THE BOOK OF
MARGERY KEMPE
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The Book of Margery Kempe: an Introduction

Reading *The Book of Margery Kempe* today can be a strange experience. We are plunged into an unfamiliar much to avoid. No clear plotline shapes the autobiography, Margery moves around quite a bit in journeys that are not at all linear, and the boundaries between real and visionary worlds blur. Margery is a difficult heroine to identify with: she weeps and shrieks in public, lectures strange men for using bad language, lectures strange women for the imperfections of their dead husbands, wears all white clothes that seem to proclaim her a virgin after many years of marriage and fourteen children, and generally sees herself as a holy woman who is constantly and unfairly misunderstood. Even so, Margery's *Book* has become one of the most-read works from medieval England for many reasons, among them its status as the first autobiography by a woman in English, its account of a lay woman's quest for spiritual authority and mystic revelation, and its riveting narrative of Margery's uncompromising efforts to break the boundaries of religious and gender orthodoxy in a period when some in England were imprisoned, and in a few cases burned, for heresy.

Two dramatic incidents in Margery Kempe's *Book* tend to stand out for modern readers from an autobiography thick with emotional and mystical intensity.

In Chapter 9 Christ speaks within Margery's mind to say that if she fasts on the coming Friday she will have her desire to live chastely, and not fulfill her marital obligation for sex with her husband, John, because Christ will suddenly slay John. John does not die out of the blue at Christ's hands, but on the following Wednesday he loses forever the power to touch Margery for the purposes of carnal knowledge. Shortly thereafter, as we learn in Chapter 11, Margery and John are on the way to York with beer and cake. John asks Margery a pointed hypothetical: if she had to choose between letting John

have sex with her or letting John get his head cut off, what would be her choice? Margery disappoints John by choosing his beheading. Later in the same trip John opens up negotiations to use his acceptance of sexless marriage as a bargaining chip to maintain the public face of their marriage: sleeping in the same bed, eating together even on Friday fasting days, and paying off his debts before she goes on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Christ again enters the scene to coach Margery on her bargaining, and an agreement with John is struck that lasts for the rest of their life together.

On another trip north (Chapters 46-53) Margery confronts Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York, whose chilly accusations she faces down with the bravery and articulate argumentation of St. Catherine. Her performance in the chapterhouse of York Minster, a profoundly intimidating theater in the round, is just one of a series of encounters in Yorkshire putting Margery in real peril for public burning as a heretic. Trying to get home from York, yeomen working for an even more powerful authority—no less than John, Duke of Bedford and King Henry V's younger brother—capture Margery. Duke John's claim to fame at this moment is his oversight of the capture and public burning of the most famous Lollard rebel in the kingdom, John Oldcastle (finally executed in December 1417, shortly after Margery's multiple imprisonments in Yorkshire) while Henry was in Normandy. Margery talks her way out of this crisis as well, intensified by a new accusation that she spoke heresy to another aristocrat, Elizabeth Ferrers, wife of John, Baron Greystoke and daughter of Joan Beaufort, who was herself the only daughter of John of Gaunt and in this period remarried to one of the most powerful men in northern England, Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmoreland. Margery's challengers are not always great lords of the realm or church, but even her lesser opponents often represent powers who easily could send Margery to her death at the stake.

A woman who believes so strongly in her spiritual status as a visionary is bound to bother people in her own time as well as today. Late-medieval England maintained a spiritual hierarchy organized by clear categories that were largely, but not exclusively, associated with the clergy. At the top was clerical status itself, with ranks as fixed as in modern militaries. An integral part of that status was literacy in Latin. One of the

greatest powers granted to the priesthood in the Middle Ages was to be educated in Latin so that they could read and interpret the Latin Bible. Thus they were gatekeepers for the Word of God just as they were gatekeepers to the sacraments of the Church that were a Christian's only pathway to salvation. Although both men and women played crucial roles in the life of the Church, that institution's unwavering belief in male dominance meant that the pastoral care of souls including confession and absolution, reading and interpreting the Bible, and the duties of priesthood generally were restricted to men. Virginity and celibacy sanctioned by the Church, a celebrated form of religious purity, was reserved with very few exceptions for male and female ecclesiastics. Finally, wealth and social status always played murky but powerful roles in the life of any Christian community.

