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**Margery Kempe's Words: an Examination of Register and  
Vocabulary in the Context of Autohagiography.**

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## **Declaration**

I, Claire McShane, hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and the work is my own. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and any included publications are my own work.

Claire McShane

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understanding parents, Ian and Sandra McShane, Margery Kempe has loomed large on their landscape for too long.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the use of vocabulary in the Book of Margery Kempe, as a means of exploring register in the context of autohagiography. It analyses the way in which Margery ascribes words to different protagonists in her work, the register from which these words are drawn, and the resonances that they have when applied to the protagonists. The aim is to understand how Margery seeks to represent herself as a medieval holy woman, and how she positions herself in relation to the Book's principal protagonists; both the personae who inhabit her visionary world, and the men and women she encounters in reality. The thesis assumes that the Book can be read as a work of autohagiography, and therefore raises a second question: does Margery manipulate register in such a way as to enhance her own holiness so that she comes to be seen as the saintly protagonist of her own *vita*? The thesis, therefore, whilst having a linguistic concern, should primarily be understood as a work of literary criticism.

The original research of this thesis is contained within its appendix, in which the words of the Book have been etymologically derived and dated according to first recorded usage entries in both the Oxford English Dictionary and the Middle English Dictionary. The dates, whilst not infallible (there are points of disparity between the two dictionaries, and points where entries cited post-date 1438) provide a useful guide as to the age of a word, and from this one can surmise its register. On this basis, the thesis then tackles assumptions that naturally arise: if we take the major personae of the Book, a supposition would be that Margery, the 'humble creatur', would use a vocabulary that reflected her humility, drawn from Old English and naturalised French. A second assumption might be that Christ, an exalted figure, would be given a vocabulary that reflected his status: Latinate and sophisticated, to exemplify his elevated position and to provide necessary contrast between himself and Margery. The difference in their statuses would, therefore, be demonstrated via their vocabulary. The Virgin

Mary, moreover, plays a significant role within the work, and one might assume that her vocabulary would mirror that of her son: divinely elevated, with Margery occupying a position beneath her.

Closer investigation, however, suggests that these assumptions are open to question. As this thesis will highlight, Christ's vocabulary is that of an everyman, both sophisticated and humble, and he is even capable of employing specific and highly localised words pertaining to fourteenth-century Lynn. Margery's vocabulary comprises some extremely stylish Latinate and later French importations, suggesting that her humility is not as absolute as she presents. Mary, moreover, is given a lexical range that is almost entirely made up of Old English and early French imports. This could be consistent with her position as the humblest of all biblical characters in her suffering, sorrow and forbearance; or it could be seen as a subtle undermining of her status by Margery who consciously shifts her own vocabulary upwards in order to usurp Mary's position. This thesis, therefore, seeks to explore the various literary issues that result from a close linguistic survey, and to explore these issues within a framework that discusses whether the use of register ultimately supports the view that Margery's work was intended to be read as autohagiography.

The thesis begins with two contextualising chapters on medieval Lynn, its religious houses, and the evolution of medieval traditions of female piety and mysticism, so that Margery may be purposefully situated within her social, religious, and broader cultural milieu (which naturally informs her use of vocabulary), before turning its attention to chapters that scrutinise the use of vocabulary in various contexts. These include the vocabulary of Christ in relation to Margery; the words of the other women whom Margery encounters, particularly the Virgin Mary; the language of virginity and the virgin saints; and the language of Margery's

persecutors. The conclusions that can be drawn from each suggest that there was register awareness on Margery's part, and that this register awareness is reflected in the *Book's* characterisations of its principal protagonists. This, in turn, can suggest strongly that the *Book* was intended to represent Margery's claim sainthood.

## Introduction

### *'Here begynnyth a schort tretys...'*

Since its rediscovery in 1938, *The Book of Margery Kempe* has proven to be a somewhat controversial text, as its varied critical reception can attest. It is the memoir of an illiterate<sup>1</sup> middle-class woman<sup>2</sup> of fourteenth-century Lynn, who, after the birth of her first child, undergoes a spiritual conversion and begins to have conversations with Christ, and to experience visions of well-known biblical scenes. Not only this, but she manages, despite a husband and fourteen children, to travel widely, visiting the Holy Land, Italy, Compostela, and Gdansk, as well as numerous religious sites in England. She is given the holy gift of tears,<sup>3</sup> and is reduced to a state of extreme distress whenever she is moved to contemplate the passion. She barter for chastity with her husband, and eventually undergoes a spiritual marriage to the godhead. She is derided by many, who consider her to be at best sanctimonious and at worst a heretic; she suffers their reproof, malicious tricks and spite, endures calls for her to be burnt, and even finds herself being cross-examined by authority figures as to her theological orthodoxy. She is also rather boisterous, status-conscious, loud, and highly visible; she does not apologise for the strength of her reactions and will not be cowed by priests whom she

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<sup>1</sup> Illiterate in a rather practical sense; she could neither read nor write and, therefore, had to dictate her *Book* to a couple of willing scribes, and she was also read to by a sympathetic priest. The result of the latter endeavour, of course, was that she was rather well-informed in terms of her knowledge of religious texts. She is able to quote from scripture, she is able to cite various other religious texts and their authors, and she is able to create a *Book* of her own, which, I shall argue, exhibits understanding and awareness of rhetoric, style and certain literary techniques. Margery may not have been able to read or write, but she by no means lacked literary education.

