section on the *Incendium Amoris*, there exists in Margery too that element of devotion leading to 'swet dalyawnce in hir sowle'.²⁶³ And Margery is often shown to demonstrate compassion to others, not least in her prayer at the end of the *Book*. The connection between love and devotion, sorrow and contrition, lowness and meekness is revealed in Chapter 72:

& euyr þe more þat sche encresyd in lofe & in deuocyon, þe mor sche encresyd in sorwe & in contrycyon, in lowness, in mekenes, & in þe holy dred of owr Lord[.]²⁶⁴

This passage continues by describing Margery's compassion for others, exhibited by her tears for any creature being chastised or punished. We also read of her crying and roaring at the sight of the sacrament. Finally, Margery is presented experiencing holy thoughts and meditations, crying, weeping and sobbing in an amazing fashion, when reminded of Christ's Passion through witnessing others receiving extreme unction.²⁶⁵

The two women's tears and cries would often alarm others, and could be triggered by a specific subject. Marie would be overcome with emotion at the mention of Christ's Passion, or at the sight of a crucifix.

²⁶³ *BMK*, I.87.214. See Chapter 71 for reference to a sweet smell in the *Book*: 'sche felt a wondyr swet sauowr & an heuynly' (p. 171).

²⁶⁴ *BMK*, I.72.172.

²⁶⁵ *BMK*, I.72.173.

she myghte not byholde an ymage of the crosse, ne speke, ne heere othere
folke spekyng of the Passyone, but if sche felle into a swounyng for
hygh desyre of herte.²⁶⁶

For Margery it was being reminded of Christ's manhood that would initiate an
emotional response:

Sche was so meche affectyd to þe man-hode of Crist þat whan sche sey
women in Rome beryn children in her armys, 3yf sche myth wetyn þat
þei wer ony men children, sche schuld þan cryin, roryn, & wepyn as þei
sche had seyn Crist in hys childhode [...] And, 3yf sche sey a semly man,
sche had gret peyn to lokyn on hym les þan sche myth a seyn hym þat
was boþe God & man.²⁶⁷

Both women are shown demonstrating sensitivity towards symbolic tokens of
Christ's life as a man, and in particular, his Passion. Margery is reminded of the
Passion when looking at lepers, as we are told in Chapter 74, and, as with Marie,
is displayed providing them with succor and affection.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ 'The Middle English Life of Marie d'Oignies by Jacques of Vitry, Book I', in
*Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle
English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie
d'Oignies*, by Jennifer N. Brown, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 23
(Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 85-110 (p. 93).

²⁶⁷ *BMK*, I.35.86.

²⁶⁸ *BMK*, I.74.176-7. Marie turned her home into a hospital for lepers, and
personally nursed them. See Windeatt, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p.
325.

Marie d'Oignies is important to Margery and the *Book*, then, for the role she fills as, more than likely, an inspiration to Margery, and more certainly, as a sponsoring exemplar whose *vita* validates Margery's own manner of living. Marie's tears, and their 'plentyuows grace', is what is particularly required in order to justify that Margery's can, in a similar way, be a true sign of God's grace, and not a sign of illness, madness, or the work of the devil.²⁶⁹ However, it is also significant to the *Book* that the example of Marie's priest who doubted her, but who was brought back to belief through a personal experience of holy tears, is provided. In just such a way we hear that Margery's priest-scribe doubted her until he read of this similar case. We are also provided with an image of the priest-scribe and Margery weeping bitterly together, in the touching illustration described by God to Margery in Chapter 88. This kind of juxtaposing of the two histories, much like that of Margery and Birgitta that occurs when Margery observes the fluttering sacrament in Chapter 20, operates to associate them together, and thereby lends the *Book* credence through such a joining of religious lives.

The second holy woman mentioned in Chapter 62 of the *Book* is Elizabeth of Hungary. Her influence would appear to be much less significant than that of Marie, as no more is written about her than mentioning she too 'cryed wyth lowde voys, as is wretyn in hir tretys.'²⁷⁰ This small mention is nevertheless important for two reasons: it tells us that Margery and the priest-scribe were aware of at least one other female mystic experiencing holy tears, and, it introduces yet another text that Margery had either heard being read, or

²⁶⁹ *BMK*, I.62.153.

²⁷⁰ *BMK*, I.62.154.

had, in whole or in part, related to her. There has been some confusion stemming from the fact there were two daughters of kings called Elizabeth of Hungary; one, the relatively unknown nun Elizabeth of Töss, whose *Revelations*, Barry Windeatt believes, were erroneously ascribed in the *Book* as belonging to the more well known St. Elizabeth of Hungary.²⁷¹ For the medieval reader, however, they were the same person, the Franciscan St. Elizabeth of Hungary, married to the Landgrave of Thuringia, who died in 1231. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the *Revelations* belonged to this earlier Elizabeth, and so the medieval reader did not, in fact, erroneously ascribe it to the wrong holy woman.²⁷²

Windeatt continues by listing the numerous similarities between the two women, which would strengthen the idea of Margery's attraction to such a lifestyle, beyond that of the mere coincidence of their tears. These include both women having frequent confessions, having St. John the Evangelist act as their confessor, being repeatedly promised of the remission of their sins, and being assured (either by God or the Virgin) that they would be better guided by heavenly instruction than by a cleric. For Margery the 'original' Elizabeth fits her own manner of living for having been married, a mother, and a laywoman. However, it was Elizabeth of Töss that wept copious tears (even fainting in prayer), spoke with the Virgin and prayed numerous Hail Marys (34,000 a year),

²⁷¹ *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Annotated Edition), ed. by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), p. 14.

²⁷² For a more complete examination of the two women and the recordings of their lives see Sarah McNamer, *The Two Middle English Translations of the Revelations of St Elizabeth of Hungary*, Middle English Texts, 28 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996), pp. 10-16. For the argument refuting McNamer's claims, see Tóth and Falvay, 'New Light on the Date and Authorship of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*', (Brepols, forthcoming 2013-14).

was anxious to confess frequently, and suffered numerous illnesses.²⁷³ However, what is crucial here is the figure represented in the *Revelations*, rather than attempting to make any distinction between the two women.

Besides Latin copies of Elizabeth's *Revelations*, there are extant Middle English witnesses, a full copy in manuscript (Cambridge University Library MS Hh.i.11), and a lengthy section of it is quoted in the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*.²⁷⁴ It is possible that Margery's priest-scribe became aware of Elizabeth through the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, therefore, although the *Book* does refer to 'hir tretys'.²⁷⁵ It may be significant that mention of Elizabeth's treatise is included as a strengthening addition, not necessarily implying that it had been personally read, but rather, that the priest-scribe had heard mention of it. This is in contrast with how Richard of Hampole's *Incendium Amoris* is referred to:

He red also of Richard Hampol, hermyte, in Incendio Amoris leche mater
þat meuyd hym to 3euyn credens to þe sayd creatur. Also, Elizabeth of
Hungry cryed wyth lowed voys, as is wretyn in hir tretys.²⁷⁶

However the information was gathered, it is clear that the priest-scribe, and therefore Margery, was aware of Elizabeth of Hungary's tears, and they may

²⁷³ McNamer, *The Two Middle English Translations*, p. 13. For Margery's fondness for praying on beads see, for example, Chapter 84 (p. 205), and for illnesses, besides her 'postpartum psychosis', see *BMK* Chapter 56 (p. 137).

²⁷⁴ See McNamer, *The Two Middle English Translations*, pp. 14-16.

²⁷⁵ *BMK*, I.62.154.

²⁷⁶ *BMK*, I.62.154.

well have been further encouraged by other similar lifestyle traits between the two women.

The manuscripts which are referred to in the *Book*, then, are relevant to Margery's manner of living for the allusions they make to weeping, and therefore for the support they provide her with for her own devotional tears. Contrition and compunction were disciplines that dated back to the earliest days of the Church, and therefore it is not the fact that she weeps, nor the quantity of her tears that may have come in question, nor even the violence of them, but rather it is the quality of her tears that becomes the key issue. In this sense Margery's tears and her observing the guidelines of *discretio spirituum* are linked; that is, that by demonstrating her behaviour is orthodox and her spirit is inspired by heavenly and not diabolical influences, the visible fruit of her divine possession, her tears, are also given spiritual approval.

The 'Exercise' of Compunction

Mary Carruthers, in her article 'On Affliction and Reading', examines Peter of Celle and his writing on the craft of *lectio divina*, and how the practice of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation functions as a rational activity.²⁷⁷ Essential components of this rational activity include both the passions and the desires. Part of the expression of these passions and desires includes what Peter calls *lacrymarum effusio*, something that the desert fathers, as Carruthers points out, gave great attention to in their writing, calling it the gift

²⁷⁷ Mary Carruthers, 'On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument: Chaucer's Lachrymose Troilus in Context', *Representations* 93 (2006), pp. 1-21, (p. 6).

of ‘flooding tears’.²⁷⁸ Tears were considered an essential part of intellectual development, and of ultimately improving the soul, as their qualities of heat and moisture were seen to stimulate the opposing cold and dry qualities of rational argument. Tears were seen as ‘necessary for the *intellectual method of meditation*’.²⁷⁹

As some theologians saw tears an integral part of intellectual meditation, it was possible, and indeed necessary at times, to summon them by ‘willed mental exercise’.²⁸⁰ Carruthers notes how Evagrius of Pontus wrote that tears were what initiated contemplative knowledge, and how St. Nilus wrote that tears can be brought forth through ascetic exercises. Margery’s tears were often produced through contemplation on Christ’s Passion, or by being reminded of it when witnessing a creature in pain or distress, or listening to a moving sermon. Although she claimed that her tears were uncontrollable, they could be seen as the outcome of a concentrated meditation on a very emotive subject. While she may not have been trained in deliberately developing tears through meditation, it nevertheless may have been the inevitable result for one practiced in producing tears through affective contemplation. While her ultimate goal may not have been to reach a state of intellectual meditation, she might nevertheless have been imitating a method of achieving this.

The notion of Margery ‘forcing’ tears becomes even more acute when considering the method that she often used when praying. Throughout the *Book*

²⁷⁸ Carruthers, ‘On Affliction and Reading’, p. 7.

²⁷⁹ Carruthers, ‘On Affliction and Reading’, p. 8.

²⁸⁰ Carruthers, ‘Affliction and Reading’, p. 8.

the reader is told how Margery ‘lay in hir contemplacyon’.²⁸¹ Although at other times she is also described as being on her knees or seated, she is commonly shown to be laying in prayer. Carruthers observes how the twelfth-century Peter the Chanter described in a treatise seven modes of prayer.²⁸² One of these, the fifth, involves lying prostrate, where the stomach and feet are on the ground, and the face and mouth are turned towards the earth.²⁸³ This position was believed to be beneficial for the production of tears, as it put ‘great strain on the stomach and lungs, squeezing them and thus squeezing out even more liquid as tears’.²⁸⁴ While it is unlikely that Margery was familiar with Peter the Chanter and his treatise, it is possible that the prostrate method of prayer described within it, and the fact that tears could more readily be produced from assuming such a position, had become familiar to her.

Again, one can only hypothesize about which texts not recorded in *The Book of Margery Kempe* were known to Margery, but it does become apparent that the material recorded within some of them does reach her through one medium or another. While it may be unlikely that Margery was introduced to the writing of Peter of Celle, Evagrius of Pontus, St. Nilus, Hrabanus Maurus, or Gregory the Great on the subject of tears and the *lectio divina*, it is perfectly

²⁸¹ *BMK*, I.85.207. See also, for example, in Book I: 6.18; 8.20; 21.50; 22.50; 23.53; 38.92; 48.114, and 87.214.

²⁸² Carruthers, ‘Affliction and Reading’, p. 9.

²⁸³ Richard C. Trexler, *The Christian at Prayer: An Illustrated Prayer Manual Attributed to Peter the Chanter (d. 1197)*, ‘Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies’ Vol. 44 (Binghampton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), p. 40.

²⁸⁴ Carruthers, ‘Affliction and Reading’, p. 9. There are also illustrations of this position included in Peter the Chanter’s treatise, found in: Trexler, *The Christian at Prayer*, pp. 162-3.

feasible that some knowledge of worship and tears, delivered by the Church fathers, trickled down to her. Whether Margery's first tears came from a tutored form of meditation, or from imitating Marie d'Oignies or another female holy woman known for her weeping, or through following the example of the tears of the Virgin and the Magdalene, it is highly probable that they were inspired by learning of the power and significance of tears as set down in writing by theologians, and passed on verbally through others.

Chapter 4

Margery Kempe's Own Book

It has often been observed that *The Book of Margery Kempe* lacks a cohesive and comprehensive overlaying structure. For example, Windeatt states how

There is little concern with chronology and with noting the passing of time, little sense of ageing and of the changing phases of life [...] there remain indications that we are dealing with an incompletely edited transcript—the lack of shaping in the material presented and the limitations of the spiritual life that is portrayed. There is no sense of a perceived development and interpretation which might mark a more contrivedly presented autobiography.¹

The material gathered together is not chronologically arranged, and the voice of Margery states, in fact, that events were dictated as they came to her, rather than according to a specific format. The *Book* could therefore be described as having an oral structure that is determined by memory.

Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thing aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn. And þerfor sche dede no þing wryten but þat sche knew rygth wel for very trewth.²

¹ Windeatt, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 23-4.

Margery suggests here that only the information she knows to be the truth has been recorded for posterity, as if to imply that any memories she was unclear about have been omitted, and everything that has been recorded is truth. At the same time that she confesses to not recalling the correct time and order of events which have occurred, indicating that the *Book* will not follow an historical, natural order, the text declares what she does recall is the ‘very truth’. In Margery’s words, then, we are presented with a disjointed but honest relation of events.

Despite the *Book* lacking a chronological order, there nevertheless exists a pattern of dates indicating that Margery did, evidently, recall the time and place when things occurred, however much she may not have been able to structure them chronologically in her mind at the time of dictation. Such a form of structure is appropriate to one using dates, in particular important Church dates, as a means of recalling significant events. It is noteworthy how many of the significant events in Margery’s life occur at the time of important Church calendar days. For example, as Windeatt points out, Friday, the day of Christ’s Passion, is mentioned with regularity in the *Book*.³ Of course the question could arise as to whether these events did all happen on the date given, or if the dates were added to lend them significance. Even if one takes Margery at her word that everything dictated by her is the truth, and nothing but the truth, there is still the possibility that she, or her amanuensis, saw fit to add certain details in order to add credibility, or enhance the sanctity of a specific event.

² *BMK*, I.*Proem*.5.

³ See Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 321. Duffy comments upon the fact that ‘scenes from the Nativity or Passion stories [...] became a staple item in many *Horae*’. Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 12.

However, there also exist in the *Book* moments that would assumedly be of particular significance to Margery, which are not remembered by her with a specific date (or at least none is given). For example, in the beginning of Chapter 3, it is written that Margery: ‘On a nygth [...] herd a sownd of melodye so swet & delectable, hir þowt, as sche had ben in Paradyse’.⁴ It is from this particular moment that Margery begins her quest for chastity, begins her weeping, as well as her sustained thinking and speaking of heaven, begins being shriven two or three times a day, does great bodily penance, and begins fasting and keeping vigils.⁵ It seems surprising, to say the least, that such a momentous occasion in her spiritual life is remembered only to have occurred ‘one night’. Why she may have remembered certain dates and not others is somewhat perplexing, although perhaps the explanation would be that this significant event did not happen to fall on the eve or evening of an equally significant Church calendar date. Perhaps, especially if the day was of no particular relevance, a date was not used as a trigger for memory, and therefore none was recorded.

Regardless of such possible irregularities, there remains a substantial amount of relations between events in the life of Margery and important Church dates or Saints’ days. A certain amount of care seems to have been taken in presenting the reader with dates and places when particular events have occurred, whether these are a means of recalling what had transpired, or are included to give weight to the authority of Margery’s experience. An example of where a specific date is provided in the *Book* occurs where we see Margery holding a book in her hand as she prays in St Margaret’s in Lynn, before some timber and

⁴ *BMK*, I.3.11.

⁵ See Chapter 3 of *BMK*, and Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 303.

masonry come crashing down on her head. The date is given as a Friday before Whitsun Eve: ‘Sche knelyd up-on hir kneys, heldyng down hir hed and hir boke in hir hand, prayng owyr Lord Crist Ihesu for grace and for mercy’.⁶ This book, according to Eamon Duffy, is a Book of Hours.⁷

Although Duffy does not state his reason for believing this to be the case, it is reasonable to assume that it may indeed have been a Book of Hours that Margery was holding in her hand.⁸ As a woman of ‘worthy kenred’, with a father who was both ‘meyr of þe town N.’ and ‘alderman of þe hey Gylde of þe Trinyte in N.’,⁹ she was in the bracket of people that might have afforded a Book of Hours. As pryms or *Horae* (as they were also called) were becoming, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, more affordable through mass production in the Low Countries, one did not have to be of the nobility to commission or own one.¹⁰ As a resident of Lynn, with mercantile roots in the family, it is not unlikely that such a book produced in the Low Countries might become available to, be inherited by, or be purchased for Margery.¹¹ Duffy writes: ‘by the late Middle Ages, wealthy bourgeois women felt naked unless they too possessed an example of this most chic of devotional fashion

⁶ *BMK*, I.9.21.

⁷ ‘Margery Kempe tells us how a falling wedge of stone from the roof of her parish church dashed her Book of Hours from her hands and concussed her as she was reciting her Matins one morning[.]’ Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 58.

⁸ However, despite the defence that I offer to Duffy’s assuming that this was, indeed, a Book of Hours, there is no reason why it could not have been another kind of book.

⁹ *BMK*, I.2.9.

¹⁰ See, for example, Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, pp. 4, 11, 20, 21.

¹¹ Margery’s father died in 1413. Her mother is not mentioned in the *Book*.

accessories'.¹² It would be impossible to ascertain whether or not this might have been the case for a woman of Lynn in the early fifteenth century. But for a woman who admitted her own vanity before becoming a religious, and even after her 'conversion' was acquiring possessions such as prayer beads, an engraved silver ring, a piece of Moses' rod, and (possibly) a measuring cord with the dimensions of the sepulchre on it, such a book would seem to be a desired item.¹³

The likelihood of Margery's possessing a Book of Hours strengthens in the light of their increased availability and affordability by the fifteenth century:

From the end of the fourteenth century the stationers' shops of the Low Countries and Northern France were catering for a mass market, producing manuscript books on vellum with a largely plain or lightly decorated text, and where such full-page illustrations as were provided were bulk-bought in sets by the stationers, and tipped into the volumes to dress them up. Nearly two hundred of such assembly-line books for England survive [...] and a large proportion of their owners were [...] 'middling merchants and local gentry, people with social pretensions who would be attracted by something which looked more expensive than it really was' [...] the King's Lynn housewife and small-time brewer

¹² Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 22.

¹³ Beads are mentioned with regularity in the *BMK* (for example Chapters 5, 36, 84, and 88). The silver ring is engraved with the words *Jesus est amor meus* (see Chapter 31, pp. 78-9), and Margery had it made for herself by God's command. The piece of Moses' rod is mentioned when she leaves it behind in Leicester (Chapter 49, p. 118), and the measuring cord (as explained by Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 314) is referred to in Chapter 31 (p. 78), when Margery gives some people the measurements of Christ's grave.

Margery Kempe owned a Book of Hours[.]¹⁴

This passage lends increased probability to Duffy's assertion that Margery's book, held in her hand in Chapter 9, was a Book of Hours. This kind of made-to-order mass production, occurring in the Low Countries for the English market, would have made such commodities attractive and affordable to mercantile customers, who would have previously found such items far too dear for their pockets.¹⁵

Although we cannot know for certain whether or not this book was indeed a Book of Hours, we do hear in the *Book* of the alleged existence of a breviary for sale. In Chapter 24, a section of the book where the priest-scribe tests Margery, it is related how an old man looking to sell a breviary approached him. The priest, now writing as Margery's amanuensis, writes of himself in the third person as he tells how there came 'an elde man, to þe same preste &

¹⁴ Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 25. The passage he cites comes from Nicholas Rogers 'Books of Hours produced in the Low Countries for the English Market', unpublished Cambridge M. Litt. Dissertation, 1984, p. 48. Examples of Book of Hours, modestly produced of Flemish origin, but for the English market (including full-page tipped-in illuminations, dating from the late fourteenth, or early fifteenth century), include: Cambridge, Cambridge University Library li 6.2; and London, British Library, Sloane 2683. See Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, pp. 26-7.