Margery starts out near the bottom of this hierarchy because she is a layperson, female, not a virgin, and middling at best in her social status. If there is a common thread to the many hostile responses to Margery Kempe in her lifetime, it is an assumption that Margery is acting out a spiritual authority to which she has no claim as a member of the laity, as a congregant who ignores or disobeys the directions of her confessors and other church authorities, as a woman whose active sex life is documented by her many children, as a mother whose post-partum depression forced her to give up control of her household for an extended period, as a wife who follows pathways both literal and figural where her husband does not want to go but is powerless to stop her.

What gives Margery the confidence to challenge her apparent lowly place in the spiritual hierarchy of her time is her visionary life. She always remains under the supervision of her confessors and other authorities of the Church. Still, she has conversations directly with Christ, God the Father, members of the Holy Family, and various saints. This unmediated communion with these holy spirits transforms Margery's life and puts her in the exalted status of religious visionary. A number of women in the later middle ages had had parallel experiences, with similarly mixed responses from the church hierarchy and bemused laity in their communities. Two women visionaries, Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), melded mystical revelations with prophecy; they were accorded the Church's approval and respect in their

lifetimes, and eventually recognized as latter-day saints. Bridget and Catherine were already major figures in Margery's time. Bridget was canonized in 1391, and in 1415 Henry V established the Bridgettine abbey of Mount Syon in London (which Margery visits in her later years (II.9); Catherine was not canonized until 1461 but venerated widely after her death.

Chapter 18 describes Margery's meeting in 1413 with another mystic who is now recognized as a major figure: Julian of Norwich (1342-1423?). The *Book*'s description of this encounter with an elderly anchoress living close by emphasizes Julian's benign approval of and advice for Margery. However, the passage does not give any hint that Margery knew the power and depth of Julian's theological explorations, or the fact that Julian was probably revising her *Revelations of Divine Love* in the years surrounding this meeting. Julian's *Revelations* did circulate to some extent during Margery's lifetime, and what little we know about Julian's life indicates that the Church consistently supported this nun confined to the ultimate cloister of the time: an anchoritic cell. Visionary experience is necessarily staged in the mind, and in this time women's visions might emerge in public only through the writings of a male amanuensis. For Julian, and for Bridget and Catherine, any physical embodiment of these visions remained almost as private as the visions themselves: no fits of weeping in the parish church or any other public place are recorded for these Church-sanctioned figures.

On the other hand, the Church was less supportive of women mystics living in the secular world. Among the women in this group whose writings or reputations Margery is likely to have encountered are Marie of Oignies (d. 1213), Angela of Foligno (c. 1249-1309), and Dorothea of Montau (1347-94). A cult around Dorothea persisted in Prussia, and she was beatifed in 1976; Marie and Anglela, though, were little more successful in terms of official veneration than was Margery. All these women, like Margery, struggled to negotiate the contradictions of married life infused with visionary experience; like Margery these women experienced intense fits of weeping. Margery sharpens these contradictions by embodying her visions in public fits before other parishioners at mass, before other pilgrims on her travels, before shocked male clerics and their retinues across England. The spiritual status these visions and fits bring to Margery is a double-edged

sword: she can claim a relationship with God not controlled by the Church and its male priesthood, but she invites scorn, humiliation, and sometimes mortal danger as she witnesses for her religious experience.