<sup>2</sup> Margery was the daughter of a prosperous Lynn merchant, John Brunham, who at various times held offices including mayor of the town (five times), Member of Parliament, coroner, and justice of the peace. At around twenty years of age, Margery married John Kempe, a man somewhat less distinguished than her father in terms of social standing, but who was nevertheless a burgess of Lynn, and at one point one of its four treasurers. See Gallyon, pp. 39-42 (Margaret Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, (Norwich 1995)). Before she fully embraces her religious life, Margery herself tries her hand at the entrepreneurial ventures of brewing and milling, both of which fail; see the *Book of Margery Kempe* (hereafter *BMK*), pp. 9-10 (*The Book of Margery Kempe*, Early English Text Society, eds. Meech and Allen (Oxford University Press, 1993)).

<sup>3</sup> The gift of holy tears, also experienced by Marie d'Oignies, is where the subject is so overwhelmed by love of Christ and the contemplation of the Passion, that uncontrollable sobbing ensues.

considers to be morally corrupt. Margery, moreover, seeks to increase her knowledge of mysticism and theology by instructing a priest to read to her, expanding her awareness of the themes, concerns and literary devices that characterised religious writing of the period. Hers is a life of incident, interest and a certain amount of risk, and she is unusual in many ways, not least of all in that she is neither a nun nor an anchoress, and therefore was not enclosed in a convent or cell: she was at liberty to move freely across England, Europe and the Holy Land, which she did, and was an often vocal presence on these journeys.

Her *Book* is as difficult to categorise as she is: it is part autobiography, part religious primer, part visionary account, and, as I shall argue, part hagiography. The purpose of this thesis, principally, is to assess to what extent Margery appears to manipulate linguistic register as a tool for portraying herself in a more virtuous light, how this manipulation manifests itself, and whether this manipulation, when viewed in conjunction with an analysis of the structure, content and tropes of the words of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the notion of virginity, Margery's detractors, and certain individual episodes of the *Book*, leads us to a reading of the work that is more indebted to the characteristics of hagiography than any other genre. If this is the case, then we must review the motivations Margery had in dictating her memoir, and assess whether she was, in fact, intending the *Book* to be read as a type of *vita*, with a possible view to promoting a vision of herself as a saint.

### **I: Hagiography and Humility**

The notion that the *Book of Margery Kempe* is a type of hagiography is not a new one; Katherine Lewis, Sarah Salih, Gail McMurray Gibson, and Richard Kieckhefer all posit the

view that this would be an appropriate generic placement for the *Book*. Katherine Lewis<sup>4</sup> compares Margery directly with St Katherine of Alexandria as an intellectually gifted woman capable of repeatedly putting down her detractors (the mayor of Leicester and Roman emperor respectively); a narrative trope, she argues, to which the *Book* is indebted. Sarah Salih argues that,<sup>5</sup> although hagiography often serves as a model for conscious imitation for the monastic orders, it also ‘could, though probably exceptionally, shape a lived life, as it is represented as doing in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, in which Margery is explicitly shown to imitate the lives of several saints’.<sup>6</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson<sup>7</sup> writes of Margery’s ‘martyrdom by slander’<sup>8</sup> also stating that ‘Margery’s *Book* seems quite conscious of the validating implications of such suffering.’<sup>9</sup> The consciousness or not of Margery’s written style will, of course, be addressed at some length, but it must be recognised that if Margery were seeking to position her text as hagiography, there must also be consciousness on her part: that she made a decision to create a text that was indebted to a certain genre. Understanding a generic form enough to emulate some of its characteristics certainly suggests awareness, and indeed, it is my belief that Margery’s knowledge of hagiography and her borrowings from it permeate her work – and attempt to inform the response of the reader. Richard Kieckhefer<sup>10</sup> further contributes to this argument, and is the first to coin the phrase ‘autohagiography’<sup>11</sup> in relation to Margery’s *Book*; that is, the notion of a self-penned vita. This thesis, therefore, draws on the scholarship that has already been completed in relation to the *Book*’s generic placement as that of hagiography; but it is also seeking to add to these existing arguments by forensic analysis of the vocabulary and

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<sup>4</sup> Katherine J. Lewis, ‘Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England’ in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* eds. John H. Arnold and Katherine Lewis (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 195-215.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Salih, ‘Introduction: Saints, Cults and Lives in Late Medieval England’, in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih, (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 1-23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

register used by Margery as a possible method of presenting her work as a self-authored vita. It is worth mentioning that for the purposes of this thesis, the working assumption is that Margery's *Book* is an autohagiography.