¹⁵ See also my section above, on Women and Books, for more about book production and accessibility. An example of a Book of Hours belonging to a mercantile family (which includes over seventy pictures, including an image of St. Birgitta of Sweden) is the Bolton Hours (York c. 1405-15): York Minster Library MS Additional 2. See Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 14. John Bolton, much like Margery's father John Brunham, was an important mercer in York, holding offices as chamberlain, M.P., and Mayor (see Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 20, and *BMK*, pp. 359-62).

proferyd hym a portose, a good lytyl boke, for to selle'.¹⁶ The priest then asks Margery for her advice as to whether or not he should trust the man. (Margery is told by God that he should not be trusted, which turns out to be the case, the story later reveals.) What this anecdote shows us, in relation to books like a breviary, or just as possibly a Book of Hours, is that such items could become available to a person living in Lynn and of a certain means, and that Margery had some kind of knowledge in regards to them.¹⁷

Returning to the idea of memory and of calendar dates as a spark for kindling the flame of recalling past events, the fact that a Book of Hours would usually contain a calendar is of great significance. Typically the owner of a prymer would use the calendar pages in order to discover which saint was celebrated on that particular day, what events in the life of Christ may have occurred, and when feasts or fasts were approaching. The more important dates were often marked in red (red letter days), a signifier that would clearly make such dates more memorable.¹⁸ Mary Carruthers and Jan Ziolkowski stipulate how, during the Middle Ages, both words and pictures are significant tools in both the composition and recollecting of memories: 'In the words can be found

¹⁶ *BMK*, I.24.57. A 'portose', being 'A portable breviary, portiforium.' *MED*, *port-hors* (a).

¹⁷ As it turns out, the priest becomes suspicious (besides from Margery's warning) due to the fact that the old man is approaching him, and not a wealthier priest. From this we might understand that a higher price than what is being asked of the amanuensis could have been asked, and that such a book might be beyond the means of a humbler priest.

¹⁸ See, for example, Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, p. 45.

many pictures—in the pictures many words’.¹⁹ A Book of Hours, containing both image and text, would provide a remarkable tool for memory recording and recalling. Also, it could explain, with its red letter days and placement of certain images and initials and rubrics, why certain dates would stand out more than others. Further, a Book of Hours, similar to the way the family Bible was later used, often contained records of events of personal significance, which could also be used to recollect memories. They could also be used ‘for the safe keeping of pilgrims’ badges, *ex-votos* and other *objets de piété*’, a practical use that would certainly appeal to Margery, who had been on numerous pilgrimages and had collected devotional objects.²⁰

Although there may not exist an obvious and cohesive format to the *Book*, discernible patterns can be seen to emerge when comparing it with the structure of a Book of Hours. Whether or not Margery indeed possessed one, it is not unreasonable to assume that she had seen one before, for example when keeping company with wealthy friends or patrons such as Lady Westmorland (Joan de Beaufort),²¹ or when having books read to her by a priest.²² Although I would not suggest that Margery or her amanuensis consciously used a prymer as a mock-up for the construction of the *Book*, the numerous similarities that I will shortly present will reveal a format bearing a strong resemblance to that of the

¹⁹ Mary Carruthers and Jan Ziolkowski, *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 2.

²⁰ John Harthan, *Book of Hours and Their Owners* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 35. One of the items Margery was believed to have brought back from the Holy Land was a cord used to display the measurements of the sepulcher. See *BMK* I.31.78, and pp. 297-8.

²¹ See *BMK*, I.54.133-4.

²² See *BMK*, I.58.142-4, and I.62.152-4.

Book, which could intimate influence or unconscious imitation. As much as Margery emulated or borrowed from writings by Rolle, or Birgitta, it is possible that another book, a Book of Hours, influenced both the material and the way it was presented within *The Book of Margery Kempe*. It is also possible that knowledge pertaining to both Rolle and Birgitta, and their respective forms of meditation and revelations, were assimilated through using a Book of Hours.

In order to develop a comparison between elements in the construction of the *Book* and a Book of Hours, a breakdown of the construction of an archetypal prymer becomes necessary. Wieck provides the following eight divisions:

- Calendar
- the four Gospel Lessons
- the Hours of the Virgin
- the Hours of the Cross and Hours of the Holy Spirit
- two Prayers to the Virgin known as the ‘Obsecro te’ and ‘O intemerata’
- the Penitential Psalms and Litany
- the Office of the Dead
- numerous Suffrages²³

The order and content could vary, but such a list provides a typical model.

Although nothing quite this formulaic can be seen in the structure of the *Book*, I intend to show how many of these elements are, in one way or another, incorporated into it.

²³ Roger Wieck, *The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (London: Sotheby's, 1988), pp. 27-8.

(a) The Calendar

The calendar portion of a Book of Hours always occurs at the beginning and lists the saints' days for each month.²⁴ It is often accompanied with illustrations that show workers performing the types of tasks appropriate to the season. It also typically includes important Church festivals as well as lesser festivals and local events such as the consecration of a church. As outlined briefly above, the *Book* also lists significant dates throughout, often attached with a significant moment in Margery's religious life. There are numerous examples of this, and therefore I will only select a few relevant instances to list here.

In Chapter 4 of the *Book*, Margery reflects upon an episode in her life where she was guilty of lechery. Such temptations would last for a couple years, but come to a peak on St. Margaret's Eve when a man approached her whom she desired.²⁵ This day was of significance, firstly because it is the name of her parish church in Lynn, but also due to the fact that St. Margaret of Antioch, a legendary virgin martyr, had her feast day 20 July and, due to the nature of her martyr story, is associated with lust.²⁶ Margery's story of lecherous desire then, appropriately takes place on a saint's day associated with lust and virginity (Margery was at this point abstaining from sexual relations with her husband), in

²⁴ They also typically contained the signs of the zodiac and the labours of the months. See, for example, Wieck, *Book of Hours*, pp. 45-54.

²⁵ See *BMK*, I.4.14.

²⁶ Olybrius, the prefect of Antioch, attempted to marry or seduce her and had her tortured and killed for refusing him. See Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 303. See also C.R. Cheney, *A Handbook of Dates: For Students of British History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945; repr. 2004), p. 78 for St. Margaret's feast day. For details on St. Margaret's association with powers over the heart's passions, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), I, pp. 368-70.

a church that shares the saint's name. This may seem to be more than coincidental. But whether or not the date was chosen to fit the event, or the event happened to fall by some rare chance on that particular date, the fact remains that it was a date of great significance to Margery. Margery's memory, and perhaps even her experience, is apparently influenced by significant dates as would be found in a calendar in a Book of Hours.

In the following chapter, Margery refers to a Friday before Christmas Day as the moment in which God came to her to promise that she would never know purgatory but would 'wyth-in þe twynkelyng of an eye [...] haue þe blysse of Heuyn'.²⁷ This was because God had shriven Margery of all her sins. As Advent was the traditional time for atoning for one's sins, and for 'thoughts of penance and of the Last Judgement',²⁸ it becomes a significant calendar date on which to relate what happens in Margery's spiritual journey to common church practices.

(b) The Gospel Readings

Following the calendar in a standard Book of Hours would be the Gospel Readings, followed by Prayers to the Virgin, the Hours of the Virgin, and then perhaps the Hours of the Cross and the Hours of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel Readings included short passages (and often pictures of the Evangelists) from the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Prayers to the Virgin most commonly included the *Obsecro te* ('I beseech thee') and *O Intemerata* ('O Untouchable'). The Hours of the Virgin, the principal and indispensable section

²⁷ *BMK*, I.5.16, 17.

²⁸ Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 303.

of a Book of Hours, came next, the section which gives the book its name and meaning—the Hours of the Virgin being the eight canonical divisions of prayer to be made through the course of a day.

The Gospel Readings' particular subjects were the four principal Church feasts of Christmas Day, the Feast of the Annunciation, Epiphany and the Feast of the Ascension.²⁹ Each Reading concentrates on particular aspects of the Gospel stories. Wieck describes the first of the Gospel Lessons in this way:

The first Gospel Lesson, from John, acts as a preamble for the entire Book of Hours. Its theme is mankind's need of redemption and God's willingness to provide it. This Lesson, opening with the famous passage, 'In principio erat verbum' ('In the beginning was the word'), starts immediately with the theme of Christ's Divinity, then proceeds to the witness of John the Baptist, the Jews' rejection of Christ, the theme of Christians as the new children of God, and the Incarnation.

The theme of the need of redemption is of great significance in the *Book* as well.³⁰ Margery is shown to be a woman guilty of at least two of the deadly sins—

²⁹ See Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, p. 158.

³⁰ See Samuel Fanous, 'Measuring the Pilgrim's Progress: Internal Emphases in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Writing Religious Women*, ed. by Renevey and Whitehead, p. 164, where Fanous speaks of Margery's having to choose between the mould of a prodigy or penitent and opts for the latter. See also Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, pp. 3-4, where Yoshikawa describes, in a section on the Structure of the *Book*, how Margery records her inner spiritual progress that includes a sense of growth from being prone to sin, to enduring persecution, to practising her renewed lifestyle.

vanity and lust.³¹ She describes how she used to dress (in Chapter 2), wishing people to admire her for the quality of her clothes. She continues by telling how she is maintaining the pride of her kindred, her father being a mayor and alderman of Lynn. She describes herself with the following words:

Sche had ful greet envye at hir neybowrs þat þei schuld ben arrayed so wel as sche. Alle hir desyr was for to be worshepd of þe pepul. Sche wold not be war be onys chastysyng ne be content wyth þe goodys þat God had sent hire, as hir husband was, but euyr desyryd mor & mor.³²

Margery also makes clear her previous weakness for the vice of lust or lechery, and to this could be added covetousness. Besides her dark secret which she stops from telling her confessor in Chapter 1 (and from ever revealing in the *Book*), and which many assume to be of a sexual nature, there is also the above-mentioned temptation from a fellow parishioner at St. Margaret's in Lynn. Similar lecherous feelings do not stop after this, despite Margery's describing her feelings of guilt and remorse, as well as being granted tears of compunction by God. She tells how they continued for nearly a year following the original incident.³³

These shortcomings, that once were part of Margery's character, are significant in that they display how she was weak, and sinful, and needing redemption. They are important in that they begin the story of the woman who

³¹ Envy and greed could possibly be added to the list.

³² *BMK*, I.2.9.

³³ *BMK*, I.4.16.

progresses spiritually from terrible (although not so terrible) sinner to saint-like figure who is loved and favoured by God. In the following chapter to that dealing with her lechery, God speaks to Margery with these words:

I, þe same God, forʒefe þe þi synnes to þe vtterest poynt. And þow schalt neuyr com in Helle ne in Purgatorye, but, whan þow schalt passyn owt of þis world, wyth-in þe twynkelyng of an eye þow schalt haue þe blysse of Heuyn, for I am þe same God þat haue browt þi synnes to þi mend & mad þe to be schreve þerof. And I grow[n]t þe contrysyon in-to þi lyues ende.³⁴

The woman in need of redemption has, in the space between chapters, become completely absolved of her sins, and promised that she will not suffer purgatory, but will directly know the bliss of heaven. She is even given a *carte blanche* when God grants her contrition until her life's end. Ironically this incident is said to take place on a Friday before Christmas Day, when Margery was kneeling in a chapel of St John. Her moment of complete absolution falls at the time of the first Gospel Lesson, in a chapel devoted to the author of that book, St John.

(c) *The Obsecro te and O Intemerata*

The *Obsecro te* and *O Intemerata* are prayers made to the Virgin Mary (the *O Intemerata* also addresses the apostle and evangelist St John). Both are prayers of indulgence which list the merits and quality of the Virgin that make her an appropriate voice to appeal to, to speak as an intercessor. The *Obsecro te* is

³⁴ *BMK*, I.5.16, 17.

somewhat reminiscent of the repeated pleas of Margery's own prayer in Chapter 10 of Book II, where she continually uses the words 'I crye 3ow mercy'. Also included in this extended prayer in Chapter 10 is a separate one directed to the Virgin. In it, as with the Book of Hours prayers, Margery lists the merits and qualities of the Virgin and asks that she pray on her behalf. Also similar to the prayer found in Books of Hours, Margery's is written in the first person singular and addresses the Virgin directly, with 'plaintive, urgent tones':³⁵

I prey my Lady, which þat is only þe Modyr of God, þe welle of grace,
flower & fairest of alle women þat euyr God wrowt in erth, þe most
worthiest in hys sight, þe most leef, der, & derworthy vn-to hym, best
worthy to ben herd of God, & þe heyest þat hath deseruyd it in þis lyfe,
benyngne Lady, meke Lady, chariteful Lady, wyth al þe reuerens þat is in
Heuyn & wyth alle 3owr holy seyntys, I pray 3ow, Lady, offyr 3e
thankys & preysyngys to 3e blissful Trinite for loue of me, askyng mercy
& grace for me & for alle my gostly fadrys & perseuerawns in-to owr
lyuys ende in þat life [we] may most plesyn God in.³⁶

This can be compared with the text of the *Obsecro te*:

I beseech you, Mary, holy lady, mother of God, most full of piety,
daughter of the greatest king, most glorious mother, mother of orphans,
consolation of the desolate, the way for those who stray, salvation for

³⁵ Roger Wieck, *Painted Prayers: the Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1997), p. 86.

³⁶ *BMK*, II.10.252-3.

those who hope in you, virgin before giving birth, fountain of pity,
fountain of salvation and grace, fountain of piety and joy, fountain of
consolation and kindness [...] Come and hasten to my aid and counsel, in
all my prayers and requests, in all my difficulties and needs, and in all
those things that I will do, that I will say, that I will think[.]³⁷

In the prayer *Obsecro te*, in what Wieck refers to as the petition segment,
there are appeals to aid the devotee with fulfilling the seven works of mercy, as
well as the twelve articles of faith, and to avoid the seven deadly sins.³⁸

Margery's acknowledgement of her own breaking of at least two of the deadly
sins has already been discussed. The Articles of Faith play a significant role in
the *Book*, when Margery is tested on different occasions for her familiarity with
them. In Chapters 48, 51, and 52 of the *Book* there are incidents where she is
tried in Leicester before the Abbot, in York Chapterhouse before a doctor of
divinity and some clerics, and then again in York before the Archbishop in his
chapel. In each instance she satisfies her interrogators that she is well versed in
the Articles, and this helps to quell any possible charges of Lollardy or of heresy
made against her. It also demonstrates for the reader or listener that Margery has
been examined by leaders of the English church and found to be a good
Christian, whose manner of religious living was not contrary to that of accepted
practice. Although Margery may have learned the Articles of Faith through oral
rather than literate practices, for example through listening to sermons, or in

³⁷ Translation from the Latin taken from Wieck, *The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, p. 163.

³⁸ See Wieck's translation in *Painted Prayers*, p. 87.

confession, a Book of Hours may have deepened her sense of awareness, if not provided her basis in understanding them.

(d) The Hours of the Virgin

The Hours of the Virgin were the primary segment of any Book of Hours. They were divided into the eight canonical hours of prayer, similar to those of the Divine Office in the breviary, namely: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline.³⁹ These eight devotions were composed of responses, hymns, psalms with antiphons and capitula, canticles and prayers. Variations in the arrangement and selection of these forms of worship could be used to identify the diocese for which the book was intended. The different hours were often associated (through the use of illuminations) with particular stories of the youth of Christ, from the Annunciation to the Flight into Egypt, or with the passion of Christ, from the Agony to the Entombment. Again, these images from the stories could vary according to the intended destination of the book. The common themes used in a standard Book of Hours appeared like this:

Infancy Cycle

| | |
|--------|-------------------------------|
| Matins | Annunciation |
| Lauds | Visitation |
| Prime | Nativity |
| Terce | Annunciation to the Shepherds |
| Sext | Adoration of the Magi |

³⁹ See, for example, Robert G. Calkins, *Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 244. See also Backhouse, *Books of Hours* (London: The British Library, 1985), p. 3.

| | |
|----------|--|
| None | Presentation |
| Vespers | Flight into Egypt <i>or</i> Massacre of the Innocents |
| Compline | Coronation of the Virgin <i>or</i> Flight into Egypt <i>or</i> Massacre of the Innocents |

Passion Cycle

| | |
|----------|---------------------------|
| Matins | Agony |
| Lauds | Betrayal |
| Prime | Christ before Pilate |
| Terce | Flagellation |
| Sext | Christ Carrying the Cross |
| None | Crucifixion |
| Vespers | Deposition |
| Compline | Entombment ⁴⁰ |

With or without the accompaniment of images, the Hours of the Virgin were the subject of meditation, where the worshipper would muse upon particular moments in the lives of Mary and Christ, fulfilling much the same function as the rosary.⁴¹ Such musings were not reliant upon illustrations in the primer itself. Its owner might reflect upon representations of the particular stories

⁴⁰ Refer to Calkins, *Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages*, pp. 246, 248 for a slightly different list. This list is taken from Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, p. 23.

⁴¹ See Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, pp. 12-15 for the Hours used for meditation, and p. 17 for the link between the rosary and the Book of Hours.

they had seen exhibited (or indeed were presently gazing at while in prayer) in stained glass, carvings, pageant plays, wall paintings, embroidered vestments, hangings and tapestries, carved or painted diptyches.⁴² Working through a text on a daily basis could, even for the most devout worshippers, become a mundane if not tedious affair. Meditation then became a means of occupying one's thoughts while occupied in prayer, as well as steering the lay devotee's musings in a direction befitting the reverence required for the occasion.

In England the popular subjects for images and meditations were based upon Christ's Infancy and the Passion.⁴³ As exhibited in the list above, such musings would often take the devotee through particular episodes in the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary. In the *Book*, Margery experiences revelations, or meditations, which follow along extremely similar lines. Following God's boon to her in Chapter 5, where he promises she will never know purgatory, we next follow Margery into her experiences of revelations based on the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Nativity. Chapter 6 of the *Book* begins:

An-oþer day þis creatur schul[d] zeue hir to medytacyon, as sche was
bodyn be-for, & sche lay style, nowt knowyng what sche might best
thynke. Þan sche seyde to ower Lord Ihesu Crist, 'Ihesu, what schal I
thynke?' Ower Lord Ihesu answered to hir mende, 'Dowtyr, thynke on

⁴² See Kathryn Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (London: The British Library, 2003), p. 4.

⁴³ For a detailed explanation of the difference between the preferred English vs. Flemish images see Saskia van Bergen, 'The Production of Flemish Books of Hours for the English Market: Standardization and Workshop Practices', in *Manuscripts in Transition*, ed. by Brigitte Dekeyzer and Jan Van der Stock (Paris: Peeters, 2005), pp. 271-82.

my Modyr, for sche is cause of alle þe grace þat þow hast'.⁴⁴

Margery is directed to begin by thinking upon the Virgin Mary, and at once the narration takes us into her vision, where St. Anne is pregnant and Margery prays to her that she be allowed to serve as her handmaid. Much as in many illustrations in Books of Hours, where the owner is exhibited in the scene they are imagining, Margery places herself directly in the picture.⁴⁵ But, perhaps more in the style of a mystery play⁴⁶, she is not a static figure, but one that actively participates in the action, has her own dialogue, and is addressed by the figures in her mental images. Margery follows through the swift progress of the Virgin from child to young woman, visiting Elizabeth with her, witnessing the birth of St. John (the Baptist), and then travelling on to Bethlehem to witness the birth of Christ. Then, just as she cared for the young Virgin mother, she swaddles the newborn Christ, weeping tears of compassion for the pain he will suffer for all sinful men.

In a sense, Margery has not only stepped into the picture, she has nudged the Virgin slightly to one side. For Margery is something of an omnipresent, omniscient being in her revelations. She knows what the future holds in store and

⁴⁴ *BMK*, I.6.18.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Janet Backhouse, *Books of Hours* (London: The British Library, 1985), p. 4.

⁴⁶ The N-Town play, *The Nativity*, for example, includes two midwives at the Nativity called Zelomy and Salomé. See *The N-Town Play*, ed. by Stephen Spector (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 152-163. Yoshikawa also points out how a boss carving of the Nativity in St. Helen's Church, Norwich, and Giotto's painting of the Nativity in the Basilica of St Francis, Assisi (both of which Margery may well have gazed upon when visiting the regions), include handmaidens; in Assisi the handmaiden is dressed in white. See Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 39.

tells the Virgin (before Gabriel can, thus making him obsolete) that she will be the mother of God. She nurses both the Virgin and Christ. Later she will attend the crucifixion as well. Mary may give birth, but it is Margery who finds them lodgings (Joseph appears to have vanished), begs for food to feed them, and for clothes to dress the infant with. It is Margery who weeps for the fate that awaits Christ. In Margery's unique form of Marian worship, she adopts a very personal bond with the Virgin and Child.

Margery then carries on with her revelations, after the Nativity, into the visit of the three kings.⁴⁷ From there she continues by finding lodgings for the Virgin in her flight to Egypt. By this time Margery has followed the meditations for the Hours of the Virgin from Matins through to Compline. There have been added elements (the birth of the Virgin) and elements that have been ignored (the Shepherds and the Presentation), but otherwise her thoughts have navigated from the Annunciation, to the Visitation, the Nativity, the Adoration, and the Flight into Egypt. At this moment Margery's revelations of the Infancy Cycle cease and she has a moment of inner dialogue with God.

Perhaps the principal purpose of praying the Hours of the Virgin was to appeal to Mary to intercede on behalf of the devotee. For many the idea of praying to a woman, rather than directly to the Son of God himself, was a more appealing prospect. Not just women, but men as well often turned to the Virgin for support to speak on their behalf. When prayers said on one's behalf were commonplace, in particular to shorten the length of time required to spend in purgatory, appealing to one as close to Christ as one of the Saints, or in particular his own mother, was not so unusual. As Wieck expresses it:

⁴⁷ *BMK*, I.7.19.