Margery's public face as a mystic becomes even more controversial because in public settings she does not hesitate to reprimand men for their failings or to tell holy parables and stories from scripture. The danger in these behaviors increased during Margery's lifetime because of the English Church's renewed attack on Lollardy. Religious dissenters grouped under the term "Lollard" were a diverse bunch, and so historians consider this term to be potentially misleading. In Margery's England, however, some specific ideas were classed as Lollard heresies, first in Henry IV's statute *On the Burning of Heretics* (*De heretico comburendo,* 1401): preaching or teaching false beliefs, and producing books with heretical teachings. These heresies were spelled out at great length and with more precision in Thomas Arundel's *Constitutions* (published 1409): preaching without a license, translating scriptures into the vernacular, denying the transubstantiation, among many others. Margery's fits and visions risked association with diabolic forces, though she is careful to lay before her confessors and other clerical authorities the content of her visions for scrutiny. Her attempts to instruct and guide those around her mired in sin, though, were a more immediate danger.

Margery Kempe's Life and World

Margery Kempe was born around 1373 in what was called (until 1537) Bishop's Lynn, now known as King's Lynn or simply Lynn. In Margery's time Lynn was an important market town in the prosperous county of Norfolk and for all of England a principal seaport at the mouth of the Great Ouse that traded with the Low Countries and the rapidly-developing Hanseatic League. Margery's father, John Brunham, was an important man in Lynn: a successful merchant in import-export, five times elected mayor of the town, six times elected Member of Parliament, alderman of the Holy Trinity Guild, justice of the peace, coroner. One record naming an Isabelle de Brunham might refer to Margery's mother, but in this period even women in families with property and civic roles remain largely invisible in local records. Similarly, we know little

about Margery's childhood, though there is evidence that her family home was in Bridgegate not far from the port and from St. Margaret's church. We can assume, based on the fact that she grew up in a prosperous family, that Margery was properly trained to assume her private and public roles as a devout laywoman: dedicated wife and mother under her husband's rule at home; obedient penitent before her confessors and church fathers; active citizen in the life of her town and her parish.

At age 20 Margery married a local burgess, John Kempe, a merchant and member of a prestigious local guild, Corpus Christi, which counted her father among its most distinguished members. Virtually everything we know about Margery's husband and her marriage comes from her *Book*. With John Margery had fourteen children but these children, and Margery's maternal duties, do not appear at all in the story Margery has to tell. Until very late in Margery's life only the first child plays any role Margery is willing to discuss: the birth of this child (and harsh treatment by her confessor shortly thereafter) induces a state of post-partum depression that leaves Margery bereft of the household keys which symbolize her authority as a wife, and enclosed in a bedroom because she is unfit for society. Her visionary life begins during this illness: Christ appears to Margery, hovering above her sickbed, and assures her that he has not forsaken her.

Margery returns to health rapidly after this encounter, but not to a state of humility and penitence. Over the next decade or so she tries to set up her own business as a brewer and then as a miller, failing at both. She is inspired by a second visionary experience, this time hearing holy melody, to live chastely and penitently. Nonetheless she gives in to her husband's demands for marital relations and the domestic duties demanded by the many children that result. Her desires flare enough that she trusts too much the malign flirtations of another man during evensong. Then just before Christmas day, probably in 1410, Christ reappears to Margery, ravishes her spirit, and tells her to put away her hairshirt along with the other trappings of conventional penitence: he will instead give her a new spiritual life of high meditation and true contemplation. Christ also directs her to go to her confessor to reveal Christ's words and presumably to get her confessor's approval for Margery's visions as revelations from God.

Margery's holiday conversation with Christ inaugurates a long series of visions intermingled with miracles of survival, travels to holy places in England, disputes with male ecclesiastics, initial accusations of heresy, and widespread scorn for her first fits of weeping. The visions resolve into three types well-known during Margery's time: narratives from the life of the Holy Family, prophecies and other high revelations for the worldly life of Margery and her associates, and assertions (from Christ, God the Father, and the Virgin Mary) of Margery's authority as a mystic. Margery tries to secure this authority in public form by asking a series of bishops to convert her marital vows to the life of wedded chastity known as spiritual marriage. She specifically requests that she be clothed all in white. The *Book* is resolutely unclear about the final dispensation of Margery's request. In any case she begins to go about in public clothed in white, a choice that draws steady public condemnation; she also manages to end carnal relations with her husband while still living and travelling with him, a choice that sparks unquenchable gossip.