Margery faces two major problems when tackling the rather involved literary form of the self-authored vita, both of which are linked. The first is the inherent difficulty of proclaiming one's own sanctity. Practically speaking, sainthood is an honour bestowed by the Church, after a lengthy bureaucratic process during which the validity of any claim is scrutinised; in medieval times, the circulation of a vita would have been an important part of the procedure, bolstering claims made about the holiness of the potential saint's existence; at the very least vitae offer recognition of a life lived in sanctity.<sup>12</sup> Vitae, however, were usually written by sympathetic authors, in many cases a long-term friend or confessor of the nominee (for example, Marie d'Oignies' advocate, Jacques de Vitry); Margery's *Book* is, therefore, something of an anomaly. Writing one's own vita lacks the necessary humility that is required in order to become a saint, even if there is an apparent humility by employing the voice of the third person, as Margery does, to create the sense of someone else having written it. Margery is in something of a predicament here; she clearly was not confident that her vita would be written after her death (indeed, her *Book* and its composition are doubly unconventional in that they are authored by herself, and therefore during her lifetime; divine permission sanctions such a departure), but without it, the holiness of her life is less eligible for recognition, or for a local cult to spring up and venerate her. It is obviously extremely difficult to gauge whether Margery was conscious of this tension during her writing of the text, or whether she was simply adhering to the conventions of a genre of religious writing with which she was familiar. Either way, Margery's

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<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive explanation of the criteria required for sainthood, see Andre Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans., Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 2005).

work must navigate the difficult waters of proclaiming her holiness, without being seen to proclaim her holiness.

## II: Scribe as Author?

The second problem that Margery faced is that she is the author of her own work; humility once again becomes an issue. The addition of two scribes further complicates the relationship that Margery has with her text, and makes an assessment of the extent of her authorial technique almost impossible. It is, however, my opinion that the scribes fulfilled, in the vast majority of the text, their function as straightforward amanuenses; the voice that echoes through the centuries is that of Margery herself, a claim that will, of necessity, be explored throughout this thesis.<sup>13</sup>

If the *Book* had been composed as part of the vita of Saint Margery of Lynn, written by a reputable (male) third party, who, preferably, had some personal knowledge of the subject, the issue of Margery's tussles with humility would instantly evaporate. The scribes provide something of a bulwark against allegations of Margery simply writing her autobiography, and there is, of course, clear evidence of a certain amount of scribal interference.<sup>14</sup> Much has already been written on the matter of the *Book's* authorship, and the scope of the present study does not admit a thorough-going analysis of these arguments. Briefly, however, scholarship

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<sup>13</sup> The linguistic survey that was undertaken as part of the research for this thesis partly forms the basis for this claim, and the following chapters will seek to argue that the use of language, explanation of visions, employment of local dialect and shifting use of register all indicate that Margery was at the very least in control of the composition of her *Book*, although a definitive answer to the question of authorial technique will always be necessarily speculative. However, there is enough in the text to argue that Margery's authorial awareness was such that she could, and did, produce a passable vita.

<sup>14</sup> For example, during the proem, and the point at which the scribe interrupts the story to express his own disbelief that Margery's gift of tears is authentic, before being converted; see chapter 62 of *BMK*, pp.152-54.

remains divided over the question of the authorship of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, broadly along the lines of those who believe the scribe had greater influence on the text, and those who do not. Anthony Goodman argues that the scribe is responsible for the thesis of Margery's work,<sup>15</sup> but in a second article acknowledges that the *Book* 'does have a distinctive authorial voice, especially in the homeliness of expression,'<sup>16</sup> suggesting that he accepts that Margery's voice can be heard in the text's composition. He is critical, however: 'The visionary ought to have been a crystal-clear vessel, revealing the vision in unflecked purity. Margery understood this, but could not shift her focus sufficiently from the vessel itself.'<sup>17</sup> Any literary merit that the *Book* might have, he argues, appears to be thanks to the efforts of the scribe. John C. Hirsh, goes further, stating that: 'the second scribe, no less than Margery, should be regarded as the author of *The Book of Margery Kempe*.'<sup>18</sup>

Lynn Staley Johnson, however, makes the distinction between 'Margery' and 'Kempe' in *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, as the subject and author respectively, in the same way that 'we distinguish between Will, the layabout, and Langland, the author'.<sup>19</sup> This reading affords Margery real status as a conscious and deliberate author of her text, as opposed to being billed as a 'manifestation of frustration and hysteria, epithets too often linked to the gender of its subject'.<sup>20</sup> Karma Lochrie tackles the complicated issue of the *Book*'s authorship in *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, arguing for a greater emphasis to be placed on the orality of the text, which allows Margery the capacity for authorship despite her illiteracy.<sup>21</sup> However, having acknowledged above that the scribe's voice is sometimes (perhaps inevitably) in

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<sup>15</sup> Anthony Goodman, 'The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter of Lynn' in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker, (Oxford, 1978), pp. 347-58.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Goodman, 'Margery Kempe', *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 217-238), p. 224.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 224-5.

<sup>18</sup> John C. Hirsh, 'Author and Scribe in the *Book of Margery Kempe*' in *Medium Aevum* 44, (1975), pp. 145-50.

<sup>19</sup> Lynn Staley Johnson, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, (Pennsylvania, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Pennsylvania, 1994), p. 98.

evidence, it is my belief that, for the overwhelming majority of the text, Margery uses the scribe as the simple enabler of her words. The occasional commentaries in the text explicitly offered by the scribe are clearly signposted, and break the rhythm of the established style; it is arguable, therefore, that it is the scribe's voice that is the rarity, rather than Margery's.