Marian devotion placed the Mother of God in the pivotal role as intercessor between man and God. As our spiritual mother, Mary would hear our petitions, take mercy on our plight. She would plead our case to her Son who, surely, could not deny his own mother anything for which she asked.⁴⁸

Margery too saw herself filling the role of mediator. As revealed as early as the Proem of the *Book*, she sees herself as being both an inspiration and an intercessor for other Christians.

God reveals to Margery (in Chapter 7) what her ultimate purpose in life is to be. She is to pray to the Holy Trinity and, through her prayers and intercessions, cause ‘many hundryd thowsand sowlys’⁴⁹ to be saved.

Immediately after this revelation, in Chapter 8, Margery converses with the Virgin again in her mind. Where, in the normal scheme of things, while praying the Hours of the Virgin, the supplicant would recite the Invitatorium—‘Ave Maria, gratia plena: Dominus tecum (Hail Mary, full of grace: Our Lord is with thee), the Virgin in the *Book* says to Margery ‘A dowtyr, blyssyd may þow be’. It even becomes a rhyme when the blessing concludes with ‘þi sete is mad in Heuyn be-for my Sonys kne & whom þow wylt han wyth þe’.⁵⁰ The roles have reversed. Instead of Margery’s praising the Virgin for her role and relationship with Christ, the Virgin extols Margery for her earning the right to sit at the foot of Christ, and to choose another to accompany her. This, we later learn as

⁴⁸ Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *BMK*, I.8.20.

⁵⁰ *BMK*, I.8.20.

Margery continues by now speaking with Christ himself, is her reward for her 'gret charyte'.⁵¹

(e) The Passion of Christ

The other set of common themes used in a standard Book of Hours was directed around the Passion of Christ. Just as the first few chapters of Book I of *The Book of Margery Kempe* include her revelations and meditations upon the birth of Christ, so contained among the latter chapters are those she experiences on the Passion. In Chapter 78 we hear how the Passion images first came to her 'spiritual sight' and how it brought forth the crying, weeping and sobbing that she had become infamous for:

Many zerys on Palme Sunday, as þis creatur was at þe processyon wyth oþer good pepyl in þe chirch-zerd & beheld how ze preystys dedyn her obseruawnce, how zei knelyd to ze Sacrament & ze pepil also, it semyd to hir gostly sygth as þei sche had ben þat tyme in Ierusalem & seen owr Lord in hys manhood receyuyd of þe pepil as he was whil he went her in erth. Þan had sche so meche swetnes & deuocyon þat sche myth not beryn it, but cryid, wept, & sobbyd ful boistowsly. Sche had many an holy thowt of owr Lordys Passyon & beheld hym in hir gostly sight as verily as he had ben a-forn hir in hir bodily sight.⁵²

⁵¹ *BMK*, I.8.21.

⁵² *BMK*, I.78.184-5.

Margery's tears are those of compassion. The *Book* describes how she cannot contain the overwhelming sensations she feels, so real is the re-living of the Passion in her mind. Her tears turn to prayer for 'al þe pepil þat was leuyng in erth', so that once again we see her assuming a role often associated with the Virgin.⁵³ This is the cycle of Margery's particular devotions. From affective piety comes the compunction of tears; from the tears come the intercessory prayers for others, but also the scorn of many who consider her a blasphemer and wicked woman. This, in turn, creates an *imitatio Christi*, where Margery is portrayed suffering the scorn of others on their behalf, much as Christ did from the Jews. Margery's claim to sanctity, her *raison d'être* and a significant part of her manner of living, are that she willingly suffers shame and ridicule as a mark of devotion to God, but also as a form of sacrifice on behalf of other sinners.

& so sche cryed ful lowed & wept & sobbyd ful sor as þow sche xulde a brostyn for pite & compassyon þat sche had of owr Lordys Passyon. & sumtyme sche was al on a watyr wyth þe labowr of þe crying, it was so lowde & so boistows, & mech pepil wondryd on hir & bannyd hir ful fast, supposyng þat sche had feynyd hir-self for to cryin.⁵⁴

God tells Margery that her crying pleases him and that the more she suffers ridicule on his behalf, the more reward she shall be blessed with in heaven. At times the perspective of the *Book* appears to lose track of the real significance of her actions, as the attention is placed solely on Margery, and not

⁵³ *BMK*, I.78.185.

⁵⁴ *BMK*, I.78.185.

on the people her tears are allegedly shed for. One might wonder if indeed, her wailing and suffering humiliation is a selfless act on behalf of others, or one committed in order to attain the highest reward imaginable for herself. In any case the originally stated theme of the book is returned to when God says to Margery's mind: '—þei xulde takyn exampil by þe for to haue sum litil sorwe in her hertys for her synnys þat þei myth þerthorw be sauyd[.]'⁵⁵

Illustrations existing in a typical English Book of Hours for the Little Office would often portray the events of Christ's Passion.⁵⁶ Passion scenes could also be included in the Hours of the Cross. Such illustrations not only aided the reader in identifying the particular section of the Book of Hours they were looking for (or looking at), they could also be used as stimulants to promote meditation upon a given theme. Kathryn A. Smith expresses it in this way: 'Medieval book owners could insert themselves into the sacred time and sacred history that shaped their illustrated manuscripts[.]'⁵⁷ Smith later continues by explaining how such meditations could 'provoke contrition' and be seen as a 'penitential act'.⁵⁸ Margery's meditations were a means for her to become closer to God. They are used to exhibit her devout nature and are shown to provoke the kind of extreme emotion, which leads to her sobs and tears:

And þan xulde sche al þe Messe-tyme aftyr wepyn & sobbyn ful
plentyuowsly, & sum-tyme among cryin rith feruently, for hir thowt þat

⁵⁵ *BMK*, I.78.186.

⁵⁶ See Backhouse, *Books of Hours*, pp. 4 and 36.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, p. 57.

⁵⁸ Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, p. 161.

sche saw owr Lord Crist Ihesu as verily in hir sowle wyth hir gostly eye
as sche had seyn be-forn þe Crucifxe wyth hir bodily eye.⁵⁹

Another element to Margery's visual musings is their disclosure of the kind of sources that probably inspired her series of imaginings. Windeatt notes, for example, how similarities arise between Margery's vision of the Crucifixion, and how it is portrayed in the Wakefield and York Mystery Plays. He also highlights how a retable in Norwich Cathedral resembles Margery's description of the flagellation scene.⁶⁰ What he doesn't comment upon are any of the revelations Margery experiences in Chapter 79. This episode is, as it were, the Prequel to the Passion sequence.

In Chapter 79 of the *Book*, Christ, on his way towards his Passion, is seen by Margery to be kneeling down and receiving his mother's blessing. It is a fictitious, or at least non-Biblical, relating of a meeting between the two. In the Gospel of John Mary and Christ do not speak or see one another until he is being crucified and says to her 'Woman, behold your son' in reference to the disciple John.⁶¹ In the Gospel of Luke, Christ speaks to a group of women (Mary, if she was present, is not mentioned by name) following him and lamenting and says 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your Children'.⁶² Although not biblical, this kind of imagined meeting between Christ and his mother that Margery witnesses is similar to that encouraged by

⁵⁹ *BMK*, I.78.187.

⁶⁰ Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 326.

⁶¹ John 19:26.

⁶² Luke 23:28.

users of Books of Hours as a form of meditation. In the Joys and the Salutations of the Virgin, for example, prayers or meditations on events in the Virgin's and the Virgin and Christ's life are highlighted. Smith comments:

In addition to providing a narrative account of the Virgin's life, each individual Salutation constituted a vehicle for meditative devotion that encouraged the book owner to enter mentally into the sacred event and, by clearly indicating Mary's response to this event, to share the Virgin's emotional experience.⁶³

In a similar way the Virgin was used as a model for imagined perspectives when musing upon the events of the Passion: 'The Virgin was the model viewer of the Crucifixion in later medieval piety'.⁶⁴

The tradition of meditation upon the Passion from another's point of view came to the Church from Saint Anselm of Canterbury and was followed by the likes of Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle and Nicholas Love.⁶⁵ The devotee was encouraged to re-live the emotional experience of the Passion through their meditative imaginings. This was to be done either in a directly empathetic way, such as imagining the private sorrows of the Virgin, or in a more personal way, such as 'attending' a moment of the Nativity or the Passion in one's mind. Rolle,

⁶³ Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, p. 186.

⁶⁴ Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion*, p. 194.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Dan Merkur, *Crucified with Christ: Meditation in the Passion, Mystical Death, and the Medieval Invention of Psychotherapy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 33-4. '—Anselm made it clear that he meditated on the passion of Jesus from the perspective of Jesus' mother Mary'.

in fact, wrote two studies on it, where he describes how the devotee should think, see and feel—a longer and a shorter *Meditation on the Passion*. As Smith points out, Rolle encourages his readers or listeners to meditate upon the body of Christ much as they would study their Book of Hours:

swet Jhesu, thy body is lyke a boke written al with rede ynke; so is thy
body al written with rede woundes. Now, swete Jhesu, graunt me to rede
upon thy boke and somewhate to undrestond thy swetnes of that
wrytynge, and to have likynge in the studious abydyng of that redyng.
And yeve me grace to conceyve somewhate of the perles love of Jhesus
Crist, and to lerne by that ensample to love God agaynwarde as I shold.
And, swete Jhesu, graunt me this study in euche tyde of the day, and let
me upon this boke study at my matyns and hours and evynsonge and
complyne, and evyre to be my meditacion, my speche, and my
dalyaunce.⁶⁶

These words, from the longer meditation, directly tie in the use of a Book of Hours with thoughts upon the love of Christ. Rolle's metaphor of Christ as a book – a Book of Hours in particular – includes the divisions of the canonical day when prayers from the book would be made. Through this type of devotion Rolle hopes that he will be filled with meditation, conversation and discussion.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *English Writings of Richard Rolle Hermit of Hampole*, ed. by Hope Emily Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), p. 22.

⁶⁷ The translation of these three words taken from *Richard Rolle: The English Writings*, ed. by Rosamund S. Allen, p. 114.

With Love and his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* an 'imaginative picturing of the events of the life of Christ as a meditative exercise' is presented to the reader.⁶⁸ The *Mirror* encourages affective meditations in order to achieve a closer bond between the devotee and God. Love describes events at the Nativity, and at the Passion, which follow biblical accounts, but also include extratextual scenes, such as Jesus's parting from his mother before the Crucifixion. There are links in both Kempe's and Love's meditations that can be compared with the portrayal of Passion events presented in the York Corpus Christi pageant play. Margery's contemplations upon the life of Christ fit into a tradition of meditations, used as a devotional exercise, which could make use of a Book of Hours as a guide or a source of inspiration.

It is worth including here, in order to enforce the significance of such meditations and to present the long history of them, mention of clerics such as Bernard of Clairvaux who, in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, wrote of the meditational technique of imagining the events of the life of Christ.⁶⁹ Aelred of Rievaulx wrote for his sister the *Rule of Life for a Recluse* in which he put forward a threefold method of meditation comprising contemplating things past, present, and future, where the subjects of the past to be considered were events from the life of Christ.⁷⁰ These examples were later developed and strengthened in significance upon the founding of the Franciscan order. Two books attributed to Bonaventure, the *Stimulus Amoris* and the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, became significant texts in England, and to Margery in particular. The *Stimulus Amoris* is

⁶⁸ Sargent, *The Mirror: A Reading Text*, p. x.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Sargent's introduction in *The Mirror: A Reading Text*, p. x.

⁷⁰ Sargent, *The Mirror: A Reading Text*, p. xii.

mentioned in the *BMK* in Chapters 17, 58, and 62 (referred to as “þe Prykke of Lofe”), while the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, although not directly referred to by name, is linked by a textual analogue in Chapter 82.⁷¹

In Chapter 88 of the *Book*, Margery speaks with God about her disappointment in not committing herself to her prayers as she was wont to do, but instead spending more time at home in her chamber composing her book with her amanuensis. She relates a mental exchange with God in the following way:

& whan sche cam to chirche & xulde heryn Messe, purposyng to seyn hir Mateyns & swech oþer deuocyons as sche had vsyd a-for-tyme, hir hert was drawyn a-wey fro þe seyng & set mech on meditacyon.⁷²

Margery attends church to both listen to the mass and to say her matins and other devotions. As with Rolle, her meditations, which may have included the use of a Book of Hours, work through the canonical hours and lead to a ‘discussion’ with God. In fact, God clearly shows the importance of the written word by telling Margery that the writing of her book means more to him than her weeping, even when joined by her amanuensis. He even prophesies that many ‘men’ will be converted through hearing or reading it.

For, þow 3e were in þe chirche & wept bothyn to-gedyr as sore as euyr

⁷¹ Windeatt gives two examples in Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 326, 327. Refer to my section on the *Stimulus Amoris* (pp. 99-107). See also my chapter 1 (p. 58) for comments on Franciscan imaginative meditation techniques.

⁷² *BMK*, I.88.216.

þu dedist, zet xulde ze not plesyn me mor þan ze don wyth zowr
wrytyng, for dowtyr, be þis boke many a man xal be turnyd to me &
beleuyn þerin.⁷³

Later in the same chapter, after re-assuring Margery of the value of her weeping and love for her confessor, and how he (Master Robert) pleases God by advising Margery to give her heart to meditation, God then reveals to her how she can never fail to please him, no matter which form of worship she uses:

& zet am I not displesyd wyth þe, for, dowtyr, I haue oftyn seyde on-to þe
þat wheþyr þu preyist wyth þi mowth er thynkist wyth thyn hert, wheþyr
þu redist er herist redyng, I wil be plesyd wyth þe.⁷⁴

As he so often does throughout the *Book*, God delivers Margery a carte blanche assuring her of his blessings no matter how she behaves. But what is of especial interest here is how God specifies that she might pray with her mouth, think with her heart (where the late medieval people believed thinking took place),⁷⁵ read from a book, or hear one being read to her. A Book of Hours was often read in a combination of ways. Some texts would be read out loud, some read silently to oneself; sometimes it would be read in private, and sometimes in company.⁷⁶

⁷³ BMK, I.88.216.

⁷⁴ BMK, I.88.218.

⁷⁵ See Saenger (listed below), p. 145.

⁷⁶ See, for example, *The Culture of Print: Power and the Use of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Roger Chartier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 2. See also, in the same title, Paul Saenger's essay 'Books of Hours and the Reading

This section is noteworthy for more than just cataloguing the different ways Margery might offer her prayers. God includes, in his list of how Margery might worship, the reading of books. Since this is listed as a separate category from having a book read to her, one might assume that Margery was able to read, or possibly follow, a limited amount of text, whether in Latin or, more likely, in the vernacular. As Saenger shows, ‘reading’ something like a Book of Hours did not necessarily imply that one understood each and every word. As far as God was concerned, a correct intention could be sufficient.⁷⁷ It would be possible, then, that a user of a Book of Hours could recognise a word or two on the page, remember what the text is saying through association, and for the rest, struggle through by understanding the general gist or intention of the prayer being offered. It is not unreasonable to assume that this was the case for Margery. The continual repetition of the matins hours, for example, especially for one as devout and devoted as Margery, would no doubt mean that a certain amount of the service would be recognised and retained in the memory. For example, we see an example of Margery’s retention of Latin phrases when in Chapter 35 she would say ‘*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*’ upon seeing ‘angels’ flying about her.⁷⁸ Also, considering the position of her father and the power he held in

Habits of the Later Middle Ages’, p. 142, where he distinguishes between what he calls ‘phonetic literacy’ (that is, ‘the ability to decode texts syllable by syllable and to pronounce them orally’) and ‘comprehension literacy’ (that is, ‘the ability to decode a written text silently, word by word, and to understand it fully in the very act of gazing upon it’). Saenger explores how word separation in the Middle Ages led to the habit of silent reading. See page 147 for Sanger’s impression on which texts in a Book of Hours might be read silently, and which might be read aloud.

⁷⁷ Saenger, ‘Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages’, p. 149.

⁷⁸ *BMK*, I.35.88.

the town of Lynn, it is not unreasonable to assume that Margery would have received some amount of education in reading, whether formally or indirectly, perhaps even learning from the ABC of a Book of Hours (primer).⁷⁹

Margery's revelations of the Passion begin with an intimate moment where Christ and his mother are together in a fictional scene, as she gives him her blessing before he heads to his death. Mary pleads with her son to not leave her, or to let her die in his stead, while Christ explains that he must die for the benefit of mankind and that she must remain to become the foundation of the Holy Church. Christ then introduces the Biblical moment at the cross where he symbolically leaves John to care for the Virgin, and he also promises to send down angels to comfort her.⁸⁰ Christ then appears to appeal to her vanity as he promises the Virgin that she shall be queen when he is king, and that all the angels and saints will be obedient to her, and she will know 'gret pees & rest wyth-owtyn ende'.⁸¹ The revelation continues with the Virgin collapsing and Christ departing from her. Margery then makes a separate appeal to Christ who consoles her too and tells her to stay with his mother and take comfort in her.

This revelation or meditation that Margery witnesses and gives witness to, is unique to the kind of meditation on the Passion which Rolle described. Rolle does not include this fictional intimate meeting of the Virgin and Christ, but instead, portrays a similar moment between them (based on the scene with the women of Jerusalem in Luke described above) as he carries his cross towards

⁷⁹ See Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, pp. 13-14. See also my section on Women and Education above.

⁸⁰ *BMK*, I.79.187-8.

⁸¹ *BMK*, I.79.188.

Golgotha. Rolle's meditations are of a much more profoundly psychological nature than are Margery's revelations. He exhibits a deep insight into the characters as well as exploring his own inner feelings in regards to the Passion scenes. Although Margery's continuation of the story of the Passion in her imaginings becomes more similar to Rolle's, as well as common medieval portrayals of the scene, this opening exchange is more reminiscent of the emotions expressed in a Book of Hours, in that both the joys and the sorrows of the Virgin are expressed.

Rolle works very closely with the emotions. His Virgin twists her hands in dismay, cries and moans and flings her arms about, tears pouring down her face in a cascade towards her feet.⁸² She collapses into deep unconsciousness (more than once) from the angst and pains in her heart. There is no mention of her future as queen of heaven and empress of hell. Rolle is not concerned with portraying the Virgin in majesty at this moment. His image is strictly that of the grieving mother—showing the sorrows and none of the joys of the Virgin.

Where Margery asks to die rather than be without her Lord, Rolle describes how he should suffer the pain of the Virgin because of his sins.⁸³ Margery places herself in a living image, where she herself is a principal player, while Rolle imagines what it would be like to feel what the Virgin feels. His meditations are more an empathetic reaching out, expressing a need to understand and experience, and, significantly, to atone. Margery, through witnessing such an intimate scene and then taking her own part in it, is developing herself as an important figure in the holy family. Both Rolle and

⁸² Allen (ed.), *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, p. 36. This is taken from the Shorter Meditation.

⁸³ Allen (ed.), *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, p. 36.

Margery are, in their individual ways, approaching scenes from the Passion just as a reader of a Book of Hours was encouraged to do. However, their understandings of the mechanics of these imaginings are very different, and this is most clearly seen in their interpretations of a meeting between Christ and the Virgin.

When Margery then moves on to the betrayal, the flagellation, and the crucifixion scenes, she falls more in line with the common trends in portraying them. Following the intimate scenes between Christ and the Virgin, and then Margery and Christ, Margery and the Virgin, Chapter 79 continues with Christ's arrest on the Mount of Olives. Margery sees in her mind the taking of Christ, where he speaks the lines of the Book of John and the liturgical trope *Quem Quaeritis*, which in the *Book* is written as "'Whom seke 3e?'" When told they seek Jesus of Nazareth, Christ replies by saying 'Ego Sum'.⁸⁴ Interestingly he replies here in Latin, which is not used elsewhere in this revelation, but may suggest Margery was familiar with such small phrases.

Following the kiss of betrayal from Judas, there is the arrest and taunting and beating of Christ, leading to his scourging and crucifixion in Chapter 80. Here Windeatt points out the numerous similarities between that of the *Book* and other medieval sources. For the scourging he comments upon a late fourteenth-century retable in Norwich Cathedral, which depicts Christ bound with his arms above his head in a similar fashion to how the *Book* describes him. Mary offers to carry the cross as she does in the Wakefield pageant, and Christ's body is stretched before the cross is lifted and dropped into a mortise as in the York

⁸⁴ Both quotes are taken from the *BMK*, I.79.189.

pageant.⁸⁵ These particular examples may not have been the direct source of inspiration for Margery's revelation, but it is the type of common depiction of the Passion which would also be found in a Book of Hours.

(f) 7 Penitential Psalms and The Litany

The latter sections of a standard Book of Hours would often be comprised of some or all of the Seven Penitential Psalms, The Litany, the Office for the Dead and the Suffrage to the Saints. The Seven Penitential Psalms were attributed to King David who, it was believed, had committed all of the Seven Deadly Sins and wrote the Psalms in atonement for each sin. The Litany of the Saints followed the Penitential Psalms and was a liturgical prayer which, in essence, included prayers of supplication to various saints, the angels, the Holy Trinity and the Virgin Mary. The Office for the Dead was an integral part of any Book of Hours and was divided into two main sections—the Vespers that were to be said in the evening, and the Matins for saying in the morning. Margery, as a woman who lived some sixty plus years, would have witnessed the funerary services of numerous people; those who passed away in her lifetime that are mentioned in the *Book* include her father, her eldest son and her husband. Finally, the Suffrages to the Saints consist of a series of short devotions dedicated to the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and a number of universal or local saints.