The next phase of Margery's life is dominated by an extended series of pilgrimages that widens her world across Europe and beyond: Jerusalem (where a new and more intense set of weeping fits begin) and Rome over the years 1413 to 1415; Compostella; Hailes, Leicester, and finally York, the ecclesiastical center where in 1417 she is arrested first by the Archbishop of York's coterie and then by the Duke of Bedford's yeomen. Margery may have been motivated to make these pilgrimages by money inherited after the death of her father in 1413. Nevertheless, she remains inveterately short of cash throughout her travels, and forced to rely on help from others appearing by God's grace rather than any kind of plan or foresight. In this phase we begin to see the importance of Margery's supporters: not only her confessors and other sympathetic members of the Church but men such as the hunchback who accompanies her (fairly unwillingly) when she is abandoned by her countrymen in Europe, or men such as Thomas Marchale who are swept up by Margery's controversies and end up in jail on her behalf.

On the other hand in this period the new severity of her fits, the international stage for the scorn cast upon her, and the hovering threat of execution for heresy all develop a theme from Margery's visionary colloquia with Christ: her trials in

this world are so sharp that Christ says—unambiguously and more than once—that she is a martyr and will receive a martyr's reward in heaven. Given the fact that medieval Europe was predominantly Christian it may be hard to imagine martyrdom within the body of the Church itself. Yet Margery's fits, her clothing, her willingness to challenge ecclesiastical authority together form a spectacle of spiritual authority, a public witness to the need for true penitence and mindfulness of Christ's suffering that challenges authorities all too willing to consider her ripe for punishment.

An emerging spiritual practice in the later middle ages, now called "affective devotion," undoubtedly influenced Margery and her supporters. This practice developed in part from heightened interest among the laity in the physical and emotional experience of religious fervor and penitential sorrow--particularly from Gospel and apocryphal narratives transmitted in sermons or devotional readings, or visualizations of the Passion from prompts such as the elevation of the Host. A movement in the Church in the high middle ages argued that for the laity to achieve salvation they needed some knowledge of the Bible and the process of repenting for their sins. In England the Lambeth Constitutions of 1281 established that the laity should be taught prayers and texts for penitence in English, though not allowed to read the Bible itself. This decision spawned its own movement, known as penitentialism, because so many of the laity seized the chance to engage actively in their own salvation. Among the teachings of penitentialism was the need to cry tears in the process of confession, contrition, and compunction—not just over guilt for specific sins one might have committed but for the fallen state of humankind that required the suffering and blood sacrifice of Jesus.

The term “affective” in this emerging form of devotion tries to summarize the experience of religious fervor not in the mind but in the body and in the senses. The most famous proponent of this idea in England was a Yorkshire hermit in holy orders named Richard Rolle, who wrote a book called the *Incendium Amoris*, the *Fire of Love*, about a century before Margery’s time. Margery in chapter 35 provides a substantial list of these embodied moments of mystical connection with Christ: sweet smells, holy melody, white angels flitting around her, and what she explicitly calls the fire of love. In chapter 58