Of course, without the scribe, Margery would not have been able to garner the requisite clerical authority that such a text demanded: 'men did indeed stand between the women and their audiences in most cases, with the power to pronounce upon their orthodoxy and the genuineness of their revelations'.<sup>22</sup> The addition of a man to present the 'public face' of the female subject allowed the Church to oversee the construction of these narratives, and to ensure that no conflicts or points of unorthodoxy arose. Whether producing a *vita* for a deceased holy woman or collaborating with her in life, the man in question (almost always clerical) supports or endorses his subject. Margery's *Book*, however, differs from the norm, in that neither of the scribes are credited for their work. In the cases of Bridget of Sweden, Hildegard of Bingen, Marie d'Oignies, Margaret of Cortona, Catherine of Siena, Dorothy of Montau and Christine of Stommeln, the names of the male biographers or collaborators are known.<sup>23</sup> Margery's scribes remain anonymous, and although one can hazard a guess that the first is her wayward but ultimately penitent son and the second is a priest, their very lack of explicit identity actually heightens a sense of Margery's authorship. The narrative does not contain the kind of material that one encounters from biographers who write extensively about their relationship with their subject, lessening her role within her own story. Margery could not compile her text alone; she had neither the education nor the authority to do so. However, the anonymity of the scribes reinforces her as the agent of the work, and reiterates her pre-eminence in its composition. The

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<sup>22</sup> John Coakley, 'Women's Textual Authority and the Collaboration of Clerics', in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout, 2010), pp 83-104, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, see pp. 89-98.

scribes do not document their own anecdotes of their relationship with her (but do endorse her), and so Margery stands fully centre-stage in her narrative. Moreover, the intensely personal nature of elements of her story, the sexual temptations, the unnamed sin that causes her to fall into madness at the beginning of her narrative, and the graphic depictions of the effects of her husband's descent into senility<sup>24</sup> are all highly suggestive that Margery's hand is uppermost in the *Book's* construction. To conclude otherwise not only stretches credulity in the face of her forceful character, but is also somewhat patronising. Furthermore, the research conducted in the present study not only suggests that Margery's voice is the most resonant within the work, but that she is also a good enough author to endow her characters with particular qualities through the conscious manipulation of register.

### III: Linguistic Surveys

Although the *Book of Margery Kempe* has been subject to a close degree of scrutiny and analysis since its rediscovery, no one has undertaken a full linguistic survey of the text, nor have they used this information to highlight possible ways in which Margery may have controlled or apportioned her vocabulary, in order to portray particular themes or concerns in a particular light. During the course of the present study, the etymology of the words used in the *Book* has been derived, in order to ascertain the register to which it belongs. The results of this substantial undertaking can be found in the appendix to this thesis, and will be discussed in greater detail below.

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<sup>24</sup> See *BMK*, p 14, p. 7 and p. 181.

Research specifically pertaining to Margery's use of vocabulary is somewhat sparse, although Robert Stone's book *Middle English Prose Style*<sup>25</sup> directly (and somewhat unfavourably) compares Margery's style with that of Julian of Norwich. Shozo Shibata's exacting article 'Notes on the Vocabulary of the *Book of Margery Kempe*'<sup>26</sup> goes some way to establishing Margery's relationship with 'hard' words, as he terms them; how they appear, and when they are deployed. However, he confines his work to two letters only (e and f), and he is solely concerned with these 'hard' words, i.e.: those that belong to a more elevated linguistic register. This seriously limits the conclusions that one can draw from a small sample, and by looking at these 'hard' words in the vacuum of two letters only, it does not provide the extended and necessary context for what Margery is actually saying; Shibata's study, therefore, provides considerable matter for linguistic interest, but perhaps says less about what the text is striving to achieve. It is important, in my view, not to use the resource of the appendix of this study in isolation, as a means of stating simply what words Margery knew, how impressive they were, and whether this is more or less in line with the expectations we have of a fourteenth-century middle-class woman. Instead I am attempting to use language as a means to a literary end. This thesis will look at the registers of all words, with a view to drawing conclusions about the portrayal of certain characters when looked at through the lens of the vocabulary given to them by Margery – including herself – and whether the usage of these words strengthens the argument that the *Book* can be read as a *vita*.

As the vocabulary of Middle English expanded to accommodate loans from Latin and French (the smooth incorporation of which was aided by the breaking down of Old English inflectional endings), it gave rise to extraordinary growth and the opportunity to integrate these 'novelty'

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Stone, *Middle English Prose Style: Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich* (The Hague, Paris, 1970).