The idea of Margery breaking a number of the Seven Deadly Sins, and then atoning for them, has already been explored in the section on the Gospel Readings. The *Book* makes clear that Margery was not a sinless woman, nor was

⁸⁵ See Windeatt, trans., *Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 326.

she a virgin. Her status would be more comparable with that of Mary Magdalene, a fallen but redeemed prostitute (or so the medieval Church believed, confusing as they did the various Marys to be found in the New Testament) than with that of the Virgin Mary who was believed to be pure and without sin. Margery, a mother of fourteen children, was not a prostitute but was, from the evidence of her large family and the tale she narrates of her passion for a fellow parishioner, not unfamiliar with lust and carnal knowledge.⁸⁶

Margery was also prone to attacks of lecherous thoughts, sent to her by the Devil, as related in Chapter 59 of the *Book*. For twelve days she is afflicted with evil thoughts, which included ‘fowle mendys of letchery & alle vnclennes as thow sche xulde a be comown to al maner of pepyl’. Margery experiences visions she cannot control, including ‘beheldyng of mennys membrys & swech oþer abhominacyons’. But the devil does not stop there – he tells her in her mind that she must ‘chesyn whom sche wolde han first of hem alle & sche must be comown to hem alle’.⁸⁷ Following the twelve days, which were sent to Margery as a chastisement for doubting that it was the word of God revealing to her how some men and women were to be damned, all is forgiven and the voice of God replaces that of the devil in Margery’s mind. Margery, like Mary Magdalene, has stepped into the realms of sexual deviance, but been saved and forgiven.

Later in the *Book*, in Chapter 74, God himself compares Margery with Mary Magdalene. Where Margery expresses the desire to be as loved and as worthy as that Mary was, God replies to her that ‘Trewly, dowtyr, I loue þe as

⁸⁶ *BMK*, I.4.13-16.

⁸⁷ *BMK*, I.59.144-5.

wel, & þe same pes þat I 3af to hir þe same pes I 3eue to þe'.⁸⁸ Like the Magdalene, Margery is a sinner, but she has been absolved of her past transgressions. In Chapter 84 of the *Book* God relates to Margery his great pleasure in her charity towards all lecherous men and women, for her tears and prayers on their behalf, desiring 'þat I xulde delyuyr hem owt of synne & ben as gracyows to hem as I was to Mary Mawdelyn & þat þei myth han as gret lofe to me as Mary Mawdelyn had'.⁸⁹

In the fourteenth century and in some areas into the first half of the fifteenth, the Seven Penitential Psalms were traditionally illustrated with a figure of Christ as Judge or as King of Heaven.⁹⁰ The Psalms were an opportunity to look back upon one's transgressions and to seek redemption for them. The Seven Psalms can sometimes function as a way of cancelling out the Seven Deadly Sins. Their number being equal, the psalms were sometimes used in a Book of Hours as prayers against the Deadly Sins.⁹¹ The Litany, which was essentially an enumeration of saints, was accompanied with 'Ora pro nobis' – 'Pray for us'⁹² at the end of each saint's listing. It normally followed after the Penitential Psalms and would be recited together with them. This segment of the Book of Hours, then, was a time to reflect upon one's life and to prepare for the afterlife.

People in the late medieval period were often obsessed with the thought of Purgatory. Smith writes:

⁸⁸ *BMK*, I.74.176.

⁸⁹ *BMK*, I.84.204.

⁹⁰ Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, p. 97.

⁹¹ Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, pp. 99-100.

⁹² Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, p. 101.

The development and widespread acceptance of the concept of Purgatory over the course of the thirteenth century and the possibility it offered of expiating sins after death provided ‘new incentives to prepare for the afterlife’ and made remembrance of and intercession on behalf of the dead - one’s kin, one’s friends, and one’s associates – a central occupation of the later medieval laity.⁹³

This remembrance and intercession partly links in with the next section, the Office of the Dead, but goes far in describing the importance of cleansing oneself of sins to avoid wasted years, or centuries, awaiting entrance into heaven. Purgatory was a place of purification or temporal punishment, where sins committed on earth would be atoned for. Although finite, rather than the eternal punishment of the damned, it was illustrated as bleak and tortuous, if for nothing else, then for the sufferer’s longing for heaven. Wieck notes how:

Like the Office of the Dead [...], the Psalms were thought especially efficacious in reducing the time the departed had to spend in purgatory. But it is also clear that the Psalms were recited to benefit the living, as a means of avoiding these sins in the first place.⁹⁴

Margery too was very concerned about the prospect of serving time in Purgatory. Although assured by God that she would never know that region, but

⁹³ Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England.*, p. 96.

⁹⁴ Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, p. 91.

would join him immediately in Heaven upon her death, she did not desist from collecting various indulgences.⁹⁵ As Duffy points out, Margery:

for all her mystical intimacy with Christ [...] showed herself once again a woman of her time by taking the liveliest possible interest in clocking up the ‘great pardon and plenary remission’ of all the pilgrimage sites she visited.⁹⁶

In a similar way, Margery prayed with her beads, despite the fact that God informed her that he did not wish her to do so, and that he preferred her to speak with him in her mind.⁹⁷ And yet, Margery does continue to pray with her beads. We see her in Chapter 88 regretting that she has not said as many beads as she wished, to which God replies that he accepts them as if they had been said.⁹⁸ Margery continues to use the beads even though she is not required to. The reason for this is given in Chapter 84, where God says to her:

For in alle oþer thyngys þu maist ben an ypocrite yf þu wilt, þat is to sey, in vndirstandyng, in many bedys byddyng, in gret fastyng, in gret penawnce doyng wyth-owtyn-forth þat men may se it, er in gret almes

⁹⁵ *BMK*, I.5.16-17: ‘I þe same God, forzefe þe þi synnes to þe vtterest point. And þow schalt neuyr com in Helle ne in Purgatorye, but, whan þow schalt passyn owt of þis world, wyth-in þe twynkelyng of an eye þow schalt haue þe blysse of Heuyn.’ (pp. 16-17).

⁹⁶ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 288-9.

⁹⁷ *BMK*, I.5.17.

⁹⁸ *BMK*, I.88.216. God also says, in Chapter 36 (I.36.90), that he knows Margery will pray the beads whether he wishes her to or not.

dedys doynge wyth þin handys, er in good wordys spekyng wyth þi
mowth. In alle þes, dowtyr, þu maist ben an ypocrite yf þu wilt, and þu
maist also don hem wel & holily yf þu wilt þi-selfe.⁹⁹

Margery appears to be confessing that she is guilty of vanity and the need to be seen performing her religious devotions. Others would obviously not witness God speaking in her mind. To appear to be living the life of a holy woman (or saint), Margery's devotional practices must be visible. However, whether she makes her practices visible or not makes no difference to God. He accepts her hypocrisy just as he accepts her wishing to use her beads but not doing so.

Margery clearly displays herself as a woman who desires to cover all the angles—just in case, or just for show.

With such a need to fulfil all the expected requirements, whether of God or of man, Margery shows herself to be the type of woman who would be certain to be seen with a Book of Hours if she could lay her hands on one. Just as with her (previously mentioned) collecting of other 'holy things' (the measuring stick, the piece of Moses' staff, her white clothes, silver ring and prayer beads),¹⁰⁰ a Book of Hours would signal both her secular and her liturgical standing. We know from Chapter 9 that she possessed a book of some kind, which she bore with her to church. We also can see that Margery is the type of religious woman that would seek to fulfil the requirements, whether expected to or not by God, for entry into Heaven, and in order to avoid Purgatory. Praying the Penitential Psalms and the Litany would be a natural and common practice for this.

⁹⁹ *BMK*, I.84.205.

¹⁰⁰ Margery is also given 'many gret relykys' by the friars of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. *BMK*, I.30.75.

(g) Office of the Dead

What follows the Seven Penitential Psalms and the Litanies is one of the most important and irreplaceable elements of any Book of Hours—the Office for the Dead. It was one of the services that, normally, would be said daily, together with the Hours of the Cross and of the Holy Spirit and, of course, of the Virgin.¹⁰¹ It was located in the back of every Book of Hours just as, Wieck notes, death itself stood at the back of the medieval mind.¹⁰² Death, like birth, was no stranger in the experience of Margery Kempe. We learn of the death of her eldest son, her husband, and indirectly of her father as well. The deaths of Margery's eldest son and her husband are both noted in Chapter 2 of Book II.¹⁰³ Her father, it is assumed, died sometime in 1413 before 16 October.¹⁰⁴ Both the death of her father, and that of her son and husband, seem to act as incentives for Margery to go on pilgrimage. This may have been because financial resources became available to her in their wills, or it may have been that she felt the need to acquire indulgences for the peace of their souls, or perhaps it was a combination of these and other factors. Whatever the motivation, death became for Margery an opportunity for exploiting her independence and setting off on a physical and spiritual journey.

There are other deaths, or near deaths, listed in the *Book* of people Margery has been in contact with, such as clergymen, supporters or confessors, neighbours, or total strangers. In Chapter 72 we learn how:

¹⁰¹ Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, p. 10.

¹⁰² Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, p. 117.

¹⁰³ *BMK*, II.2.225.

¹⁰⁴ See Windeatt, *BMK*, p. 29 (Chronology), and p. 305 (Notes to Chapter 11).

Also þe said creatur was desiryd of mech pepil to be wyth hem at her deying & to prey for hem, for, þow þei | louyd not hir wepyng ne hir crying in her lyfe-tyme, þei de[si]ryd þat sche xulde bothyn wepyn & cryin whan þei xulde deyin, & so sche dede.¹⁰⁵

This segment continues with explaining how Margery, when she saw people anointed (receiving extreme unction before death), would have holy thoughts and meditations, and if she saw them dying, she would then see Christ dying, and sometimes the Virgin's death, and would respond with crying, weeping and sobbing. Margery sees each individual departing from life as an incarnation of the dying Christ. Their deaths remind her of his ultimate sacrifice. The Office for the Dead does not appear to remind Margery of her own mortality but, rather, of how Christ came to earth to live among men and die as one of them. This is not to say that Margery does not ponder her own death. Her thoughts and feelings in this respect will be explored further in the next section on the Suffrages to the Saints and the idea of martyrdom.

From what is said in Chapter 72 it would appear that Margery was very familiar and experienced in attending the rituals that would occur at a dying person's bedside. Although it cannot be taken for granted, it is not too much to assume that she would probably have attended their funerals as well. If they were comforted in their last moments in life by her attendance, one might presume that Margery's prayers following their death would have been just as welcome. The Office for the Dead was probably a service that Margery heard read on numerous occasions. It is also possible that she would say her Office from her own Book of

¹⁰⁵ *BMK*, I.72.172-3.

Hours as the clergy recited it from their Breviaries.¹⁰⁶ But as Wieck points out, the Office for the Dead was not just read at funerals. The laity was encouraged to read it on a daily basis, whether in church or at home.¹⁰⁷ The souls of the departed would always require the prayers of the living, and the living should always be reminded of their own mortality, and their need to prepare spiritually for their own deaths.

One of the common images portrayed in Books of Hours, from the late medieval period into the Reformation, is that of Job.¹⁰⁸ Besides images, readings would also be included from the Old Testament book of Job. The longsuffering nature of this man, who is tormented by Satan on numerous occasions (deprived of children, wealth and personal health), is used as an example for other Christians to follow. Wieck comments:

The trials endured by Job become an allegory for one's time on earth—or in purgatory. Thus the 'I' of the reading ceases to be Job, ceases even to be the person reading the Office and, instead, becomes the voice of the dead man himself, crying for help[.]¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Also, Margery may have had the names and dates of people she wished to remember entered in her book. Obits containing the name and date of decease were commonly found in the calendar of Books of Hours. An exceptional example of this can be found in the Beaufort Hours, which Lady Margaret Beaufort used as a chronicle to mark important political and dynastic events relating to the Tudor family: London, British Library, Royal MS 2 A XVIII. See, for example, Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁷ Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, p. 117.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁹ Wieck, *Painted Prayers*, p. 118.

The characteristics of selflessness and fortitude also happens to be a key element of Margery Kempe's persona in the *Book*. From the very beginning, where in the Proem it states:

it was to her in a maner of solas & comfort whan sche sufferyd any dysese for þe lofe of God & for þe grace þat God wrowht in hyr. For euyr þe mor slawnder & repref þat sche sufferyd, þe mor sche incresyd in grace & in deuocyon of holy medytacyon of hy contemplacyon & of wonderful spechys & dalyawns whеч our Lord spak and dalyid to hyr sowle, techyng hyr how sche schuld be despysed for hys lofe, how sche schuld han pacyens, setting all hyr trost, alle hyr lofe, and alle hyr affeccyon in hym only.¹¹⁰

to the very end where in Chapter 10 of Book II is written:

And I prey þe, Souereyn Lord Crist Ihesu, þat as many men mote be turnyd be my crying & my wepyng as me han scornyd þerfor er xal scornyn in-to þe werdys ende & many mo yf it be ʒowr wille.¹¹¹

Margery's life is related as being filled with hardships in regards to receiving scorn, rebuking, threats and desertion of others because of her particular forms of piety. Like the figure of Job in the Office for the Dead, the woman Margery Kempe is presented to the intended readers or listeners of the *Book* as one who

¹¹⁰ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.2.

¹¹¹ *BMK*, II.10.249.

exhibits grace through forbearance and fortitude. Margery's saint-like behaviour, forgiving her adversaries and praying for their souls, is intended as an example to others.

This kind of suffering through adversity, forgiving one's enemies and maintaining a love for God, is of course not unique to Job and Margery. The ultimate example is that of Christ himself and the humiliation he suffered during the Passion. Contemplating death and praying the Office for the Dead would naturally bring to mind thoughts of the Redeemer. Besides Margery's main revelation of the Passion, which has already been discussed, there are other mentions in the *Book* of her affective mystical experiences which are triggered by thoughts of the Passion. In Chapter 57, while witnessing an Easter Sepulchre service, with priests and worthy men 'deuowtly representing þe lamentabyl deth and doolful beryng of owr Lord Ihesu Crist', Margery experiences an empathetic joining with the sorrows of the Virgin, and then witnesses, in her mind's eye, the Passion of Christ. She witnesses the beating, the scourging and the crucifixion as if it were truly happening. The experience is so overwhelming that she sobs, roars and cries, spreads her arms out wide and cries 'I dey, I dey'.¹¹²

While this is by no means a typical response to a reading of the Office for the Dead, or of witnessing an Easter Sepulchre service, it demonstrates how affective experiences were generated, and indeed encouraged by the Church, through the engagement of the laity in religious practices. Contemplating the life of Job, or the Passion of Christ, while remembering one's dead friends and relatives, aided the devotee in accepting or understanding the reason for death

¹¹² *BMK*, I.57.140.

and suffering. The figures of the Messiah and the saints and prophets could serve as examples of strength through adversity and coping with loss. The strength of saintly figures of the past worked as a motivating force for facing tribulations. Because of their closeness to God, and because of their suffering great hardships and overcoming them, the saints also became popular targets of prayers seeking support and guidance. Turning to the saints for aid in prayers, in addition to those directed to the Virgin and the Holy Trinity, was what the Suffrages in a Book of Hours is concerned with.

(h) Suffrages

‘Though every Christian might hope for Heaven, only the saints could expect to go there directly’.¹¹³ As has already been shown, Margery Kempe had similar expectations of attaining heaven without knowing purgatory. Nevertheless, she still followed the rituals of praying to the saints, and she also communicated with them in her mind. Besides the Trinity, and the Virgin and Mary Magdalene, there are numerous saints that are mentioned in the *Book*. These range from apostles and evangelists to martyrs and to female mystics like herself. Among those most commonly cited are two female saints also most commonly found in Books of Hours. Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret were prominent saints in Books of Hours, both in prayers and in images.¹¹⁴ They’re found in the *Book*, for example, in Chapter 86:

¹¹³ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 341.

¹¹⁴ See Wieck, *Time Sanctified*, for comments on the popularity of Mary Magdalene, Catherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch in the Suffrages, pp. 119-122.

Also þu preyist Kateryn, Margarete, & alle holy virginys to wolcomyn me in þi sowle. And þan þu preyist my blissyd Modyr, Mary Mawdelyn, alle apostelys, martirys, confessowrys, Kateryne, Margaret, & alle holy virginys þat þei xulde arayn þe chawmbre of þi sowle wyth many fayr flowerys & wyth many swete spicys þat I myth restyn þerin.¹¹⁵

In fact, this section reads much like a list of the prime candidates to pray for as used in a Book of Hours, and in their order of rank. First and foremost (besides the Trinity) comes the Virgin, then, for a woman, Mary Magdalene would be a usual next choice, the martyrs and confessors came next (male, then female) and finally the virgins and widows.¹¹⁶ Margery was very likely aware of this hierarchy. She may not have learned it from a Book of Hours, but these were definitely an available source for teaching her. There is further evidence of possessing knowledge of the hierarchy shown in Chapter 22, when Margery seeks reassurance from God that her high place in heaven will be secured, despite not being a virgin: ‘þu art a mayden in þi sowle [...] & so xalt þu dawnsyn in Hevyn wyth oþer holy maydens & virgynes’.¹¹⁷ In fact, the entire chapter is devoted to the hierarchy of heaven and Margery’s particular place in it. In a similar way, Margery informs God that she does not cherish the idea of

¹¹⁵ *BMK*, I.86.210.

¹¹⁶ Wieck lists them as following in this order: the Virgin, archangels, angels and other celestials, John the Baptist, the apostles, male martyrs, confessors (male nonmartyr saints), female virgin martyrs, and then widows – *Painted Prayers*, p. 92.

¹¹⁷ *BMK*, I.22.52.

becoming a martyr, while hoping to maintain her promised elevated position in heaven.

Saints that were included in the Suffrages of a Book of Hours, such as Catherine and Margaret and Barbara,¹¹⁸ had suffered a martyr's death, or at least faced the threat of a violent death. Margery contemplates the idea of martyrdom in Chapter 14 of the *Book*. She feels that she would like to be killed for God's love but fears the moment of death. She then imagines that the best martyr's death would be tied to a stake and having her head chopped off with a sharp axe. As consistently occurs throughout the *Book*, God recognises Margery's willingness to serve and lets her know that the desiring to please him in this way is as good as if she had done it:

I thank þe, dowtyr, þat þow woldyst <suffer deth> for my lofe, for, as oftyn as þow thynkyst so, þow schalt haue þe same mede in Heuyn as þow þu suffredyst þe same deth.¹¹⁹

While it cannot be ascertained what book Margery Kempe held in her hands as part of the roof of St. Margaret's in Lynn crashed down upon her, a likely candidate would be a Book of Hours, a useful religious tool for the laity, much like the beads which we know Margery also carried. What is certain is that she possessed a book, and took it so much for granted that she could describe it merely as 'hir boke'. We also learn from the *Book* that Margery was not

¹¹⁸ One of the three holy maidens together with Catherine and Margaret and also mentioned in the *Book*, in Chapter 22 (I.22.52).

¹¹⁹ *BMK*, I.14.30.

unfamiliar with such manuscripts, as she advises the priest-scribe about the purchase of a breviary in Chapter 24. Books of Hours were becoming commonplace for mercantile people as well as the elite, thanks to increased, and more economical, production. For a woman like Margery, they would not only serve as an important utility, but might also serve as an indicator of her religiosity, as well as suggesting learning, and with it, authority.

The *Book* may not be as well structured, or thought out, and it may not exhibit the intellectual prowess of Julian of Norwich, or Richard Rolle of Hampole's writing, but there are ascertainable qualities of influence within it that demonstrate other books and systems of writing affected its content and presentation. One possible, even likely influence would be a Book of Hours. From the devotion to the Virgin and Saints, to the types of prayers, to the significance of dates within the church calendar, to meditations upon the Passion of Christ, the *Book* exhibits numerous possible parallels with the content and function of a Book of Hours.

Chapter 5

Oral and Literate Devotion

(a) Preaching and Teaching

Margery and the Pulpit

In Chapters 52 and 53 of the *Book* there are scenes rich in verbal and written imagery involving Margery, as she exchanges words of holy wisdom with others. Chapter 52 begins with a monk preaching in York, who uses the opportunity to voice poorly disguised ill opinions about Margery. Rather than hurting her, as it is said to have done to her friends, the experience strengthens Margery through testing her 'paciens & hir charite'.¹ This brief episode introduces the power of the sermon in influencing other people's perspectives, not so much in this instance in a religious way, but more as a form of gossip-mongering. It also demonstrates how the oral tradition can appear to work to Margery's detriment, but how she can turn it to something positive.