the narrator-scribe intrudes to tell us that he read to Margery various devotional texts, including Rolle's *Fire of Love* and Bridget's *Revelations*, that helped Margery understand what she was going through due to her visions. While these experiences are not necessarily identified with women as a gender, Margery's tears of contrition and compunction are notably provoked by empathy for and identification with the emotional experience of the Virgin Mary and women members of the Holy Family generally. A re-imagining of Christ's Passion is central to affective devotion, and Margery offers a profound version of such a vision in Chapter 28, when her visit to Jerusalem inaugurates a new kind of weeping while in a state of contemplation. Nonetheless, Margery also imagines herself inside the stories of the women of the Holy Family such as Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist) and Mary Magdalene. These narratives had entered widely into the imaginations of late-medieval laity in England thanks to another book that told all sorts of stories about the Holy Family meant for devotional contemplation, the *Mirror of the Life of Christ* by Nicholas Love from the Carthusian house at Mount Grace in Yorkshire, where our surviving copy of Margery's *Book* also ended up for a time. Love's *Mirror* translated the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, probably the work Kempe's scribe identifies by the name of its author, (pseudo-) Bonaventure in the list of affective works he read to Margery.

Still, much of Margery's story does not conform neatly to the model of affective devotion she might have found in her authors and her contacts among devout laity. Margery's humility finds expression in her self-identification as "this creature" and by regular assertions that she is unworthy to be the vessel of holy revelation. Yet Margery does not live her life as any kind of anchoritic recluse. She performs her devotion through public fits, flagrantly non-normative white clothing, and the shaming of male clerics in front of their cohorts. These behaviors represent a model for mystical practice well beyond a private arena dedicated to affective devotion. Margery's martyrdom as a contemplative happens in social settings and interpersonal conflicts. Never are these conflicts more potent than during her pilgrimage period from 1413 to 1415, to the north of England and to the Holy Land. These years represent the height of Margery's self-fashioning as a distinctive public figure for lay devotion.

Margery returns from pilgrimage to a long period of quiet, marked primarily by illness and the loss of dependable visionary experience which together become the new form of her martyrdom. Some patterns from her earlier life continue. Margery's prayers are credited with a snowfall during the burning of the Holy Trinity Guildhall that saves a neighboring church; Margery struggles with the male religious figures from her life in Lynn, notably a Franciscan preacher (probably William Melton) who attacks her directly from the pulpit. At the same time Margery shifts her focus to everyday works of charity and mercy: she regularly comforts the afflicted and cares for her husband in his last dotage. A new section of the *Book* begins with Margery's brief time with a son returned from Germany (possibly the amanuensis for an early draft of Margery's life) who dies soon thereafter, and a last pilgrimage in 1434 which seems to drift aimlessly through northern Europe: she goes off to Danzig for no stated reason, then stops in at various shrines while working herself back along the coast with great difficulty and one more unwilling companion—a monk this time. She returns home by way of London, where she visits the new Brigittine monastery of Mount Syon and once more denounces sinful behaviors around her while warding off accusations of hypocrisy.

After narrating Margery's return to Lynn the *Book* shifts to a series of prayers that to some extent reconfigure passages in her earlier visions. Nothing in the text of this second section explains this rapid downward movement in the devotional energy of the *Book*. One possible explanation might be one more substantial rise in tensions around heresy, in this case centered on several women nearby in Norwich. From 1428 to1430 the Norwich Heresy Trials accused these women of teaching and quoting sacred text among other offenses, crimes close to Margery Kempe's well-known public persona. The accused women were diverse in their own performance of what the trials condemned as heresy. Hawisia Mone, for instance, ran a Lollard school in her own home; Margery Baxter seems from her testimony to have been a hothead with a gift for provocative phrases, but not a leader for the cause. No records indicate Margery Kempe's involvement with these trials, but undoubtedly a chilling effect spread through the region, and may be a motivation behind William Melton's resolute attacks on her during the 1430s.

In the end Margery's life seems to have traced its arc during an inauspicious time and place for a mystic of her type. No detectable cult developed around her, no miracles credited to her after her death survive in reports, no blossoming audience for her *Book* left any trace beyond the single manuscript that survives today and a separate copy that must have served as the source for a pamphlet of extracts (described below). In the later middle ages her impact on Lynn, Norfolk, or England as a whole may not have extended beyond the reach of her *Book*, but that testament to her life has found a permanent place in the lives of students, scholars, and devotees of mystical practice.