<sup>26</sup> Shozo Shibata, 'Notes on the Vocabulary of the *Book of Margery Kempe*' in *Studies in English Grammar and Linguistics*, (Tokyo, 1958), pp. 209-20.

words into speech or writing, producing different effects. The latter is of particular relevance to this study, as it is the philosophy and practice of the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* to provide contextualising quotations for each definition of an individual word. It is possible, therefore, broadly to ‘date’ a word through its earliest recorded usage, and then ascribe a register to it; newer, Latinate words arguably provide a scholarly, authoritative tone. My initial point of research for this thesis, therefore, was to derive the etymology of the words used in the *Book of Margery Kempe* (the results of which can be found in the appendix). One must, however, also acknowledge the limitations of this system. For instance, I have found twenty-four examples in the *Book of Margery Kempe* that predate the earliest quotations in the *OED*,<sup>27</sup> and one must, moreover, concede that the year of the record certainly, by common sense, post-dates the existence of the word itself: it needs must have been in circulation orally in order for it to be recorded. One must also, therefore, acknowledge that some first recorded usages given in the *OED* as hailing from the *Book* are such simply because nothing earlier has yet been discovered; it does not mean that earlier usages do not exist. There are, therefore, clear limitations to using the *OED*, and caution is to be advised; but it is very interesting to note that, when I cross-referenced the *OED* findings with the *MED*, there are only two examples out of the twenty-seven discrepancies in which both dictionaries have incorrectly stated the date: ‘qwietyng’ is considered by each to have been recorded in 1460, and ‘whelys’,

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<sup>27</sup> The *OED* and the *MED* occasionally disagree as to when a word might have materialised in English, in which case I have used the earlier quotation. The words in the *Book* that predate the quotations in the *OED*, or are not cited at all are: bloberys (*OED* cites 1481 and not for ‘pustules’ at all; *MED* cites *BMK*), bolendyns (an Italian coin; not cited in *OED*, *BMK* is earliest citation in *MED*), charyetfully (not cited in *OED*; *MED* cites 1435), compassyf (*OED* cites 1612; *MED* cites *BMK* as first usage), contemptibly, (*OED*: a.1586; *MED* cites *BMK*), cowche (not cited in *OED*; *BMK* is sole citation in *MED*), craske (*OED* c.1440; *MED* cites 1300), cross-staf (*OED* cites a. 1464; not cited in *MED*), euerlestyngly (*OED* cites c.1450; *MED* cites c. 1390), inqwietyng (*OED* 1527; *BMK* is first citation in *MED*), lamentabyll (*OED* c.1460), lawdacyon (*OED* a. 1500; *MED* cites *BMK*), lothful (*OED* 1450; *MED* ?a.1425), malendrynes (not cited in *OED*; *MED* cites *BMK*), purifyid (*OED* 1475; *MED* a.1400), quemfulnes (Not cited in *OED*; *BMK* is sole citation in *MED*), qwietyng (*OED* cites c.1460; a rare moment of agreement from *MED*), reuoluyng (in the context of to turn something over in one’s mind *OED* 1597; *MED* cites a.1425), sawcyd (*OED* cites 1592; *MED* cites *BMK*), slory (*OED* cites c.1440; *MED* cites *BMK*), slugge (*OED* cites 1649; *MED* cites *BMK*), spyteful (*OED* cites 1440; *MED* cites *BMK*), sterte (a continental term of abuse for the English; *OED* cites 1673; *MED* cites a.1300), and whelys (both list 1440). There are twenty-four discrepancies.

which both state as 1440. However, the system remains a robust guide or rule of thumb when considering the length of time a particular word might have been in the language, especially when one takes into consideration that my original research has been cross-referenced. In fifty-three cases that I have found, the *Book of Margery Kempe* bears the distinction (at present) of being the first recorded usage; this is either in terms of the *OED* or *MED*, the word itself, a new sense of the word, or sometimes, a phrase.<sup>28</sup> The substantial appendix to this work offers a more extensive analysis of the words themselves, together with colour-coding and explanatory notes. It must also be noted here that a very small minority of words have not been included in the appendix: for example the definite and indefinite articles, certain pronouns, proper nouns, prepositions and conjunctions. It is possible that the appendix may prove to be of some usefulness to future scholars of Margery Kempe's language.

The rationale for using register as the basis for this inquiry is that, arguably, it provides firm linguistic evidence for lexical manipulation, rather than theoretical supposition. I suggest that the composition of vocabulary can be used to determine the relative statuses of characters

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<sup>28</sup> The first recorded usages from the *Book*, either as words, or as a new mode of using an existing word, cited as first in either the *OED* or the *MED*, are: almshiving, (second definition: use with agent nouns), attyd (of a charge: admitted as evidence), bannars (*MED* cites as first), bloberys (*MED*), bolendynys (an Italian coin; *MED*), compassyf (affectionate; *MED* cites as first), compassyfly (not cited in *OED*; first recorded in *MED*), contemptibly (*MED*), cowche (*MED*), diswer (*MED*), dys-ewsyd (*MED*), earnest-peny, faith (as a verb), infortunity, inqwietyng (*MED*), invdirstondabyl (*MED*), to labour (seventh definition: 'to move around or travel, esp. laboriously, with great exertion or difficulty'), languryng, lawdacyon (*MED*), madwoman, malefactor, malandryn (a very interesting word meaning highwayman, ultimately from the Italian 'maladrino'. There is only one other citation in the *OED* of this word - from John Capgrave, a bishop of Lynn which gives it real local character: see chapter three below), man-child, misbeliever, mischievous (the third definition: 'of a person, animal, or disposition: producing mischief or harm; inflicting damage or injury; having a harmful influence or intent.'), obloquy, person (considered as a physical presence), peyr (as in a pair of tongs or bellows), pregnawntly, purse-string, put (before a judge), quemfulnes (*MED*) quotidianly (spelt with a 'c' in *BMK*), redemyd, redemptor, rememorawns, representyng (to depict), resolve (to cause or lapse into a particular emotional state), resort (to revert), ribaldy, sawced (*MED*), slory (*MED*), slugge (*MED*), sorhed (*MED*), sport (sense six: 'with the source of, or a companion in, the amusement, diversion, or entertainment specified.'), spiteful (*MED*), sterte (*MED*), supportacyon, thundirkrakkys, vndrawun (*MED*), voys (followed by a that-clause or how), watyr-dropys (as tears), and well-laboured (the sole quotation for a definition of scholarly or learned, and not listed as a word in the *BMK* glossary). The *Book of Margery Kempe* also offers the first recorded usage of the phrases 'to hit the nail on the head', 'and odd' (denoting an indefinite number), 'mayor's peer', 'Passion Week', 'Our Lady's even', 'plain English', 'his reverence' and 'go to the stations'. 'Passion Week' is, arguably, an example of where there is some disconnect between oral and written traditions, as it stretches credulity to think that 'Passion Week' did not exist orally before c1438.