Shortly after the scene of antagonistic preaching is one where Margery is in Archbishop Henry Bowet's chapel, and many of his household scorn her and call her a 'Lollard' and a 'heretic'.² It is unclear why this accusation is levelled against her. It could be that the terms were used synonymously as generic terms for 'sinner', and that, because she behaved so differently, with her crying and wailing and wearing a white gown, they saw her as a threat to orthodoxy. It could also be that they feared she was possessed by a devilish spirit, or madness. These

¹ *BMK*, I.52.123.

² *BMK*, I.52.124.

were tropes of the heretical, as described by John Arnold, where madness or devilry ‘hid behind a veil of false piety’.³ In a later chapter we hear how many people of Lynn, again influenced by preaching against her, believed her to have a ‘deuyl wyth-inne hir’.⁴

Certainly some individuals interpreted Margery’s wailing as possession by a demonic rather than a God-given force.⁵ Besides this aspect of using her voice to act as God’s witness, her teaching and preaching were likely targets for Margery being accused of being a Lollard. Indeed, Chapter 52 focuses on Margery being interrogated before the Archbishop of York, where she is told to cease teaching people.⁶ The Bible is quoted to her, where St. Paul states that no woman should preach,⁷ and Margery replies by saying ‘I preche not, ser, I come in no pulpytt. I vse but comownycacyon & good wordys’.⁸ No sooner has Margery spoken these words then she is commanded by the Archbishop to retell an alleged anti-clerical tale she had related earlier to one of the accusing doctors. She then begins to narrate a moral tale about a bear, a pear tree, and a priest that is, in essence, an *exemplum*, as would be used in a medieval sermon.

³ John H. Arnold, ‘Margery’s Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent’, in Arnold and Lewis, *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 76.

⁴ *BMK*, I.62.154.

⁵ See also, for example, Chapter 44, where Margery is accused of having a devil within her, and of having epilepsy, and the people spit at her in horror of her behaviour. *BMK*, I.44.105.

⁶ *BMK*, I.52.125-6.

⁷ I Corinthians XIV, 34-5.

⁸ *BMK*, I.52.126.

Marea Mitchell comments how marginalia in the Salthow manuscript includes the word ‘*narracio*’, and how this was a ‘medieval Latin rhetorical term’ which would ‘suggest that the passage is to be seen as *exemplum*’.⁹ The hand that wrote this annotation, possibly a monk of Mount Grace, would therefore seem to have interpreted Margery’s tale as a sermonized fable.¹⁰ It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that Archbishop Bowet’s retinue would also have construed it to bear such similarities. Margery’s didactic lesson to the learned assembly clearly places her in the role of teacher or preacher; the assembly, in particular the later repentant cleric, function as her congregation.

The Archbishop commends her tale upon completion, the man who only a moment ago had insisted that Margery desist in her teaching others. She then turns to the accusing cleric and speaks of a good preacher in Lynn, who many times has said from the pulpit ‘*zyf any man be euyl plesyd wyth my prechyng, note hym wel, for he is gylty*’.¹¹ She says to the cleric that this is how he has behaved towards her. This retort links Margery to a priest moralizing from the pulpit. She has just preached her lesson and it has been found to be a good tale. Margery not only escapes the charge of preaching, she in effect mounts a pulpit and preaches her response to the gathering, swaying even the Archbishop of

⁹ *BMK*, I.52.126, and Mitchell, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 119.

¹⁰ Meech believed the writer of the red annotations to be a monk of Mount Grace, and, although the writer of the small brown letters probably pre-dated him, he may also have belonged to that same Carthusian priory. See *BMK*, pp. xxxvi-xliv. See Kelly Parsons, ‘The Red Ink Annotator of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and His Lay Audience’, in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence From Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe and Gower*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria Press, 2001), pp. 143-216, for more on the ‘red-ink annotator’.

¹¹ *BMK*, I.52.128.

York with her words. If we can believe that this episode took place exactly as described, it is extraordinary how Margery is able to overcome the accusation of preaching, by preaching.¹²

There is more that can be extracted from this incident. As Lochrie and Staley both in their separate ways attempt to demonstrate, there is the sense of an added significance with this *exemplum* telling. Beyond the obvious parallels exposed by the pilgrim to the priest in the tale itself, of the bear eating and defecating the fruit, and the priest glorified by administering sacraments but despoiling himself by his sins, that is to say the message that is delivered in real time to the listeners, and besides the linking this story to the accusing cleric, there is also a further sense of purpose with her *exemplum* being copied into Margery's book. Whether there is comic intent as Lochrie suggests, or a scrutiny and criticism of community (in particular the Church and the doctrine of transubstantiation) as Staley argues, is beyond the capacity of this thesis to explore fully.¹³ However, a further sense of this story that has not been previously examined, is the way in which it serves as an example of Margery's movement between the oral and literate traditions.

The original relating of the story, as well as the rest of the scene surrounding it, demonstrates Margery's skill in telling stories, and gives witness to her talent at manoeuvring herself out of danger with her words. She knows the

¹² See Genell Gertz-Robinson on 'homiletic rhetoric' and 'trial narrative', in Gertz-Robinson, 'Stepping into the Pulpit? Women's Preaching in *The Book of Margery Kempe* and *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 459-82.

¹³ Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, pp. 149-51; Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, pp. 5-9.

correct answers to provide, and proves to her accusers her orthodoxy by knowing the Articles of Faith and responding ‘wel & trewly & redily wyth-owtyn any gret stody so þat he myth not blamyn hir’.¹⁴ Margery is not going to be caught out saying anything that might seriously implicate her. Her art of rhetoric, although not university learned, is enough to impress doctors of theology, so much so that they fear the people have great faith in her and that she could ‘peruertyn summe of hem’.¹⁵ The scene, along with her other trials, is reminiscent of Christ’s tests before the Pharisees and Sadducees.¹⁶ Like Christ, she not only deflects the accusations made against her, but also makes her accusers appear foolish in the process.

By recording this scene and repeating her telling of the bear tale in her book, Margery is recreating it for a different kind of audience. Due to the impulsive and spontaneous nature of oral communication, as opposed to the more considered written word, as well as considering the effect of memory and interpretation, the scene as it originally occurred, as opposed to that remembered at a later date by Margery, will not be identical. Her written account is bound to have inclusions and deletions that are more favourable to the impression she would wish to create. Margery is recollecting the moment again in order to impress her readers, rather than the people who actually attended the event.

The original witnesses to the scene of Margery’s hearing before Archbishop Bowet would not have responded in the same way that her later readers or listeners would. Their interest would have been primarily in hearing

¹⁴ *BMK*, I.52.125.

¹⁵ *BMK*, I.52.125.

¹⁶ See, for example, Matthew 16:1-4 and 19:3-12.

this woman being charged and how she defended herself. To them she would not be seen as a deeply religious woman whose example they should follow and whose lifestyle was to be praised and admired. The Archbishop, although applauding her tale, desires her to be escorted out of his diocese as quickly as possible. She is seen as a nuisance who refuses to do as she is told, but in whom no real fault can be found. The Archbishop wishes to wash his hands of her, as Pontius Pilate did with Christ, but would not have seen himself as filling such a role. When Margery departs their company and returns to York, many of the people there, including 'ful worthy clerkys', rejoice in the Lord (no doubt having heard her retell the adventure) for having provided her, 'not lettryd' as she is, with the 'witte & wisdom to answeryn so many lernyd men'.¹⁷

Margery's inclusion of the tale works to many purposes in her book. It displays her wisdom; it reveals her authority as one capable of chiding learned men of religion; it furthers the development of her portrayal as a saintly woman overcoming persecution; it draws a parallel between herself and the parable-telling of Christ; it exemplifies her ability to operate, or manipulate, both the oral and the literate traditions to her advantage. As Mitchell points out, Margery functions both within and without the tale.¹⁸ Just as the pilgrim must interpret the tale for the priest, Margery is needed to open the eyes of the accusing cleric. Margery is the pilgrim as the cleric is the priest. She functions both within and without her story, just as she does within and without the confines of her book. This kind of duality, of the woman relating and the woman taking part, is what inspired Staley's division of Margery (subject) and Kempe (author). However,

¹⁷ *BMK*, I.52.128.

¹⁸ Mitchell, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 124.

just as with the telling of the bear and pear tree exemplum, both women are the same person, first she is telling the story in the past by word of mouth, while later she is having it recorded by a scribe in a book.

In the following chapter Margery travels on to Bridlington, then down to Hessle where men of the Duke of Bedford arrest her. A symbolic scene is presented when women come running out of their houses, hearing of Margery being arrested and charged with Lollardy, armed with their distaffs and crying out 'Brennyth þis fals heretyk'.¹⁹ Again the charges of Lollardy and heresy are linked, but the moment is best remembered for the incredible image presented by the women. An evocative image of contrast is presented between these apparently archetypal housewives - rushing from their homes and brandishing the symbol of Eve, their tools as good housewives, like a weapon - and Margery, the woman who has abandoned her home and taken up a life of preaching and teaching the word of God.

Immediately following the women rushing her with their distaffs, we are presented with another telling scene as Margery is led on towards Beverley. Now it is the men of the district that approach her saying 'Damsel, forsake þis lyfe þat þu hast, & go spynne & carde as oþer women don, & suffyr not so meche schame & so meche wo'. Clearly this is the occupation they wish her to devote herself to, not the public preaching and teaching which has, apparently, led to her arrest. Interestingly, the men and women approach her separately and have different approaches to their attack. This Golgotha-like procession is strengthened as such an image by Margery's reply, as she states, 'I suffir but schrewys wordys, & owr merciful Lord Crist Ihesu, worschepyd be hys name,

¹⁹ *BMK*, I.53.129.

suffyrd hard strokys, bittyr scorgyngys, & schamful deth'.²⁰ As they carry on, Margery tells the company 'good talys', and, upon reaching Beverley, she is imprisoned in 'a fayr chambyr' with 'an honest bed' to lie in.

It is within this room that a final scene, redolent of a preacher in the pulpit, occurs. Following her arrest and telling of tales to her male oppressors, Margery now sways the local women by her 'many good talys', which cause the women to weep in remorse. Liz McAvoy describes the scene by highlighting the positioning of the characters involved:

Margery proceeds to detail her defiant and celebratory preaching from the makeshift "pulpit" of an upstairs room to which she has been confined, and recounts how she wins over the hitherto resentful women[.]²¹

Margery looms above her listeners as she narrates her (religious) tales. We do not know what these tales might have been; perhaps as well as gospel stories, she had more *exempla*, such as that of the bear and the pear tree, to tell. Importantly, however, as with the other images provided in the two chapters, is the way in which Margery's authority is strengthened by her priest-like control over the gatherings that listen to her. Furthermore, the window-preaching scene is memorable for the way in which Margery is made to resemble Christ on the cross. Like the crucified Christ, Margery requests a drink as she is 'euyll for

²⁰ *BMK*, I.53.130.

²¹ Liz Herbert McAvoy, "'Aftyr Hyr Own Tunge": Body, Voice and Authority in the Book of Margery Kempe', in *Women's Writing* 9:2 (September 2007), 159-76, p. 166.

thyrste'. Like Christ she is given wine, which must be brought to her by setting a ladder, a symbol of the Passion, against the window.²²

Chapters 52 and 53 of the *Book* provide significant information regarding Margery's understanding of preaching and teaching and the importance they hold for her. Through the written word we are shown how her skills at public speaking enabled her not only to escape charges and threats made against her, but could be used to turn the tables completely. Margery, we learn from the telling of the bear and pear tree incident, was able to deflect an attack against her and instead lay down her own accusations and triumph in them. She could then, as the *Book* demonstrates, move on and win souls to her cause as a result of her forbearance and wisdom. Margery is shown to be skilled in verbal dexterity, and to use 'good talys' to profit both herself, and those who would gain comfort from her experience.

The 'Good Prechour'

Than cam þer a frer to Lenne whечh was holdyn an holy man & a good prechour. Hys name & hys perfeccyon of prechyng spred & sprong wondyr wyde.²³

The words above describe a visiting friar to the town of Lynn, whose presence occupies chapters 61 to 63 of the *Book*. This unnamed preacher was very popular

²² *BMK*, I.53.131. For Christ's thirst and drinking wine on the cross see, for example, Mark 19:28-9.

²³ *BMK*, I.61.148.

for his sermons, and it would appear that many of the people of the town, Margery included, were keen to hear him speak. However, it is worth observing that the words 'was holdyn' are used in conjunction with his holiness and skill as a preacher. As is later divulged, when the description of the relationship between Margery and the friar is developed, her opinion of him, and God's opinion of him, is far less flattering. In fact, we learn that God is angry with him, and that 'it wer bettyr he wer neuyr born, for he despisith hys werkys in me'. It is at this point in the manuscript that the word 'Melton' is written in faded brown letters in the outer margin.²⁴ The individual that wrote 'Melton' was, according to Meech, possibly referring to the Franciscan preacher, William Melton.²⁵ It is a fifteenth-century hand, and it is unclear if the annotator was referring to a contemporary of theirs, or to this earlier William Melton. The possibility of it being the Franciscan preacher Meech mentions is worth examining, as there are points of interest relating to him and the persecution of Margery, if indeed he was this 'holy man'.

Another Franciscan preacher of the earlier fifteenth century, called Nicholas Philip, left behind a manuscript containing a collection of sermons (a 'sermon diary') that also contains some names and dates.²⁶ Among these names is one that is believed to have been the author of four of these sermons, and this preacher is referred to as 'Melton'.²⁷ Fletcher tells us that some of Philip's writing and preaching was done in Lynn, and that, because of the strong East

²⁴ *BMK*, I.63.155.

²⁵ *BMK*, Notes, p. 321.

²⁶ See Alan J. Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry in Late-Medieval England* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), p. 41. The manuscript is Bodleian Library, MS Lat. th. d. 1. Both Philip and Melton were active during the 1430s.

²⁷ Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, p. 47.

Anglian nature of his writing, he may have been a native of that town.²⁸ It is also believed that he travelled with another Franciscan, and that this man may have been William Melton, who was also known to be preaching in the same area.²⁹ There is a possibility that the ‘Melton’ of friar Philip’s ‘sermon diary’ is the same as the ‘Melton’ of the marginalia in the *Book*, and that this is the William Melton who has been identified from Franciscan documents.³⁰

The reason why this somewhat tentative connection is important to consider, is that one of the four Philip sermons, believed to have been by Melton, concerns ‘a series of injunctions, based on St. Paul, against four varieties of female misconduct’.³¹ What the sermon does not do, is mention a Margery Kempe by name. In Chapter 62 of the *Book*, we learn that this ‘good frere’, on St. James’s Day, preached in St. James’s Chapel yard in Lynn on a subject that was ‘meche a-geyn þe seyde creatur, not expressyng hir name, but so he expletyd hys conseytys þat men vndirstod wel þat he ment hir.’³² If the Meltons are indeed the same individual, this Philip sermon is remarkable as it may be the one identical to that mentioned in the *BMK*. However, even if they are different

²⁸ Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, p. 48.

²⁹ Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, p. 50.

³⁰ A.G. Little, *Franciscan Papers, Lists and Documents* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1943), pp. 245-6. H. Leith Spencer also remarks upon the possible connection of (William) Melton of Philip’s ‘sermon diary’, and Margery Kempe in Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 58-9.

³¹ Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, p. 51. The four things prohibited for women according to the sermon were: to preach or teach publicly; to be before their men (therefore, they should be submissive to their husbands); to pray without a veil; and to decorate themselves proudly.

³² *BMK*, I.62.152.

preaching friars, the fact that a sermon was being written about female misconduct according to the rules of St. Paul, is intriguing simply for the connection that can be made to Margery's ordeal on the same issue in Archbishop Bowet's presence.

Of particular interest is that one of the injunctions expressed in this sermon concerns the precept that women should not preach.³³ What we cannot know, but may have been common knowledge to Margery's contemporaries, is the possibility this was a manner of hers that the preaching friar was (besides her disruptive weeping) particularly opposed to. The *Book* does inform us, however, that many of the congregation hearing the friar's sermon were upset by it, that there was 'mech remouwr a-mong þe pepil' as they loved and trusted her, and that they disliked how he 'spak so meche a-geyn hir'.³⁴ Clearly, according to this account, the people understood without doubt that he was referring to Margery, and that his words were condemning and offensive. Unfortunately, what the *Book* does not provide, are specifics in regards to the charges he brought against her.

The scene with the 'good Prechour' is significant for the way in which it further demonstrates the importance of sermons to Margery. We hear how, when she was unable to hear him preach, 'sche had so mech sorwe þat sche wist not what sche myth do', while when she was able to hear him it 'was to hir þe hiest comfort in erth'.³⁵ This is stated regardless of the fact that Margery is able to hear 'many wor-schepful doctorys & oþer worthy clerkys, bothyn religyows &

³³ See Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, p. 51.

³⁴ *BMK*, I.62.152.

³⁵ *BMK*, I.61.151.

seculerys' preaching, and cries and sobs boisterously during them without consequence.³⁶ Despite the antagonism, or perhaps partly because of it, Margery values the friar's talent for preaching. His words give her the highest comfort on earth, which is very high praise indeed, considering she continually experiences the voice of God speaking directly to her. However, his making use of the pulpit to denounce Margery's manner of living to the people of Lynn displeases not just Margery but God as well.

The preaching friar may also provide an historical link between Margery Kempe and the religious world of early fourteenth century England, and one in which feelings of antagonism towards Margery's often raucous manner of living are expressed. If the William Melton of Franciscan records is the visiting friar of the *Book*, and the sermon preserved by Nicholas Philip was written by him, another, albeit tentative link (besides that of a Margery Kempe of Lynn being admitted to the Guild of the Trinity)³⁷, could be seen to exist between the protagonist of the *Book*, and an historical personage. Whoever the 'good Prechowr' was, he plays a part in the 'slawnder & repref' that is a significant part of Margery's devotional lifestyle, which makes her increase in 'grace & in deuocyon', and bears witness to God's love for her.³⁸

³⁶ *BMK*, I.61.151-2. As examples, a couple of these men are identified in Chapter 69 (p. 207) as 'þe Priowr of [Seynt Margarety's Chirch in Lynne], and 'Bischop Wakeryng, Bischop of Norwich'.

³⁷ See, for example, *BMK*, p. li.

³⁸ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.2.

(b) Devotional Books and Pious Practices

By the late medieval period in England, books were becoming a commodity that was less exotic, and the sharing of books was not uncommon, even among the merchant classes.³⁹ As Margery constructed her devotional manner of living, and later when she exercised it, books became an essential part of her development and understanding of common and favourable religious practices. Several questions arise in regards to how she may have accessed these books, how she absorbed the information within them, and how she later made use of the knowledge she had gained. Besides the titles or authors that are mentioned in the *Book*, there are certainly other books Margery either had direct access to, heard someone quoting from or paraphrasing, or learned about indirectly through another medium such as art or drama. This section will examine the religious literate culture of late medieval England as Margery may have experienced it, looking at evidence such as wills, extant miscellanies, and other documents to ascertain how an illiterate woman could become erudite in devotional teachings.

As the *Book* progresses, there are numerous references to books, from the unspecified exemplar Margery clutches in her hand in Chapter 9 when some timber and masonry falls on her, to the books she heard read listed in Chapters 17 and 58, to further books listed in Chapter 62.⁴⁰ There is also the mention of a breviary, a possible allusion to the Eternal City medieval travel guide, the *Stacions of Rome*, and textual analogues implying the knowledge of further

³⁹ See my chapter section 'Women and Books'. See also, for example, Vincent Gillespie's essay 'Vernacular Books of Religion' in Gillespie, *Looking in Holy Books*, pp. 145-73.

⁴⁰ *BMK*, I.9.21; I.17.39; I.58.143; I.62.153-4.

books.⁴¹ Finally, there are frequent references to Margery's knowledge of the Gospels.⁴² Margery moves about in a world that is evidently not short of available books, and where being classified as *illiterati* does not appear to be much of a disadvantage when it comes to utilizing them. Besides the priest-reader, there is at least one other person mentioned in the *Book* who may have provided readings to Margery, and that is Joan Beaufort, Lady Westmoreland.⁴³

The allusion to Joan Beaufort is not rich in detail, and hardly presents us with any chance of conclusively ascertaining whether it was a brief encounter, or a more prolonged visit. However, there are clues, and circumstantial evidence, which may intimate how close a relationship they had. A preaching friar, or Dominican, who is Suffragan to the Archbishop, says to Margery: 'Damsel, þu wer at my Lady Westmorland'.⁴⁴ The point he is trying to make, we later learn, is that while visiting the Beauforts, Margery was believed to have 'cownseledyst [...] Lady Greystokke to forsakyn hir husbonde, þat is a barownys wife & dowtyr to [the] Lady of Westmorlonde'. Margery denies the accusation, and tells the Archbishop that she has not seen the Lady Westmorland for over two years,

⁴¹ *BMK*, I.24.57-8; I.39.95. Possible examples of 'further books' could include Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* (see I.18.42-3 for reference to the time Julian and Margery spend together, when Margery may have learned of Julian's book), and the *MVC*, as examined earlier in my chapter section *Discretio Spirituum*.