The Life of Margery's *Book*

The Book of Margery Kempe as we now know it seems to have disappeared from public view not long after her death around 1438. No mention of it in wills connected to devout book-owners has yet been found, nor in early modern library catalogues. A pamphlet version of Margery's *Book* by London printer Wynken de Worde did surface during the early years of print, whose seven pages of brief extracts was reprinted twice over the following centuries. Her story, though, disappeared otherwise until 1933, when a manuscript of the text we have today resurfaced in the Lancashire home of the Butler-Bowden family thanks to medieval scholar Hope Emily Allen. Allen produced a modern edition of the text with Sanford Brown Meech, and various modernizations and translations have followed.

Margery's experiences with the men who wrote down her *Book* are peculiar. The *Book* starts with an introduction from 1436, written by a priest who goes through his own crisis of faith and miraculous return to belief in Margery. Like women visionaries before her, Margery could not write her own book not just because she was incapable. Margery might have been literate, and earlier women visionaries such as Hildegarde of Bingen certainly were. Still, all these women had their revelations interpreted and written down by a priest, an educated male sworn to uphold the true faith against diabolic visions and heretical falsehoods. Margery's first amanuensis was not a priest, however, but a married man come recently to England from Germany and possibly her son John Kempe. He wrote "as mech as sche wold tellyn hym" in their time together,

and then he died. Margery next turned to a priest in town she trusted. He at first was put off by the script in which the existing draft was written but offered to try to transcribe this original material. Then the malicious talk about Margery in town so alarmed him that he avoided the task and Margery for around four years, at the end of which he advised Margery to take the draft to another man. That man gave up after a leaf or so, and Margery cheerfully returned it to the priest. After a period when the priest's renewed attempts were thwarted by eye problems so severe he could not see the letters or even trim his pen, the efficacy of Margery's prayers seem to have cleared his eyes and he successfully took up the task in 1436, completing something that is probably very close to the text we have now. This version is his structuring of Margery's retold memories. This priest also says that he wrote the second section of Margery's *Book* "not alle, but summe of hem, aftyr hyr owyn tunge." How much his role is crucial in the text we have, and how much Margery deliberately shaped her own narrative, remains a fierce debate.

Since what has survived is one later copy, not the original by Margery's priest-scribe, there is no telling exactly how much other men have intervened and restructured Margery's *Book*. We also do not know exactly where the original copy of Margery's *Book* went after it left the hands of her amanuensis. At least three sets of intervening hands, also probably male, stepped in to shape this woman's narrative. Margery admits in the Introduction that her "boke is not wretyn in ordyr" since "sche had for-getyn the tyme & the ordyr whan thyngys befellyn." The scribe, the series of annotators and, eventually, the printer who reproduced Margery in extracts all offer primary evidence near in time to the text's origins about the very processes of constructing Margery that bedevil scholars to this day. Fundamental evidence of reshaping by the original scribe—additions, subtractions, reorderings—is lost for the purposes of analysis. However, almost certainly this same scribe (who signed his name to the manuscript as Salthows) supplied a set of little brown annotations that suggest a cleric, or at least enough of a scholar to know the standard form of a saint's life or *vita*. This hand's annotations emphasize moments in the narrative that shape an overarching *vita*-structure for Margery: from the initiation into her earthly martyrdom of crying fits to the confrontation with the

Archbishop that resonates with a long list of saintly women responding to their accusers. These marginalia in the first narrative arc, for instance, mark the mileposts in Margery's journey as a mystic from her first tears, to white clothes, a visionary confession to John the Evangelist, a miracle with a foreign priest that prefigures the miracle of her second amanuensis, spiritual marriage to God the Father, parable-telling before the Archbishop, a discussion with a nervous confessor, and finally a full plenary remission of sins from the Virgin Mary. Throughout the *Book* this little brown annotator assiduously avoids controversial and messy elements of Margery's identity; instead, he carefully compiles incidents and elements that would constitute an exemplary brief *vita* adapting traditional hagiography to contemporary forms of lay affective devotion.