within *The Book of Margery Kempe*, and that a vocabulary that is mostly French and Latinate in terms of its origins, as well as containing relatively recent coinages, could be indicative of a character that Margery wishes to appear at some advantage. I am, therefore, working on the principle that words of Old English origin or naturalised French importations (for instance words that entered the language in the twelfth century, and therefore had already enjoyed around three hundred years in English by c.1438) characterise a simple register that could communicate humility or lowly status. Later French importations and words derived from Latin would indicate a more sophisticated, broader vocabulary, and may therefore suggest a higher status. On this basis, if we take the main characters of the *Book*, a natural assumption would be that Margery, the 'humble creatur', would use a vocabulary that reflected her humility. It would be drawn, therefore, from mostly Old English and naturalised French. A second assumption might be that Christ, an exalted figure, would be given a vocabulary that reflected his status: Latinate, recent, and sophisticated, to exemplify his elevated position and to provide necessary contrast between himself and Margery. The difference in their statuses would, therefore, be demonstrated throughout the *Book*, via their vocabulary, and would place each in their 'correct' position: Christ is high and Margery is low. The Virgin Mary, moreover, plays a significant role within the work, and one might assume that her vocabulary would mirror that of her son: divinely elevated, with Margery occupying a position beneath her.

Close examination of the language which Margery attributes to her protagonists suggests a more complex picture, however. As we shall see, Christ's vocabulary is that of an everyman, both sophisticated and humble, and he is even capable of employing parlance local to fourteenth-century Lynn, lending an almost earthy and unpretentious tone to his words. Margery's vocabulary comprises some extremely stylish Latinate and later French importations, suggesting that her humility is not as absolute as she presents. Mary, in a contrast

that is almost stark, is given a lexical range that is almost entirely made up of Old English and early French imports. This could be consistent with her position as the humblest of all biblical characters in her suffering, sorrow and forbearance; or it could be seen as a subtle undermining of her status by Margery who consciously shifts her own vocabulary upwards in order to usurp Mary's position. The effect of this is twofold: it brings Margery closer to Christ, and it helps to suggest that Margery has a quasi-divine status; indeed, one that is almost superior to Mary. This, of course, brings with it certain complications that must be explored. The Christian ethos of humility is rooted in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'<sup>29</sup> This is reinforced, again in Matthew: 'And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.'<sup>30</sup> To be humble, therefore, is to be exalted, which is, in itself, a rather paradoxical concept. If inheriting the earth is the ultimate reward for meekness, then it has the same notions of grandeur, and is couched in the same language as those who are put down from their thrones: majesty exists for the humble, just as it exists for the mighty. Christianity retains the trappings and symbolism of conventional ideas of power for its most humble, yet the established mode is to reject them. In brief, in order to achieve exaltation, one has to reject it. This paradox perhaps accounts for the occasionally contorted phrasing of Margery's *Book*, as she seeks to express something that is humble, the mere utterance of which actually invalidates its humility.

It is also my aim to explore what this attention to register can reveal about the *Book* in relation to the genre of hagiography. Having analysed the words used by Margery, certain chapters will also look at the text's literary form. It is my contention that subtle alterations in register aid the

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<sup>29</sup> For the complete Sermon, see Matthew 5-7.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew, 23:12.

reception of the work as a possible attempt to construct a *vita*, with a potential aim of encouraging a bid for recognition or the beginning of a local cult. The pitfall of such an endeavour brings us back the Christian paradox of exalted humility. Margery was also, as we shall discover, influenced by the lives of saints with which she was highly familiar, creating an account of her life that borrowed from the conventions of that genre, thus creating a more convincing example of it. I will attempt to examine the contention that Margery is producing a hagiography, and analyse her ability to handle her material and the registers given to other characters, in order to ascertain whether vocabulary has been used to portray herself more favourably. If this proves to be a reasonable argument, this would have had a bearing on the *Book's* contemporary critical reception, and may have helped to promote Margery as a local holy woman deserving of a cult and wider recognition, as well as providing the vital saint's life that the above entailed. That she was ultimately not recognised as such perhaps is indicative of the spiritual preferences of her country, rather than a lack of effort on her part.