⁴² For example, the company Margery travels with to the Holy Land tells her that she 'schal not [speke] of þe Gospel' around them (*BMK*, I.27.65). When Margery is being questioned before the Archbishop of York, she startles the gathering with her speaking of the Gospel (*BMK*, I.52.126). Also, Margery is shown to be knowledgeable enough that she can inspire a priest to further study and contemplation by her insights (*BMK*, I.58.143 – this will be examined further below).

⁴³ *BMK*, I.54.133.

⁴⁴ *BMK*, I.54.133.

that at that time she was sent for by her, and that she could return to her for a testimonial of her innocence if so desired by him.

I saw not my Lady Westmorland þis too 3er & mor. Sir, sche sent for me
er I went to Ierusalem &, 3yf it lyke 3ow, I wyl gon a-geyn to hir for
recorde þat I mevyd no sweche mater.

If the Countess were summoning Margery, it would be natural to assume that it had something to do with an interest in her religious manner of living. It would seem that the Suffragan suspects this as well, as he feels Margery, a married woman living estranged from her husband and wearing white garments, is encouraging Joan's daughter to lead a similar life. Evidently Margery believes her relationship with Joan Beaufort to be quite a strong one, as she has no doubt that the Countess, daughter of John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford, sister of Cardinal Beaufort, and aunt of the Duke of Bedford, would see her again should she request it, and that she would produce a testimonial on Margery's behalf.⁴⁵ Instead of committing any sort of subversive act, it is revealed that at least part of her visit entailed telling a story to Joan Beaufort.

Margery's tale, of a Lady that was damned for not loving her enemies, and a bailiff who was saved because he loved and forgave his enemies, is clearly reminiscent of a Gospel parable.⁴⁶ Her story may have been inspired from hearing a Gospel reading, or from a sermon, or from a similar parable given in a

⁴⁵ For notes on Lady Westmorland's genealogy, see Meech's note in *BMK*, p. 317. Meech also comments on how the mayor of Leicester similarly responds to Margery's dress, thinking that it is a signal for subversive activity (*BMK*, p. 311).

⁴⁶ See, for example, Matthew 18:23-35 for a parable by Christ on forgiving (debts), or Luke 18:9-14 for a parable on humility, social position, and giving.

different written source. What it tells us, however, is that Margery's account posits she was not only speaking with the Countess, but was apparently teaching her in matters religious. This speaking of God would seem to be the reason behind Margery's summons—if Joan Beaufort valued Margery's words, and saw her as a holy woman, it is credible that she wished to meet with her as an expression of her own religiosity. Their meeting may therefore have entailed an exchange of beliefs, possibly including the other women of the Beaufort household.⁴⁷ Perhaps part of this exchange included readings from books owned by the Countess.

Joan Beaufort's name has been associated with the ownership of several books, and one of her daughters, Cecily, appears to have accumulated an even larger library. Books belonging to Joan include a copy of *Tristram*, a version of *The Chronicles of Jerusalem* and *Godfrey de Bouillon* in one volume, a volume of Gower's poetry, and a miscellany that included Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion* as well as extracts from Birgitta of Sweden's *Revelations*.⁴⁸ There is also a manuscript containing Nicholas Love's English translation of the pseudo-Bonaventura's *MVC*, the *Speculum vitae*, linked to her name.⁴⁹ If Joan possessed

⁴⁷ Lady Greystroke (Elizabeth Ferrers) clearly met with Margery as well. Meech puts the audience with Archbishop Bowet as occurring in 1417, and Margery states she met with the Beauforts before leaving for Jerusalem, which was in 1413. Joan's daughter Cecily would have been only a couple years old, and Anne somewhat older at the time. See *BMK*, p. 317, for Meech's reckoning of the dates. More will be written on Cecily immediately below. For Cecily and Anne's association with books and devotion see, for example, Meale, 'Laywomen and Their Books', pp. 110 and 144.

⁴⁸ See Meale, 'Laywomen and Their Books', pp. 140-4. The miscellany containing both Rolle and Birgitta is Cambridge University Library Additional MS 3042.

⁴⁹ This document is: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Mus. 35. See Otto Pächt and J.J.G. Alexander, eds., *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library Oxford*:

some of these volumes at the time of her meeting with Margery, and if she shared them (and possibly others) with her through a reading, or through conversing with her, the titles by Rolle and Birgitta are particularly striking. Perhaps it was a connection in the admiration for Birgitta between the Countess's family and Margery that drew the two women together.

Henry V's foundation of the Bridgettine abbey of Syon at Isleworth may have represented a family devotion to the cult. Besides founding the abbey, Henry V authorized a payment of one hundred pounds to be used 'pro certis libris et aliis rebus' ("for certain books and other things"), and bequeathed the majority of his sermon collections and works on meditation to be divided between Sheen and Syon (although they were not received).⁵⁰ It was Henry IV's daughter, Philippa, whose marriage to Eric XIII of Sweden indirectly brought about the introduction of the order to England.⁵¹ Besides Henry V's support, we know, for example, that John Duke of Bedford laid the first stone of a new

British, Irish, and Icelandic Schools, 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 82. However, the attribution to Joan is almost certainly incorrect. It is more likely a book that belonged to Margaret Beaufort, but the link with Love's *Mirror*, and female devotional practices, is still noteworthy.

⁵⁰ Vincent Gillespie, 'The Haunted Text: Reflections in *A Mirror to Devout People*, in Jill Mann and Maura Nolan, eds., *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors, and Readers* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 140. See also E.A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion, c. 1400-1700* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), pp. 3-6.

⁵¹ Henry, third Baron Fitzhugh, who escorted Philippa to Sweden, is credited with introducing the Order to Henry V after learning of the abbey at Wadstena. Although Henry V did not lay the dedication stone until February 22, 1415, Philippa's journey to Sweden occurred in 1406, and in the same year Fitzhugh volunteered to found a branch of the Order in England. It is possible that Birgitta's popularity was already established before the decision to build at Isleworth was made. See, for example, *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, ed. by J.H. Blunt, EETS e.s. 19 (London: Trübner and Co., 1873), repr. 2005, pp. xii-xiii.

chapel built for the community in 1426, gave a gift of a cramp ring to some of the sisters, and donated Office books for their new chapel.⁵² It is possible, then, that the interest in Birgitta and her Order spread across the family, and that Henry and John's aunt, Joan, was also a devotee. Margery's dedication to Birgitta is clearly demonstrated in the *Book*, and numerous studies of the analogues between their two manners of living have been made.⁵³ While the connection of an interest in Birgitta being shared between Joan and Margery is a tenuous one, it would appear more likely that Joan's summons of Margery entailed a sharing of a religious devotion of some type.

Although we cannot be certain what the meeting between Joan and Margery entailed, we can look to one of the Countess's daughters for an illustration of how pious practices, women, and books could be linked together. Cecily Neville was Joan's eighth child with John Neville, and was mother to both Edward IV and Richard III.⁵⁴ The ceremonial of her spiritual and worldly duties are preserved in a document commonly known as a household ordinance.⁵⁵ This document reveals the way in which Cecily, and her household,

⁵² *The Myroure of Oure Lady*, ed. by J. H. Blunt, p. xvii.

⁵³ For an example of Margery's devotion to Birgitta see, for example, her 'pilgrimage' to Birgitta's home in Rome in Chapter 39 (*BMK*, I.39.94-6). For examples of writing on the comparisons between Margery's and Birgitta's manner of living see: Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, pp. 168-79; Diane Webb, 'Political Prophecy in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, in *A Companion to 'The Book of Margery Kempe'*, ed. by Arnold and Lewis, pp. 153-6; Naoë Kukito Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, pp. 54-8.

⁵⁴ For Cecily's (also Cicely) genealogy see, for example, C.A.J. Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy in the Fifteenth Century* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1983), pp. 136-7.

⁵⁵ 'Orders and Rules of the Princess Cecill', in *A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household* (London: London Society of Antiquaries, 1790), pp. 37-9.

followed a devotional regime particularly linked with the written word, and gives the impression that ‘Cecily spent almost all of her time engaged in devotional exercises in some form or other’.⁵⁶ Following the ordinance’s daily routine for Cecily Neville can reveal how a deeply religious woman could occupy her day with prayer, the reading of books, and a discussion of their contents with others.

In the ordinance, we follow Cecily from her rising, to reciting matins with a chaplain, to hearing Low Mass in her chamber before breakfasting. These devotions were private, but following the Mass and breakfast, she assisted in the Office of the day and two Low Masses, assumedly with others of her household. She then took dinner, during which ‘the reading of some pious work, such as Hilton’s *Contemplative and Active Life*, Bonaventure’s *Life of Christ*, the apocryphal *Infancy of the Saviour*, or the *Golden Legend*’ occurred.⁵⁷ Cecily also admired the mystics, such as Matilda of Hackeborn, Catherine of Siena, and Birgitta of Sweden.⁵⁸ Cecily’s devotion to such devout women was demonstrated by her following, according to Armstrong, ‘the path of the mystics’ as part of her pious practices, or, ‘prayer and contemplation’, which she observed in isolation after her public duties and a short rest.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Mary Dzon, ‘Cecily Neville and the Apocryphal *Infantia Salvatoris* in the Middle Ages’, in *Medieval Studies*, 71(2009), 235-300, p. 247.

⁵⁷ Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, p. 141. Cecily’s collection of books is known through her will, and my thanks go to Alison Spedding for her transcription of it. Among the books she bequeathed were a copy of the ‘*Legenda avrea*’, the ‘*lif of Saint Kateryn of Sena*’, ‘a book of saint Matilde’, ‘a book of Bonatentvre and Hilton’, and a boke of the revelacions of saint Bvrgitte’.

⁵⁸ Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, pp. 141-2.

⁵⁹ Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, p. 142.

Following evensong, Cecily would repeat to the members of her household the reading she had heard earlier at dinner. Importantly, this demonstrates the interactive process occurring with books, where an initial passive listening is converted into demonstrating a remembrance of, but probably also an interpretation of, the information that was earlier received. Reading is demonstrated as being part of a pious woman's daily devotional practice; but it is a significant part, and central for occurring in two halves of the day. Books are shown as essential to pious practice, where the individual has a direct input on their reception and advancement. While the Beauforts and Nevilles were exceptional in that they were noble women, the practice of using books privately for devotional purposes was not unique to their class.⁶⁰

Indeed, we see Margery in a similar situation as she travels to the Holy Land, sitting at table with her companions and speaking of the Gospel:

Sche reheersyd a text of a Gospel lych as sche had leryd be-for-tyme wyth oþer goode wordys.⁶¹

Unfortunately, her companions were not as keen to spend their time speaking of the Gospel, a clear indication that not everyone observed such practices, nor wished to be in the presence of those who did. Also, we find in Margery's words, the suggestion of other possible books being studied, in what she refers to as 'oþer goode wordys'. Perhaps these were words Margery added to gloss the

⁶⁰ Examples of the middle class using books for pious purposes will be examined below.

⁶¹ *BMK*, I.27.66.

meaning of the Scripture, or the term might have referred to the telling of one of her stories or parables. There are numerous such cases where Margery is shown speaking her good words to others.⁶² Regardless of what is meant by these ‘oper goode wordys’, we see Margery trying to stimulate a group discussion of a pious nature, reminiscing on a previously heard devotional selection, just as Cecily Neville does with her household.

Felicity Riddy examines this kind of aural and oral communication, where knowledge gained from works read is stored and later transferred to others, in context with Cecily’s religious culture.⁶³ Riddy comments on how Cecily ‘heard works read, remembered them and passed them on to her companions’.⁶⁴ Riddy then summarizes the entire process of shifting from the written to the spoken word as a form of ‘textuality’:

This is a textuality of the spoken as well as the written word; it begins in the book, which may have been read aloud by a clerk, but is then transmitted among the women by word of mouth.

This idea of the interweaving of textual and verbal practices is furthered by Riddy’s later comments on Julian of Norwich being located in a visionary

⁶² See, for example, *BMK*, I.45.108 where Thomas Marchale is taken by Margery’s ‘good wordys’; *BMK*, I.50.120 where many good people of York were truly happy to ‘heryn hyr dalyawns, hauyng gret merueyle of hir spech’; *BMK*, I.53.130 where heading to Beverley under arrest with the Duke of Bedford’s men, she stops and tells ‘good talys’ inspiring one of the men to praise her ‘good wordys’.

⁶³ For more on women and oral and aural culture, see my chapter sections in ‘Literacy and Orality’.

⁶⁴ Riddy, ‘Women Talking About the Things of God’, p. 111.

tradition, when her experiences are ‘read’ by a cleric familiar with a culture of the miraculous.⁶⁵ In a similar way, Margery’s tears can be ‘read’—recognized from the *vitae* of women such as Marie d’Oignies, and thereby locating Margery in a textual community.⁶⁶ By demonstrating how devotional tears can be located in a textual community, Margery identifies her own manner of living with that written, and approved of, in ‘Þe Prykke of Lofe’ (also listed as ‘Stimulo Armoris’), the ‘Incendio Amoris’, and the *vitae* of ‘Maria de Oegines’ and ‘Elizabeth of Hungry’.⁶⁷ Also, we are shown (in *BMK*, Chapter 62) how information gathered earlier from a book, can be repeated at a later time to further the learning of others. This inclusion in a textual community, in turn, and following Riddy’s argument, supplied women like Julian and Margery with both power and confidence.⁶⁸

Perhaps it was this power and confidence, gained from the inclusion in a textual community, that attracted Joan Beaufort to Margery, or perhaps they shared, as devotional women, a tradition of interrelating books and speech. Mary Dzon, following Cecily’s ordinances, describes how a male clerk would read devotional works, which Cecily would then, later in the day, repeat to a mixed

⁶⁵ Riddy, ‘Women Talking About the Things of God’, p. 115.

⁶⁶ For more on Marie d’Oignies and tears see my chapter ‘Tears and Compunction’. Riddy identifies Margery’s chastity as the attribute which locates her in a textual community (p. 112), but I feel this is far more defensible when looking at her tears; tears can be seen (and heard), and the *Book* contains evidence of Margery having her tears ‘read’. For Margery, her chastity is important for locating her in a saintly, and heavenly community. See *BMK*, I.22.52 for Margery’s dialogue with God about her chastity, where she is promised her place in Heaven with the ‘holy maydens & virgynes’.

⁶⁷ *BMK*, I.62.153-4.

⁶⁸ Riddy, ‘Women Talking About the Things of God’, p. 115.

audience.⁶⁹ In this capacity Cecily too assumed power and confidence, effectively becoming a preacher (or ‘quasi-preacher’ in Dzon’s words)⁷⁰ lecturing to her congregation, or household. It is a scene already made familiar in this thesis by Margery’s relating her ‘goode wordys’ to others.⁷¹ Both Cecily and Margery practiced a form of preaching which was, in essence, a regurgitation of words earlier heard read from a book.

The Beaufort and Neville’s female households present what appears to be a familial tradition of book usage and patronage. Margaret Beaufort, Cecily’s cousin, shared her relation’s interest in devotional practices and books. Margaret also bore a striking resemblance to her more distant relation, Joan Beaufort, both ‘outwardly and inwardly’, in regards to her pious practices, according to C.A.J. Armstrong.⁷² Margaret’s love of books, learning and piety is demonstrated not only by her collecting and use of books, but also through her commissioning of them. In 1491, for example, she commissioned a copy of the *Fifteen Oes*, a work attributed to Birgitta of Sweden.⁷³ Wynken de Worde printed a life of St. Jerome on her behalf, a work that was originally written for Lady Margaret’s

⁶⁹ Dzon, ‘Cecily Neville and the Apocryphal *Infantia Salvatoris*’, pp. 256-7.

⁷⁰ Dzon, ‘Cecily Neville and the Apocryphal *Infantia Salvatoris*’, p. 257.

⁷¹ See above. See also my chapter section ‘Margery and the Pulpit’.

⁷² Margaret Beaufort was the granddaughter of Joan’s brother, John, 1st Earl of Somerset. Margaret’s daily routine can be found in: *English Works of John Fisher*, ed., by J.E.B. Mayor, EETS e.s. 27 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1876), pp. 294-5. Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, p. 141. For a description of Cecily’s and Margaret’s devotions together see: W.A. Pantin, ‘Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman’, in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, ed. by J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 398-422 (412-3).

⁷³ Allyson Foster, ‘A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon’ in Arnold and Lewis, eds., *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 95-112 (p. 102).

grandmother, Margaret of Clarence.⁷⁴ This Margaret, according to Anne Clark Bartlett, ‘maintained a similarly active commitment to scholarship and patronage’ as Margaret Beaufort.⁷⁵ The copy of the life of Jerome contained an inscription written by the scribe Symon Wynter to the duchess of Clarence:

Should it please your ladyship, first read this and copy it for yourself; and afterwards allow others to read and copy it, whoever should wish to do so.⁷⁶

This inscription demonstrates the freedom with which it was possible, and expected to make use of a book, and to reproduce and distribute or share it with others. Besides owning the copy of a life of St. Jerome, Margaret of Clarence also purchased a Bible for the brothers of Syon.⁷⁷

Margaret of Clarence is also known to have commissioned Books of Hours, and Anne Neville, Cecily’s sister, commissioned a Psalter and owned a Book of Hours.⁷⁸ Cecily bequeathed books to her grandchildren, including two treatises bound together that were left to her granddaughter, Anne de la Pole,

⁷⁴ See Foster, ‘A Shorte Treatyse’, p. 102. See also: George Keiser, ‘Patronage and Piety in Fifteenth-Century England: Margaret, Duchess of Clarence, Symon Wynter and Beinecke MS 317’, *Yale University Gazette*, 60 (1985), pp. 32-53 (43-5).

⁷⁵ Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers*, p. 12.

⁷⁶ Keiser, ‘Patronage and Piety’, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers*, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Meale, ‘Laywomen and Their Books’, pp. 136-7.

Prioress of Syon.⁷⁹ These books, according to Armstrong, were probably Hilton's *Epistle on Mixed Life*, and Love's *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*.⁸⁰ Anne also received Cecily's copy of Birgitta's *Revelationes*.⁸¹ Another granddaughter, named Bridget by her grandmother (and godmother), most likely after Birgitta of Sweden, was bequeathed the *Legenda Aurea*, the life of St. Catherine, and the visions of Blessed Matilda of Hackeborn. Cecily also willed to Margaret Beaufort a portuous or breviary.⁸² One of Cecily's daughters, Margaret of Burgundy, owned a copy of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, a devotional book teaching how to 'build an abbey in [your] soul'.⁸³

The book ownership of the Nevilles and Beauforts, including the fact that a wide swathe of the female side of the family seems to be involved with the frequent use of books, the distribution of them, and the commissioning of them, strongly suggests a tradition of book usage. The types of books used are largely liturgical and devotional, and those collected by Cecily are particularly interesting in relation to those that are listed by Margery in the *Book*. As examined by Dzon, Margery and Cecily were both familiar with Birgitta's *Revelationes* and Hilton's *Stimulus amoris*, and possibly with his *Mixed Life* and with Love's *Mirror*.⁸⁴ Dzon encapsulates the significance of the two women's familiarity and regard for these books by stating:

⁷⁹ Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, p. 145.

⁸⁰ See Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, pp. 144-5.

⁸¹ Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, p. 151.

⁸² Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, p. 153.

⁸³ Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy*, p. 150.

⁸⁴ Dzon, 'Cecily Neville and the Apocryphal *Infantia Salvatoris*', p. 243.

Although they were clearly of different classes and lived during different parts of the fifteenth century, these women's tastes in books were basically the same.

The similarity of the books that became available to both Margery and Cecily may not be purely coincidental. It is possible that Margery's alleged visit with Joan Beaufort included her in a network of sharing books, a network demonstrated by the Nevilles and Beauforts sharing books with religious institutions and members of their extended family. It is also possible that the women's combined knowledge and understanding of the material contained within such books led to a sharing of pious practices and devotional beliefs.

Ryan Perry, writing about the Throckmorton document, states that 'reading religious matter at the table in the English vernacular' could become 'a task to be shared by the family and visitors to the table'.⁸⁵ He furthers this by stating that not only could books be 'a key element of domestic piety', but also, 'an integral component of the lay recipient's liturgical worship'.⁸⁶ Margery is described hearing the Mass, kneeling with bowed head, 'hir boke in hir hand'.⁸⁷ This inclusion of a book in the liturgical space becomes a familiar element of worship when examining the performative use of a text in connection with the

⁸⁵ Ryan Perry, 'The Clopton Manuscript and the Beauchamp Affinity: Patronage and Reception Issues in a West Midlands Reading Community', in *Vernacular Manuscript Books of the English West Midlands from the Conquest to the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by Wendy Scase and Rebecca Farnham (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 131-159 (156). See more on the Throckmorton document below.

⁸⁶ Perry, 'The Clopton Manuscript', p. 157.

⁸⁷ *BMK*, I.9.21.