This structure is quite different from those marked out by the next set of annotators, either Carthusian monks at Mount Grace Priory or associates (one of whom wrote in the front of the manuscript "this boke is of mounte grace"). Five more annotating hands appear from this group (which might also include the scribe and little brown commentator). Carthusian manuscripts from this period often have readers' marks in the margins, probably so that the monks could communicate about shared reading without violating their vow of silence. The responses to Margery's *Book*, though, are much more extensive interventions and reveal more specialized interests than the global overview of the little brown annotator: one zeroes in on mystical speech and visionary moments to the exclusion of anything else; a second notes the more controversial and worldly ramifications of Margery's spiritual vocation as if her life were a kind of passion-play; two more make only infrequent incursions into the margins. The most frequent hand, called the Red-Ink Annotator, seems also to have been the latest. This annotator not only flags mystical passages in particular but also mentions the ecstatic Mount Grace mystic Richard Methley and draws various cryptic symbols as some kind of meditative response. In the main text, though, comes his most striking interaction: he invades virtually every line of the *Book* with punctuation marks, a massive effort that suggests the Red-Ink Annotator redesigned this manuscript for reading aloud to a group. Some evidence suggests that in 1553 this manuscript next was taken to the London Charterhouse of

Sheen to protect it after the Dissolution from agents of Henry VIII. From there it passed into the Digby family, ancestors of the Butler-Bowdens.

One copy survives of the printed pamphlet from Margery's *Book* published in London by Wynkyn de Worde in 1501, probably around the time the manuscript was annotated at or near Mount Grace. In its seven pages brief excerpts from the *Book* present Margery as a mystic in direct dialogue with Christ. Its final page offers a woodcut of the Crucifixion as a device for the meditation the pamphlet encourages. Interestingly, this pamphlet focuses from its first words on Christ's declarations that Margery's contemplative practices are better than martyrdom. Without the narratives that show how close to martyrdom Margery does come in public, Wynken's extracts seem to argue for a more orthodox kind of private visionary life that abandons the violent conflicts of the secular world. This pamphlet had enough of an afterlife to be republished by Henry Pepwell in 1521, as part of an anthology of mystical writings now called *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*. Pepwell incorrectly identifies Margery as an anchoress, shifting her identity all the more towards private and orthodox religious experience. This anthology was republished in a 1910 edition by Edmund Gardner, who guesses that Margery was a thirteenth-century anchorite but who also intuits that the extracts were drawn from a larger book. Margery's full *Book* did not surface until 1933, but since then a series of editions, translations, a radio play, even an adaptation to gay fiction all testify to the growing importance of this work for contemporary readers.

Margery's treatment at the hands of a series of male amanuenses, commentators, and editors who took control over her *Book* may not have been helpful, but certainly instructive as a history of male response to a woman's text. Undoubtedly Margery shaped her self-presentation in her *Book* as in her life. The question remains, though, what effects all these mediating men have had on the surviving form of her *Book* and on responses to that book over five centuries and more.

A note on this edition

The first modern edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe* was produced for the Early English Text Society by Hope Emily Allen and Sanford Brown Meech in 1940. That edition still has

value today. The editors followed a common practice at the time to create a hybrid critical/reader edition, providing modern punctuation, quotation marks, and other print-based markers for ease of use. One problem with this approach rises up immediately. The prose style in Margery's *Book* flows in long sentences with many clauses and few clear stops, at least as scribe Salthows presents it in the manuscript. This additive style may be close to the rhythms of Margery's own speech, and in any case creates distinctive effects in her visionary moments, in the heat of her debate speech, in her accounts of her daily life. Much of this rhythm, and specifically much of Salthows's punctuation cannot even be seen by the naked eye due to the massive application of new punctuation by the Red-Ink Annotator many decades later. Consequently Meech and Allen's edition relies throughout on the Red-Ink Annotator's markings rather than those of the scribe, whose presentation of the prose style may not be Margery's (or her priest-scribe's) but is much closer in time and location to Margery.

This edition is based on what had been an unavailable body of evidence. A new online facsimile of *The Book of Margery Kempe* allows readers to magnify images of the manuscript substantially and see the original punctuation—or absence—by scribe Salthows underneath overlays of red ink; the accompanying transcription allows readers to strip away the Red-Ink Annotator's additions and reveal that original punctuation. The reader's edition provided here inevitably translates scribal practices into modern print conventions, including the supply of punctuation not used in the manuscript for Margery's sentences. However, in this case the editorial decisions begin with the original decisions by scribe Salthows, not a later annotator. Many of these editorial decisions are intended to clarify the Middle English by separating out clauses and phrases whose elements could easily run across syntactic boundaries that are not always apparent to modern eyes—or to the eyes of the Red-Ink Annotator when he inserted thousands of stops throughout the text.

Margery Kempe: A Timeline

c. 1373: Margery is born in Bishop's Lynn to John and Isabella(?) Brunham.
c. 1393: Margery is married to John Kempe.
c. 1394: Margery gives birth, falls into depression, has her first vision of Christ (I.2).
c. 1394-96 (?): Margery experiences two years of spiritual calm (I.4).
c. 1397-99 (?): Margery struggles with worldly desires for three years, but begins to experience tears of compunction (I.3-4).
c. 1399 (?)-Christmas1413: Margery begins a series of visions of Christ, God, and the Holy Family (I.5-14); Margery miraculously survives a falling stone and rafter beam in the Church of St. Margaret, Norfolk (I.9); Margery travels around England for local pilgrimages (I.10-13) and for meetings with clerics, devout laity, and Julian of Norwich (I.18-19).
1413: Margery and John meet with Philip Repingdon, Bishop of Lincoln, to request that they take the mantle and ring of spiritual marriage, and that Margery may be clothed in white. Repingdon tells them to take the request to the Archbishop of Canterbury (I.15).
1413: Margery meets with Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, in London and receives from him a letter granting her the power to choose her confessor and receive communion throughout the parishes under his dominion (I.16).
1413: John Brunham, Margery's father, dies.
1413: Margery leaves for pilgrimage to the Holy Land (I.26).
c. 1414: Margery arrives in Jerusalem (I.28); Margery stops in Venice (I.30); Margery visits Assisi and comes to Rome for a long sojourn (I.31).
1415: Margery sails to Middleburgh in Zeeland (I.42); Margery returns to Norfolk (I.43).
1417: Margery goes on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella (I.46).
1417: Margery imprisoned and tried in Leicester (I.46-49); Margery brought before Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York, in Yorkminster Chapterhouse (I. 52); Margery detained by yeomen of John, Duke of Bedford (I.53).
c. 1418-c. 1426: Margery endures eight years of illness (I. 56).

1421: Fire burns down Lynn Guildhall; Margery's prayers are credited with saving adjoining parish church of St. Margaret (I.67).

c. 1431: Margery's husband and son die (II. 2).

1433: Margery leaves for pilgrimage against her confessor's wishes and arrives in Norway (II.3); Margery stays with her daughter-in-law in Danzig (II.4); Margery on foot visits relic of the holy blood in Wilsnack (II.5); Margery sees relics in Aachen on St. Margaret's day (II.7); Margery sails from Calais to Dover and goes on to Canterbury (II.8); Margery visits London, faces accusations of hypocrisy, speaks out against sinners (II.9); Margery encounters the hermit Reynald at Mount Syon monastery (II.10).

1436: Priest able to revise Margery's Book (First Prologue).

1438: Priest begins to write second "treatise" from combination of Margery's words and his own observations (II.1); Margery admitted to Guild of the Holy Trinity in Lynn.

after 1438: Margery's death.