Throckmorton document.⁸⁸ Margery is therefore seen to make use of books in both domestic and liturgical settings. As I have earlier demonstrated, we know that Margery had books read to her, that she interacted with her reader in regards to a study of the contents of the book, and that she looked to share this knowledge gained with others, all in domestic settings.⁸⁹

In Chapter 88 of the *Book* we are provided with a description of what might be considered to be Margery's typical prayer routine. We learn that she would attend mass and 'seyne hir Mateyns & swech oþer deuocyon'; she would also say 'many bedys', and weep, but her heart would be 'drawyn a-wey fro þe seying & set mech on meditacyon'.⁹⁰ Her concern is that by meditating rather than reciting her beads and prayers, she will displease God, but he assures her this is not the case. Meditation, therefore, becomes a significant part of her devotional observance, and the part that most pleases God. He says to her understanding that she should listen to her confessor who tells her:

sittyn stille & zeuyn thyn hert to meditatcyon & thynkyn swech holy
thowtys as God wyl puttyn in þi mende.⁹¹

⁸⁸ See below for a more detailed examination of the use of a text as a religious talisman in the church in connection with the Throckmorton document.

⁸⁹ See Chapter 58 (142-4) for her hearing books read and interacting with the reading-priest, and Chapter 27 (66) for her wishing to speak of the Gospels while gathered with others at the dinner table.

⁹⁰ *BMK*, I.88.216.

⁹¹ *BMK*, I.88.217-8.

Margery's devotion to both her meditation and her recitation of prayers is interrupted, however, by the composition of her book, and an unexpected link is made between her meditation and her writing. We are first told that she spends more time in her chamber writing than in church saying her beads, but this is immediately followed by the comments on her inclination to meditate rather than say her prayers. Directly after we hear that Margery's heart is drawn into meditation, God says to her soul:

þi stody þat þu stodiist for to do writyn þe grace þat I haue schewyd to þe
plesith me right mech[.]⁹²

The writing of Margery's book appears to be equated with part of her devotional practice. It is pleasing to God, as is her praying with beads or meditating with her heart and mind. This is further emphasized by the moment when God is heard saying:

wheþyr þu preyist wyth þi mowth er thynkist wyth thyn hert, wheþyr þu
redist er herist redyng, I wil be plesyd wyth þe.⁹³

Praying, meditating, reading (dictating?) and listening to books being read are all shown to be aspects of her devotional routine.⁹⁴

⁹² *BMK*, I.88.216.

⁹³ *BMK*, I.88.218.

⁹⁴ It is unclear what Margery, or rather God, meant by 'redist er herist redyng'. It clearly denotes different kinds of interaction with the book, perhaps indicating a different setting, such as silently listening to a reading from the Gospel in church,

In the following and final chapter of the *Book*, the link between Margery working on her book and her pious practices is further defined. We hear that while committed to writing, Margery had ‘many holy teerys & wepingys’, but also that she felt ‘a flawme of fyer a-bowte hir brest ful hoot & delectabyl’.⁹⁵ She also experiences, while in church (assumedly in between her writing sessions), the voices of Christ, the Virgin, and many saints in her soul, and they thank her, saying they are ‘wel plesyd wyth þe writing of þis boke’. Finally, we learn that Margery also often heard the ‘voys of a swet brydde’ singing in her ear, and ‘swet sowndys & melodijs’ that were beyond description. She presents a combination of familiar devotional experiences, borrowing largely from Rolle and his ‘calor’, ‘dulcor’, and ‘canor’, and demonstrates how, not just in moments of prayer in church, but also while working on her book in her room, she receives such holy gifts.⁹⁶ Margery’s pious practices are therefore composed of moments in her chamber, as well as those spent in church. She is occupied with prayer, with meditation, and with an interaction with books.

An example of a literate layman conducting pious practices both in the church and the home, with books and with prayer, can be found in the owner of a strip of parchment found among the Throckmorton muniments at Coughton

as opposed to ‘reading’ a book in an interactive way with the reading-priest. This explanation would describe the difference as being either active or passive engagement. Another possible interpretation is that her ‘reading’ is actually the process of dictating her book to the amanuensis. The possibility of her being able to read, at least to a certain degree, cannot be ignored either. Windeatt adds another possibility in referring to the ‘read or hear read’ formula commonly found with indulgences attached to prayers and books (*Omnibus visuris vel audituris*). See Windeatt, ed. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (annotated), p. 381.

⁹⁵ *BMK*, I.89.219.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, ed. by Ralph Harvey, I.15.33-4.

Court, Warwickshire.⁹⁷ This individual, believed to have been of the regional gentry with links to the city and to mercantile networks, was well-educated and could speak Latin.⁹⁸ The document he made use of was an *aide-mémoire*, provided to the merchant as a personal devotional guide, which partly functioned as a reminder of earlier oral instructions, and partly was used to supplement them.⁹⁹ He was meant to always carry it about on his person, and it use it to guide him through his devotional day, in both thought and action. I will outline some of the pivotal aspects of the instructions given in this document, in particular in relation to Margery's own pious practices.¹⁰⁰

The document from the Throckmorton muniments lists in detail how its owner ought to conduct himself from the moment of waking. It leads him from his bedside through various thoughts and actions until he reaches the church. Once there he is instructed: 'with Mary Magdalene throw yourself at the feet of the most sweet Jesus, and wash them with your tears and anoint them and kiss them'.¹⁰¹ He then is then told to say the matins of the Virgin, followed by hearing Mass. During Mass, while the clerks are singing, he is instructed to study the books of the church. Following this, he is to pray with his beads, saying five decades of the rosary. Upon returning home, and once seated for dinner, the

⁹⁷ Throckmorton muniments (Coughton Court), 76 (box 30). See Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', pp. 398-422, but especially pp. 398 and 420. See also Ryan Perry, 'The Clopton Manuscript', pp. 156-7.

⁹⁸ Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', pp. 402-3.

⁹⁹ Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', p. 400.

¹⁰⁰ I will be working from Pantin's translation of the Latin used in the document.

¹⁰¹ Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', p. 399.

document states he should: 'Let the book be brought to the table as readily as the bread'. When there is no reading, he is advised to meditate.¹⁰²

This list, or devotional program, of the middle-class recipient of the Throckmorton document is strikingly similar to that of Margery described in the *Book*, but in particular to her routines presented in the penultimate and final chapter. The two lists of pious practices are linked through their observance of tears of devotion, identification with Mary Magdalene, saying the matins and following Mass, praying with beads, meditating, but perhaps most significantly, by combining the use of books and reading with oral and aural practices. This reading was not for the male holder of the document alone, however. The advice given is that 'there be reading, now by one, now by another, and by your children as soon as they can read'.¹⁰³ As Pantin suggests, it is unlikely that the document holder's wife and children were fluent in Latin, and so the books provided were probably in translation, or he provided translations as they were read.¹⁰⁴

Reading for a person of the late medieval period in England was an occupation more closely linked with hearing than with seeing.¹⁰⁵ It was, therefore, not necessarily the person reading to a gathering that was the sole interpreter or assimilator of the words; indeed, he may not have understood them at all, as in the possible scenario of the Throckmorton document holder's family reading from a Latin text. Those listening to a reading, or a translation of a reading, could therefore also take part in any discussion following the reading.

¹⁰² Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', p. 400.

¹⁰³ Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', p. 399.

¹⁰⁴ Pantin, 'Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman', p. 407.

¹⁰⁵ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 270-1.

Indeed, as with the instance of Cecily Neville and her household examined above, the Throckmorton document family quite possibly discussed the content of a book following a reading.¹⁰⁶ This reading and sharing of impressions following the reading is the process we can conclude took place when Margery visits the reading-priest.

Although it is not specifically recorded, we may imagine that Margery and her reader exchanged thoughts and impressions of what was read, looking ever further and deeper into each book they discovered. This can be reasonably ascertained by the fact we learn how the reading-priest had ‘gret ences of hys cunnyng & of hys meryte’ as a result of their study, assumedly, in part, from her participation in their mutual rendering of each book being read.¹⁰⁷ Not only that, but it would appear that Margery was sometimes the initiator in the discovery of new books to be studied. We are told that Margery ‘cawsyd hym to lokyn mech good scriptur & many a good doctowr which he wolde not a lokyd at þat tyme had sche ne be’. What Margery’s source was is unknown; it may possibly have been her primary confessor, or Alan of Lynn, or any of the number of men and women of religion that she spoke with. Perhaps it was her line of questioning that inspired the reading-priest to look for further sources of information. In any case, as with the Neville household, and that of the Throckmorton document, Margery and her reader appear to be clearly engaged in a productive, rather than a passive reading, where, rather than being the finishing point, the book becomes the fulcrum for a process of deeper understanding, and a yearning for further exploration.

¹⁰⁶ Pantin, ‘Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman’, p. 408.

¹⁰⁷ *BMK*, I.58.143.

As we have already seen from the reading lists provided in Chapters 17, 58, and 62 of the *Book*, Margery's experience of books was quite vast.¹⁰⁸ Some of the books she became familiar with may have been gathered together in a single miscellany, where they could have been connected by a specific agenda, decided by whoever conducted the planning and supervised the manuscript's production.¹⁰⁹ This type of codex could follow an organizing principle of containing devotional guides, for example, probably in the vernacular although not necessarily, or exclusively so. It might contain writings by different mystics, or a selection of prayers, religious poems, sermons, or an amalgamated collection of different genres of devotional writing.¹¹⁰ I will examine below a couple of extant documents that contain some of the books listed in the *Book*, as well as holding other writings relevant to Margery's development of her manner of living. They may be seen as representative of the type of miscellany Margery may have had access to, and provide examples of books used to educate, inspire, and direct their intended consumers.

¹⁰⁸ For a list of the numerous books Margery was probably familiar with, see my Appendix II.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel, eds., *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Julian Boffey has pointed out the difficulty in the terminology used for different types of codices, where 'miscellanies' may indeed have an intellectual, aesthetic or pragmatic structure. She offers the terms: anthologies, miscellanies, part anthologies or miscellanies, compilations, or composite collections as different. Julian Boffey, 'Short Texts in Manuscript Anthologies: The Minor Poems of John Lydgate in Two Fifteenth-Century Collections', in *The Whole Book*, ed. by Nichols and Wenzel, pp. 73 and 81. See also, in the same edition, Barbara A. Shailor, 'A Cataloger's View', p. 153.

The first of these documents is Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 131, dated to the second quarter of the fifteenth century.¹¹¹ The contents of this particular document include: Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*; an abridged copy of the *Meditationes de Passione Christi* (with added prefatory material introducing the hours of the Passion); William Flete's *De Remediis contra Temptationes* (in English, and with the last three chapters being drawn directly from the *Stimulus Amoris*, Chapter 6); an extract from St. Birgitta's *Revelations*; a confessional form of catechetical instruction with reference to the Seven Deadly Sins, the Seven works of Mercy, the Five Wits (inward and outward), Ten Commandments, Seven Sacraments, and Fourteen Points of Truth; a text on the necessity of suffering as part of a process of spiritual improvement; a text advising the need for oral confession.

It is immediately apparent to one familiar with the *Book* how relevant this miscellany is to Margery's own subjects of interest, and to her construction of a manner of living. Birgitta's *Revelations*, and Hilton's *Stimulus Amoris* are two of the books mentioned in her lists. Love's *Mirror*, and the *Meditationes de Passione Christi* I have already examined in this thesis, and would have been the kind of books she probably had reference to, directly or through an advisor, to aid her in her Passion meditations.¹¹² Flete too has been examined earlier in this thesis, highlighting how his advice on *discretio* would have been beneficial to Margery, and his use of other devotional books, such as Hilton's *Stimulus*

¹¹¹ More will be said about the provenance of Bodley 131 below. For bibliographic details see, for example, <http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/resources/?section=manuscript&id=97> in 'Geographies of Orthodoxy' at: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/geographies-of-orthodoxy/>, [accessed 18 March 2013].

¹¹² See my chapter section, '*Meditatio* and 'Thynkyng''.

Amoris, may have provided Margery with the background to these other works.¹¹³ The catechetical instruction would have proven useful for Margery's rebuttal to attacks on her knowledge of the *Articles of Faith* in Leicester and York, where she pleases her questioners with her knowledge and form of reply.¹¹⁴ Finally, Margery's somewhat obsessive emphasis on her own suffering, and patience and perseverance, is a common theme in the *Book*, again already examined in this thesis, while her taking of frequent confessions is also highlighted.¹¹⁵

The miscellany MS Bodley 131 provides a practical example of the type of codex that might have been available for Margery to share with her priest-reader or with another clerk, such as Alan of Lynn, or with one of her more prominent lay friends, such as Joan Beaufort. Regardless of whether or not she had seen such a document, we know that these manuals of devotional advice were widely available, and that the knowledge and instruction contained within them were popular subjects both to a lay, and a clerical audience; they were likely to be passed on by word of mouth, if not through direct interaction with such codices. Margaret Connolly writes that the 'appetite for religious texts in particular seems to have been voracious'.¹¹⁶ She also states that the

¹¹³ See my chapter section, '*Discretio spirituum* and Codes of Behaviour'.

¹¹⁴ See *BMK*, I.48.115; I.51.122; I.52.125.

¹¹⁵ See my chapter section '*Discretio spirituum* and Codes of Behaviour', for example, where Margery's gift of prophecy is seen as a torment, and she feels she has become a martyr to her visions. For some examples of Margery being shriven, in Book I alone, see: *BMK*, I.1.6-7; 4.16; 8.20; 16.36; 17.40; 27.63; 32.80-1; 33.83.

¹¹⁶ Margaret Connolly, 'Compiling the Book', in *The Productions of Books in England 1350-1500*, ed. by Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 133.

practices of extraction and anthologization were so widespread in the production of devotional manuscripts that certain combinations of texts seem to have circulated together as a matter of course, a process that was greatly facilitated by their frequent copying in self-contained units or ‘booklets’[.]¹¹⁷

This idea of certain devotional manuscripts contain combinations of texts can be seen by comparing the contents of MS Bodley 131 to those of Cambridge University Library Hh.1.11.

CUL Hh.1.11 has its provenance in the fifteenth century, possibly written for the Benedictine nuns of Carrow abbey in Norwich, and contains work including parts of Love’s *Mirror*, part of *The Pricking of Love* (translated from the *Stimulus Amoris*), and a translation of Flete’s *De Remediis*.¹¹⁸ Besides these texts similar to those found in MS Bodley 131, it also includes the Latin *Missa de nomine Ihesu*, a translation of Suso’s *Orologium sapientiae*, a Latin prayer to the name of Jesus, and a sermon for the Assumption, probably addressed to a female community, which borrows from Brigittine sources. Not all of the booklets included in this miscellany may have their provenance from Margery’s lifetime, but the collection nevertheless shows an interest in a mode of devotional

¹¹⁷ Connolly, ‘Compiling the Book’, p. 139.

¹¹⁸ For details of the contents of Hh.1.11 see Margaret Connelly, *The Index of Middle English Prose Handlist XIX: Manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge (Dd-Oo)* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 186-90. See also Charles Hardwick and Henry Richards Luard, eds., *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge: Edited for the Syndics of the University Press*, Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1858), pp. 262-4.

books very relevant to that of Margery's chosen manner of living. Margery's affection for, and protection of the name of Jesus, for example, is witnessed in the numerous instances where she chastises those who misuse his name, while displaying her own veneration for it.¹¹⁹ Suso's *Orologium* was known in England, partly through *The Chastising of God's Children*, for its opposition of the Free Spirit movement.

The reading material available in these miscellanies, and others like them, can be seen as having an organizing principle based around an interest in practicing or developing spiritual devotion, perhaps with some attention shown by the collaborators in guiding the reader along a specific path.¹²⁰ Also, the

¹¹⁹ A possible source of inspiration for Margery's affection to the Holy Name is that of the *Incendium amoris*. Rolle refers to the Holy Name on a couple of occasions in the *Incendium*, but also commended the practice to others in *Enconium Nominis Ihesu*, part of his *Super Canticum Canticorum*. See Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, pp. 18-19. For examples of Margery's sensitivity to, and veneration of, the name of Jesus see, for example: *BMK*, I.42.101 when Margery is returning to England from Rome and hears a man that 'swor a gret oth', causing her to weep and sorrow as she knew the man had offended God. Assumedly this offence is caused by using God's name in vain, as in another instance where men swearing oaths are guilty, according to Margery, of not keeping 'þe comawndementys of God' (I.52.124. Likewise, see: I.55.135-6 and I.65.160). For Margery's veneration see, for example, I.Proem.1; I.63.155, and II.1.221. For more on Rolle and the Holy Name see: Denis Renevey, 'Name Above Names: The Devotion to the Name of Jesus from Richard Rolle to Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection I*', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Ireland and Wales VI*, ed. by Marion Glascoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 103-21.

¹²⁰ Other miscellanies with similar contents include: Cambridge University Library Ff.5.40, which contains a collection of different texts by Rolle and Hilton (Hilton's *On the Mixed Life*; *Scale of Perfection*; *Of Angel's Song*, and Rolle's *De Emendatio Vitae*; *The Commandment*; *On the Name of Jesus*—from *Form of Living*) and Hh.1.12, which includes writing from Hilton's *The Prickyng of Love*, and *Eight Chapters on Perfection*, Rolle's *The Form of Living*, as well as numerous extracts from the anonymous *Pore Caitif*. The codex Hh.1.12 begins with a 'kalender', which thematically divides the book into sections, such as 'On the Name of Jesus', 'On Meekness', and 'On Active and Contemplative Life' (all from *Pore Caitif*). See Connolly, *The Index of Middle English Prose*, pp. 135-41 for Ff.5.40, and pp. 191-200 for Hh.1.12.

material contained within them could be expressing an interest in particular authors and books. The owner and copyist of Bodley 131, John Morton, belonged to a significant York family, which probably included the John Morton who worked for the interests of Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmorland, and of his wife, Joan Beaufort, following the Earl's death.¹²¹ Ryan Perry draws a further tentative connection in their having a 'bibliophilic tie', as Morton bequeathed to Beaufort an English book from among his several bequeathed volumes.¹²² Further, there are parallels between the texts collected in Morton's miscellany with those known to have belonged to Cecily Neville. Perry states:

These textual overlaps may hint at the development of devotional-literary tastes and pious praxis in the magnate household in the generation before Cecily, that both permeated the gentry network in its orbit and passed into succeeding generations in the Beaufort/Neville family.

Naturally, this overlap of 'devotional-literary' taste could also have been exchanged between Joan Beaufort and Margery Kempe. It may even have entailed a circle (however informal it may have been) of lay people in the York region sharing their religious habits and devotional-literary knowledge with one another.

¹²¹ My thanks to Ryan Perry who pointed out both the connection between John Morton and the Beaufort-Nevilles, and between Morton's collection with that of Cecily Neville. See Perry, 'Some Sprytuall Matter', pp. 97-8.

¹²² Perry believes the Morton that is the likely writer of the book, is the John Morton who was mayor in 1418 and died in 1434 (son of Roger Morton of Bawtry). Perry, 'Some Sprytuall Matter', pp. 98-9.

A further possible clue to the existence of such an interplay of devotional methodologies and beliefs may be found in another detail—within the codex, involving Morton’s interest in penitential cleansing. In the rear of the codex, Morton had written on the verso of a stub, ‘In mynd of my trespass I cry god marcy’.¹²³ This form of prayer is probably taken from the ‘Form of Confession’ text, where a contemplation of individual categories of sin is culminated with the words, ‘I cry god marcy’. This text is,

almost certainly adapted from the ‘Form of Confession’ that occurs in York minster Archive MS Add. 2 [...] the ‘Bolton’ Book of Hours.¹²⁴

This connection thereby provides a codicological link between the Morton household and the Blackburn or Bolton families who were part of the York mercantile elite.¹²⁵ As leading members of the middle class in York, they would be likely candidates for befriending Margery, particularly if they had a common friend in Joan Beaufort.

We know that Margery had a circle of friends in York, and we even have the names of some of them. In Chapter 51 of the *Book*, we are told that:

a doctowr of diuinyth, Maistryr Iohn Aclom, also a Chanown of þe

¹²³ Perry, ‘Some Sprytuall Matter’, p. 102.

¹²⁴ Perry, ‘Some Sprytuall Matter’, p. 102.

¹²⁵ Perry, ‘Some Sprytuall Matter’, p. 102. See also Ann Rycraft, ed., *The Blackburns in York: Testaments of a Merchant Family in the Later Middle Ages* (York: The Latin Project, 2006) for the links between, and wills of the Blackburns and Boltons, as well as details on the Bolton Hours, in particular pp. 1-8, and 77-9.

Mynstyr, Syr Iohn Kendale, & an-oþer preste wech song be þe
Bischopys grave; þes wer hir good frendys of þe spiritual-te.¹²⁶

Of these men, John Aclom has not been identified, but there is a John Kendale, although he was a vicar choral of the Minster, and not a canon, as acknowledged in an inventory of Hugh Grantham's (a mason of York) assets and liabilities.¹²⁷ Meech identifies the 'oþer preste' as probably being one of the two chaplains of the Chantry of All Saints. We also learn in the same chapter that Margery had lay friends in the city too, as when a judge threatens to send her to prison, 'þe secular pepil answeyd for hir & seyde sche xulde not comyn in preson'.¹²⁸ Further, we are told in Chapter 50 that an anchoress had been a great friend of hers until people's slanderous talk had turned her from Margery, but that Margery could then make friends with 'oþer fremd folk'.¹²⁹ Finally, when Margery is tried before Archbishop Bowet in Chapter 52, we are told that afterwards she returned to York from the Archbishop's chapel to be 'receyued of mech pepil & of ful worthy clerkys'.¹³⁰ Clearly, Margery had, according to her own accounts, numerous supporters from both secular and clerical circles.

Just as Joan Beaufort was apparently attracted to Margery's devotional manner of living, it is probable that religious, book-owning, mercantile elite families like the Mortons, Blackburns, or Boltens would have been similarly

¹²⁶ *BMK*, I.58.121.

¹²⁷ See Meech's note in *BMK*, p. 313.

¹²⁸ *BMK*, I.58.122.

¹²⁹ *BMK*, I.50.119.

¹³⁰ *BMK*, I.52.128.

drawn to her. The one common denominator that we can bring into play to unite those families with Margery, besides their social status and religious devotion, is in their form of prayer. We know from the final chapter, or segment, of the *Book* that Margery too used a refrain very like that of the ‘Form of Confession’, in reciting, ‘I cry þe mercy, Lord’.¹³¹ Margery’s prayer, however, begins each phrase with the refrain, and her prayers are spoken on behalf of others. She prays for all states, the Pope and priests, the King, Jews and Saracens, heretics, thieves and adulterers, her confessors, her children (spiritual and bodily), her friends and enemies, and all the souls in purgatory. Margery has already been redeemed—God has promised her that she will not know purgatory, but will pass directly to heaven; and so her prayers are for those who are not so fortunate.¹³² As a saintly figure, her task is to extend her prayers on behalf of those less fortunate, but the form of her prayer, the words that she uses, is that used by the Mortons, Blackburns and Boltens.

As with so many details of Margery’s construction of her manner of living, precedents can be seen to exist in earlier religious figures described in devotional writing and other documents. Whether it is in Margery’s tears of compunction, her praying with beads, her daily devotional routines, or her manipulation of books as part of her pious practices, others were there before her, and, of course, others followed after her as well. Just as one can begin to decipher the pattern of a medieval miscellany by identifying the scribe’s source materials, so too is it possible to understand Margery’s composition of a devotional lifestyle by breaking down individual components of that

¹³¹ *BMK*, II.10.250-1.

¹³² *BMK*, I.5.16-17.

configuration.¹³³ Margery's amalgamation of apparently disparate elements begins to make sense when seen as a collection, a 'miscellany' of devotional practices. Margery is unique in being a married English woman, living and travelling independently from her husband, unattached to any particular religious house and yet dressing in white garments, and weeping and crying out loud publicly from compassion and devotion. She is not unique in praying with beads, in shedding tears of compunction, in following a routine of prayer, or in making books a part of her religious lifestyle.

Books such as Love's *Mirror* were being produced in the late medieval period in order to educate, and to offer lay people directions in furthering their devotional experience. The problem with devoting a book to 'lewde men & women & hem þat bene of symple vndirstondyng' is that not everyone classified in these categories truly is uneducated.¹³⁴ Just as not all illiterate people were incapable of reading or writing in the vernacular, or of understanding a limited degree of Latin, not all people of 'symple vndirstondyng' were ignorant of the learning found in books, preached in sermons, or discussed in familial or local gatherings.¹³⁵ Knowledge had a way of disseminating beyond the kind of controls that might be imposed by the Church or universities. Vincent Gillespie examines how a pattern of book ownership and usage among well-born and noble women in London was 'largely indistinguishable from those of their sisters

¹³³ See, for example, Nichols and Wenzel, eds., *The Whole Book*, p. 40.

¹³⁴ Sargent, *The Mirror: Full Critical*, p. 10.

¹³⁵ See my chapter section 'Literacy and Orality'.

and daughters who were professed nuns'.¹³⁶ For some lay devotees, books were becoming a more common means of expressing and furthering their pious practices. They were finding books to be educational, inspirational, and, most importantly, more accessible.

¹³⁶ Vincent Gillespie, 'The Haunted Text: Reflections in *A Mirror to Devout People*', in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors and Readers*, ed. by Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 136.

Conclusion

*In principio erat verbum*¹

This thesis addresses the question of how an allegedly illiterate woman managed to alternate between her oral background and the literate world, culminating in the assisted production of a book. The production of this book describes this process as part of her devotional biography. My research examines examples of the oral and the literate aspects of Margery's development as revealed in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Studying instances of Margery Kempe's use of her verbal skills, from her interior conversations with God, to her story-telling to groups of learned men, as well as analyzing her movements towards a literate development, from listening to books being read, to producing her own book.² Through this process of examination, I reveal a progression, not discernible as a step-by-step advancement, but apparent when reviewing the span of Margery's life from her conversion to her final pilgrimage, as she moves between oral and literate modes of existence.

With my examining of women and literacy in the late medieval period, a clearer understanding of the kind of education a wealthy mercantile girl may have received is revealed. Something that becomes apparent is how the words *laicus* and *illiteratus*, did not necessarily imply a complete lack of reading or writing skills in the vernacular, or a complete ignorance of Latin.³ Learning through the knowledge of business or religious formulae, or terms of the trade, as well as accumulating a vocabulary through rote learning, meant that a degree of

¹ John 1.1.

² Both the letters and the book are written with the aid of others.

³ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 226-30.

literacy was still possible, and even probable for Margery. I have suggested, therefore, that rather than designating an individual such as Margery illiterate, simply on the basis that she does not know Latin grammar, further subdivisions denoting certain skills should be used. Such divisions could include: illatinate and paraliterate, where the former implies literacy in the vernacular, but little knowledge of Latin, and the latter represents a collective that may have acquired some literate skills outside of any formal education, and by aural or visual means, rather than primarily textual.⁴ This knowledge almost certainly derived more from aural than from visual reception, and as Mary Carruthers points out, retention of such temporally received data is more difficult than is that of spatial.⁵ Another possible handicap that Margery faced was in how women were believed to digest such knowledge (and perhaps even trained to), learning more from a literal and self-interested perspective, as opposed to the masculine spiritual understanding.⁶ Past criticisms of the *Book's* lack of chronological order, and Margery's self-satisfied and self-absorbed perspective, could stem from such factors.

Margery may have developed a limited vocabulary in Latin, but God uses the vernacular, a living language and the language of the laity, when he speaks to her; it is, ultimately, from this that she attains her spiritual power and authority. This power and authority increases through Margery's knowledge of religious books, and her learning reverberates back into the *Book* as she constructs a

⁴ See my introduction for more on the 'illatinate', and the 'paraliterate', and my chapter section on women and literacy for the need to define different levels of literacy.

⁵ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 27-8.

⁶ Copeland, 'Why Women Can't Read', p. 257.

manner of living from the lives and advice of others. These shared familiar qualities lend her further credence, but Margery's pick-and-mix assemblage of self is never completely imitative. Instead, each characteristic is only assumed if it suits her individual requirements; Margery clearly realizes the power of the written word, of the patterns of the past, and the importance of appearing to be following by example.

However, Margery's movement into the world of the literate does not involve a transfer of her authority to that medium. Margery seeks out learned men of religion and speaks with them, she tells stories, and relates Gospel to others. God speaks with her throughout her devotional life, throughout the span of the *Book*, and nothing written she has ever heard read can match the quality of these exchanges. Her conversations with God are heard verbally, but recorded as text, and ultimately, such 'spechys & dalyawns' reveal their basis in books, or the vocalizations of books.⁷ Margery is committed to verbal communication (the 'superiority of spoken language to communicate thought'),⁸ but she realizes how the written word can develop the authenticity of her manner of living, and preserve her spoken words for posterity. Her *Book* can deliver recognition and continuance.

Margery is seen in the beginning of the *Book* displaying social ambition, proud of her position and appearance, and desiring to be 'worsheped of þe pepul'.⁹ As her manner of living develops, this social climbing becomes what

⁷ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.2.

⁸ Uhlman, 'The Comfort of Voice', p. 24.

⁹ *BMK*, I.2.9.

Nicole R. Rice calls ‘spiritual ambition’.¹⁰ Margery begins a pattern of ‘emulating and affiliating with various religious orders’, looking for advancement in the devotional realm instead.¹¹ This new focus entails considering *The Book of Margery Kempe* as a synthesis of the oral and literate worlds. These worlds merge and overlap as the *Book* progresses, one flowing into the other; Margery is shown moving back and forth between the oral and literate traditions, adapting and manipulating both to her advantage. In the *Book*, Margery is seen displaying how ‘literacy involves much more than command of the technologies of reading and writing’.¹²

By examining codes of behaviour, including *meditatio*, *discretio spirituum*, and the exercise of tears of compunction, I have revealed the devotional practices Margery understood as being pertinent to the spiritually ambitious, the probable sources of inspiration for these practices, and the reasoning behind elements of the *Book*’s construction. Margery’s ceaseless and determined efforts to demonstrate her orthodoxy, as portrayed in the *Book*, not only are shown to be following largely accepted and practiced codes of behaviour, but operate to give the *Book* impetus, from the moment of her ‘conversion’, towards her final intercessory prayer. Margery’s looking to endorse her manner of living demonstrates an understanding of codes of behaviour and accepted Church practices, acquired through hearing texts read, or through ‘holy dalyawns’ with men and women of religion.¹³

¹⁰ Rice, ‘Spiritual Ambition’, p. 224.

¹¹ Rice, ‘Spiritual Ambition’, p. 226.

¹² Rappaport and Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City*, p. 170.

¹³ *BMK*, I.18.43.

This thesis works towards an understanding of Margery Kempe as a woman devoting herself to attaining a mode of life that would lead her to 'þe wey of hy perfeccyon'.¹⁴ In order to accomplish this she is seen to move between the oral and literate traditions. This movement does not entail a split into two separate entities for her, however, but rather involves a process of weaving one into the other, as suits her needs. Margery is able to use her voice, her crying and criticizing, her preaching and prophesying to her advantage, just as she is capable of following doctors' commentaries, advising on the purchase of a breviary, or using letters to define her status, and for her protection. It is therefore key to a comprehensive understanding of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, that the approach is not prejudiced against one aspect of Margery Kempe's 'maner of leuyng' or another, and that any study considers the *Book* as being 'about' her.

Further studies may utilize these rules of approach, and discover further depths to the *Book*, as well as exposing a clearer understanding of Margery Kempe and her 'maner of leuyng'. Such studies could be aided additionally by further research and compilation of knowledge regarding women's use of books, possession of them, and the interchange of such literate wealth during the late medieval period. Continuing research is bringing to the surface more facts from testaments, illuminations, book dedications, trial documents, and other secondary sources pertaining to women's use of books, and in particular, devotional works.¹⁵ Combining such developments in research with my methodology of

¹⁴ *BMK*, I.*Proem*.2.

¹⁵ For example, see: Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety*; Gillespie, *Looking in Holy Books*, Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*; McNamer, *Affective Mysticism*; Perry, 'Some Sprytuall Matter'.

approaching *The Book of Margery Kempe* could provide an even clearer image of the means and manner by which Margery Kempe developed her devotional lifestyle.

In order to expound a fuller understanding of Margery's described relationship with her community, there are particular items touched upon in this thesis which could be further developed in the future. For example, there is the sermon ascribed to William Melton that could be translated and presented as an historical link between Margery and her nemesis—the preaching friar presented in the *Book*.¹⁶ Whether or not Melton wrote this particular sermon (Nicholas Philip is as good an alternative source), it can nevertheless place Margery's facing a sermon preached - concerning the exemplary, versus the unacceptable behaviour of women - within the context of historical records. Both Melton and Philip were contemporaries to Margery, and were Franciscan friars preaching in Lynn and its surroundings; this particular sermon may demonstrate a felt need for instructing or directing women, or indeed a particular woman, towards a more conventional lifestyle.

Another example of further studies made possible by my research and conclusions might include an in-depth exploration of a possible underlying structure to the *Book*. My study draws parallels between the ways in which *The Book of Margery Kempe* is arranged, with that of a 'standard' Book of Hours. Although we can never be certain of what book Margery owned and referred to in Chapter 9, tantalizing similarities can be seen to exist between the *Book* and *Horae*, or *primers*. This likening contents of the *Book* to that of a devotional manuscript may have been a deliberate construction by Margery or the priest-

¹⁶ For my examination of Melton and Philip see pp. 294-298.

scribe, but, as the outline of this construction is shadowy rather than clearly defined, it is more likely to have been a subconscious imitation than a precise template.

Throughout the course of the *Book*, Margery is seen being exposed to, assimilating, and then adapting - or in some instances perhaps only reinforcing what she already has assumed - traits that are part of the construction of other manners of living. There are clear parallels made between Margery's 'maner of leuyng', and that of both Birgitta of Sweden, and Marie d'Oignies. The hagiographies of Birgitta and Marie were obviously familiar to Margery, as was that of Elizabeth of Hungary, as witnessed by the *Book*, and as I examine in this thesis. Other books, including the *Incendium Amoris*, the *Stimulus Amoris*, and *The Scale of Perfection*, all offered examples, or provided confirmation of, the orthodox nature of Margery's devotional lifestyle. Margery demonstrates a 'spiritual ambition', using 'conduct guides' in a way similar to both those of the merchant class, such as the owner of the Throckmorton document, and the nobility, as demonstrated by the Beaufort-Neville households.¹⁷ Further sources of inspiration came from interviews conducted by Margery with well-known and respected religious authorities of the time, including Julian of Norwich, Richard of Caister, and William Sleightholme.

Through such examples of literary and verbal inspiration and encouragement, Margery Kempe is represented constructing a 'maner of leuyng' that was unique to her, despite having imitated documented examples of affective mysticism, following her understanding of *imitatio Christi*, and living a

¹⁷ Rice, 'Spiritual Ambition', pp. 224, 226. See also my chapter section on devotional books and pious practices for more on the Throckmorton document owner and the Beaufort-Nevilles.

lifestyle reminiscent of the *mulieres sanctae*. By living both in and out of the world, seeking out confrontations and seeming to encourage scorn and ridicule, devoting herself to a life of contemplation, and yet living as part of society, Margery struggles to attain a lifestyle that will deliver to her a voice of authority. Her spiritual growth and experience is shown to operate both in the oral, and the literate worlds, in a kind of pious literate practice. Nicholas Watson calls the book an autobiography, and a saint's life, while Lynn Staley describes it as 'sacred biography', and Felicity Riddy sees it as 'lay selfhood produced by changes in the theory and practice of confession'.¹⁸ My thesis demonstrates how *The Book of Margery Kempe* portrays a mercantile lay woman's assembling of a manner of living, achieved by a process of cultural absorption, where aural, oral and visual influences, but ultimately, that of books, provide her inspiration.

¹⁸ Riddy, 'Text and Self', pp. 442, and 446

Appendix I

Usage of ‘maner of leuyng’ (and other similar expressions) in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, relating to Margery Kempe’s devotional lifestyle. All usages refer to Margery herself, unless indicated by text in round brackets.

| Terminology | Page(s) | Line(s) |
|---|---------|---------|
| forme of her leuyng [Book II] | 4 | 1 |
| maner of crying | 68 | 24-5 |
| maner of crying | 140 | 24 |
| maner of crying & wepyng | 200 | 1-2 |
| maner of dalyawns | 230 | 20-1 |
| maner of daly[yawns] | 36 | 34-5 |
| maner of dalyawns (the Saints’) | 215 | 19 |
| maner of governawnce | 80 | 29 |
| maner of governawns | 43 | 31 |
| maner of governawns | 46 | 22 |
| maner of governawns & leuyng | 40 | 15 |
| maner of governauns | 63 | 25 |
| maner of leuyng | 3 | 13 |
| maner of leuyng | 36 | 30 |
| maner of leuyng | 37 | 1-2 |
| maner of leuyng | 41 | 13 |
| maner of leuyng | 43 | 21 |
| maner of leuyng | 43 | 25 |
| maner of leuyng | 48 | 35 |
| maner of leuyng | 79 | 11 |
| maner of leuyng | 96 | 39 |
| maner of leuyng | 152 | 6 |
| maner of leuyng (Bridget of Sweden) | 95 | 24-5 |
| maner of leuyng (Marie d’Oignies) | 153 | 1-2 |
| maner of levyng | 38 | 31 |
| maner of lyfe | 215 | 29-30 |
| maner of spekyng (1 st scribe) | 220 | 20 |
| maner of thowtys | 214 | 23 |
| maner of visyons & felyngys | 208 | 30 |
| maner of werkyng | 147 | 37 |
| maner of werkyng in crying | 209 | 12 |

| Terminology | Page(s) | Line(s) |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| maner of wrytyng & spelling (1 st scribe) | 220 | 21 |
| maner speche and dalyawnce | 214 | 36 |
| maner visitacyons & holy contemplacyons | 214 | 26 |

Appendix II

The books associated with *The Book of Margery Kempe*¹

| Book, or subject of book | Description of book, or way in which referenced in the <i>Book</i> | Location |
|---|--|---|
| Angela of Foligno | Vita linked to the <i>Book</i> through textual analogue. | Ch. 21, p. 49 Ch. 28, p. 70 Ch. 31, p. 79 |
| Bible | MK talking about scripture, and repeating gospel stories, or hearing readings. See also 'Latin texts'. | Ch. 13, p. 27 Ch. 27, p. 66 Ch. 58, p. 143 Ch. 61, p. 150 |
| Book of Hours | MK's book. Possibly another kind of devotional book. | Ch. 9, p. 21 |
| (The) Book of Margery Kempe that never was | A White Friar offers to write the <i>Book</i> , but God tells MK that it is too soon. See also 'Indexes of St. Bridget's Revelations'. | Preface p. 6 |
| Breviary | MK advises the priest-scribe about the purchase of a breviary | Ch. 24, pp. 57-8 |
| St. Bridget of Sweden | 'Revelations' – The book is mentioned twice, but the woman is referred to more frequently. | Ch. 17, p. 39 Ch. 58, p. 143 |
| <i>Cloud of Unknowing</i> Elizabeth of Hungary | Textual analogue. Vita, which is referred to as her 'tretys'. | Ch. 21, p. 49 Ch. 62, p. 154 |
| Hilton, <i>The Scale of Perfection</i> | Given by name of author. | Ch. 17, p. 39 Ch. 58, p. 143 |
| <i>Incendium Amoris</i> (Richard Rolle) | Given by name of title. See also under 'Richard Rolle'. | Ch. 17, p. 39 Ch. 58, p. 143 |
| Indexes of St. Bridget's Revelations | Written by Alan of Lynn. He may have shared his knowledge of Bridget with MK. | Alan is referred to in different parts of the <i>Book</i> , including Chs. 61, 88, 89 |
| Julian of Norwich | Her 'Showings' are not mentioned, but MK spent 'many days' in her company. | Ch. 18, pp. 42-3 |
| Latin texts (the Psalter – Psalm 126: 5-6) | Besides knowing scriptural stories, MK appears to know some verses in Latin. | Book II Ch. 6, p. 235 |
| Marie d'Oignies - Vita | The priest-scribe reads of | Ch. 62, pp. 152-3 |

¹ This is not an exhaustive list, but is intended to give a good sampling of the different books referred to directly in, or linked by textual analogue to, *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| | Marie, and her tears. A 'worschepful doctouer wech hite Maistyr Custawns' has evidently also heard of Marie's tears. | Ch. 68, pp. 165-6 |
| <i>Meditationes Vitae Christi</i> | Two examples of textual analogue relating to the <i>Meditationes</i> . | Ch. 81, p. 195 |
| Mystery plays – MK was in York at the time the plays were shown. | A loose textual connection, as MK was most likely only associated with a performance. Their influence may be seen in MK's Passion meditations. | Ch. 11, p. 23 Ch. 80 MK's Passion meditations - compare with scenes from the York Crucifixion Play |
| 'ne non oþer þat euyr sche herd redyn' | MK seems to have heard more books read to her than those listed in the <i>Book</i> . | Ch. 17, p. 39 |
| Prayer (hymn) – <i>Veni creator spiritus</i> | MK repeats a prayer, presumably in Latin, with all its verses. | Book II ['Prayers of the creature'] Ch. 10, p. 248 |
| Richard Rolle – 'Meditations on the Passion'. The <i>Incendium Amoris</i> is not only mentioned by name, but also linked to the <i>Book</i> by textual association. | Both works are linked to the <i>Book</i> by textual analogue. See above each page reference for the work in question, and underneath the reference for the subject. | 'Meditations' Ch. 28, p. 70 (Christ's body as a dove-cote) ' <i>Incendium</i> ' c. 3 p. 11 (Melody as part of the mystical experience) c. 35 pp. 88-9 (Fire and heat as part of the mystical experience) |
| <i>Stacions of Rome</i> – A medieval guide to the churches of Rome (with lists of remissions given for specific visits). | The <i>Book</i> states that MK 'wolde a gon þe Stacyownys', which does not imply her having a copy of the guide, but perhaps was sharing one, or at least knew someone with the knowledge of such a guide. | Ch. 39, p. 95 |
| <i>Stimulus Amoris</i> by the pseudo-Bonaventura | Given by name of title, and later by name of author and title ('Bone-ventur'). In the third instance it is listed as 'þe Prykke of Lofe', by 'Bone-auentur'. | Ch. 17, p. 39 Ch. 58, p. 143 Ch. 62, pp. 153-4 |

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