The structure of this thesis will first examine the social, religious and cultural milieu of fourteenth-century Lynn, in an attempt to situate Margery within it. This will provide necessary understanding of the context in which she grew up, and therefore provide us with possible insights into her choice of language. Secondly, I have undertaken a survey of other female mystics of the medieval period, and will discuss to what extent Margery fits into the framework that they created. The remaining chapters will be more linguistic in nature, analysing her use of language and register when dealing with her detractors, other women characters (including the Virgin Mary) and, of course, Christ himself, with a concomitant aim of analysing whether her *Book* can be viewed as a hagiography.

Although the notion of reading the *Book* as hagiography has been raised by several researchers, the *Book of Margery Kempe* has not been analysed so thoroughly in terms of its language. I hope to address some of the questions raised by undertaking a linguistic survey, analysing the shift in relationships that may occur as a result of register manipulation, the effect that these shifts have on an audience, and to ask whether in doing so, Margery might have intended to facilitate her own claim to sainthood – the implications of which are, in themselves, fascinating.

## Chapter One

### *'I am of Lynne in Norfolk'*: Margery Kempe and Medieval Lynn

#### I: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a description of the bustling medieval port town of King's Lynn (then Bishop's Lynn, or simply Lynn), and to situate Margery within this context so that some preliminary conclusions may be drawn as to any formative effect that this location might have had on her character, her frames of reference, and in what ways it shaped her attitudes. This is a necessary undertaking, as Margery's frequent allusions to her place of birth and particularly her father's place and status within it (and by extension, her own social standing), indicate that she herself viewed her town as a source of pride. In addition, Lynn was a particularly important commercial centre; it was part of the Hanseatic League, provided a gateway to Scandinavia, Germany and the Balkans, and offered vital inland waterways for transportation of goods. Margery's family engaged heavily in the town's brisk trade, bringing them financial prosperity. Norfolk, moreover, was also a place of deep spirituality; a spirituality which was perhaps not always expressed in an orthodox manner, as we shall see. Additionally, Lynn had a marked influence on Margery's language, as we shall see in chapter three of this thesis; instances of local language provide some most interesting insights into the work. Margery is a product of both this highly commercialised and financial world, and the world of its religious expression, which is why a brief sojourn to Lynn will provide a useful insight into Margery's own expression of piety.

Despite one monk's assertion that the best place for Margery Kempe might be the inside of an anchoress's cell,<sup>31</sup> she remained very much a creature of this world. Her visions are imbued with a stalwart practicality, concerning herself with swaddling clothes for the newly delivered infant Christ<sup>32</sup> or providing a restorative drink for Mary after the Crucifixion.<sup>33</sup> It could be that Margery's no-nonsense mysticism was influenced by her own social and cultural setting. As a wealthy merchant's daughter, she was obviously accustomed to (and perhaps even expected) a certain standard of living. She wore her social pedigree rather heavily, as evidenced by the manner in which she berated her husband's lack of social standing in comparison with her own,<sup>34</sup> and she belonged to the mercantile elite of Lynn. She was not, however, aristocratic, and although used to servants, she also had a clear understanding of domestic affairs and the manner in which they had to be conducted. The remarkably grounded quality of Margery's visions clearly owes much to her upbringing, business ventures, and to Lynn itself.

This chapter will offer an economic, commercial and cultural history of the town, followed by a discussion of its religious houses and affiliations, subsequently situating Margery in the context of her local, national and international relationships with members of the clergy, offering a commentary on monks, friars and St Margaret's Church. It will then analyse Margery's relationship with any local convents or religious women. Finally, this chapter will discuss Margery's family, particularly focusing on the achievements and success of her father and how Margery uses him as a means of providing security for herself during some of her more difficult life events. On the basis of this, we will be able to situate Margery within the environment that helped to mould her responses and religious outlook.

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<sup>31</sup> *BMK*: 'I wold þow wer closyd in an hows of ston, þat þer schuld no man speke wyth þe,' p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> *BMK*: 'Also sche beggyd owyr Lady fayr whyte clothys & kerchys for the swathyn in hir Sone', p.19.

<sup>33</sup> *BMK*: 'þan sche mad for owr Lady good cawdel browt it hir to comfortyn hir.' p. 195.

<sup>34</sup> *BMK*: '[she] seyde þat sche was comyn of worthy kenred, -hym semyd neuyr for to a weddyd hir, for hir fadyr was sum-tyme meyr of þe town N,' p. 9.

## I: Medieval Lynn

The site of Lynn stands at the south-eastern side of the Wash estuary, and the name of Lynn derives from a Celtic term meaning pool, referencing its location.<sup>35</sup> The most recent edition of the *Domesday Book* notes that ‘Eleventh-century Norfolk was a county much influenced by water. In mills and fisheries it easily outnumbered any of its eastern neighbours. And in the wet areas to the east and west, where broadland and fenland both made agriculture difficult, salt pans and sheep held sway.’<sup>36</sup> Of the famous marshland of the surrounding area, Clarissa W. Atkinson comments:

The fens were lonely, unhealthy and frightening. They were described in the eighth-century Life of St. Guthlac as a place of ‘manifold horrors and fears, and the loneliness of the wild wilderness’.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly, the fens made large-scale settlement rather difficult (the magnificent Ely cathedral in Cambridgeshire was tricky to access, surrounded on all sides by water or marsh; the name itself suggests that eels were a notable presence), but despite the marshy ground, medieval Lynn was ideally situated, standing on a convergence of sea, river and road routes. The site was close to the major east-west land route across the fens, and it utilised the rich agricultural soil produced by the marshlands of West Norfolk, and amply supported sheep and cattle. In the

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<sup>35</sup> It was known as Bishop's Lynn during Margery's time, as it was a seigniorship of the Bishop of Norwich. Henry VIII changed it to its present form of King's Lynn in 1537 when he assumed lordship. For interesting contextualising material see chapter two of Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World* (Harlow, 2002); Margaret Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, (Norwich, 1995), pp. 61ff; chapter three of Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: the Book and the World of Margery Kempe*, (Ithaca and London, 1983), pp. 67-102; and Dorothy M. Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn* (Oxford, 1984).

<sup>36</sup> *The Domesday Book*, ed. Thomas Hinde, (London, 1986) p. 182.

<sup>37</sup> Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe*, p. 67-68.

opposite direction lay sea routes to Europe, and Lynn's concentrated wealth during the middle ages came about as a result of its enviable location as a trading post.<sup>38</sup>

Thanks to the tidal estuary, early settlers in Lynn were able to establish salt harvesting operations in the marshes, and it was this process that accounts for the unusual system of watercourses, known locally as fleets, that intersected at various points in the settlement. As the settlement grew taller, however, it was nevertheless impossible to stave off the estuary and so the village became crisscrossed by watercourses of varying sizes. Today, the streets bear nothing of their watery past, except in their names: Millfleet and Purfleet are two such, but it was between these two fleets, to the south and north respectively, that the body of the town grew up.<sup>39</sup> The Wash coast, therefore, was an attractive prospect for traders in search of the preserving powers of salt for meat and fish, a demand that was 'inexhaustible'.<sup>40</sup>

It is, however, during the thirteenth century that Lynn achieved spectacular commercial success. The town became one of the country's most prosperous ports, and items produced by agriculture were its principal exports:

Furs, hawks, iron and other raw ores, brass, mill-stones, worked marble, wax, timber of all kinds, wine, dye-stuffs, spices and fish come in from abroad, corn and ale, lead, wool and later cloth, come in from the hinterland and are shipped abroad, or coastwise to the north or to London.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the history of King's Lynn, see Dorothy M. Owen's exacting study, *The Making of King's Lynn*. For a particularly helpful map of medieval Lynn, see *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. xv.

<sup>39</sup> Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 64.

<sup>40</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.

The fish that was imported was then salted on-site and shipped inland. Margery mentions stockfish ('which applied to cod, codling, haddock and other similar fish'<sup>42</sup>) on more than one occasion in her *Book*, and this apparently highly sought-after dried product was a thriving local industry; note Stockfish Row running southwards off the Tuesday Market and parallel to the Great Ouse, in early maps. The bustling trade allowed taxes to be levied, and as the century wore on, a greater variety of products were liable for taxation:

They were now taking toll from furs, an incredible variety of timber, much of it ready cut, from wax, wine, fish, spices, cloth-makers' requisites such as alum, potash, woad and teazles, metals like iron, steel and brass, leather and manufactures such as millstone and querns, bells and bowls.<sup>43</sup>

Lynn traded widely, covering Scandinavia, the Baltic, the Low Countries, Flanders, France and Spain.<sup>44</sup> Margery's willingness to venture to an extraordinary number of overseas locations perhaps stems from her witnessing the relentless ingress and egress of shipping in the town's port. She, of course, had personal connections with Germany, having a German daughter-in-law and grandchild whom she accompanies back to the continent after the death of her son.<sup>45</sup> The cosmopolitan make-up of Lynn is, therefore, very much part of Margery's domestic existence. Immigrants from these countries also became part of the social milieu of Lynn, as it was part of the Hanseatic League, and there was a Jewish quarter in the New Land.<sup>46</sup> Over the next two centuries, its imports diversified, and during the Scottish and French wars of the

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<sup>42</sup> Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 62. See chapter three of this thesis of a full discussion of Margery's use of this word.

<sup>43</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> For a more wide-ranging discussion of the nations involved in trade with Lynn and the trades themselves, see Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, pp. 44-51.

<sup>45</sup> *BMK*, p. 225.

<sup>46</sup> Note Jews Lane at the south-west corner of the Tuesday Market Place. The Jewish community became subject to anti-Semitic attacks during January 1189/90 at the time of the third crusade. See Owen, p. 270, document 327. German merchants integrated into Lynn, and in 1310 'the mayor and burgesses had confirmed their privileges as a community, and indeed, some of them had burghership. See Goodman, p. 19.

fourteenth century, Lynn was an important market for provisioning royal armies: 'England was at war with Scotland or France, or both, for most of Margery Kempe's lifetime'.<sup>47</sup>

Although the town came under the supervision of the Bishop of Norwich, local government also relied on the mercantile elite of the town holding positions of power. As the town grew, the rich jostled for a greater say in how the affairs of the town were conducted, brushing up against the ecclesiastical authority of Norwich. Discontent lingered into the fourteenth century, but came to a head in 1377, when Margery's father was mayor. In making a visit to the town, Bishop Despenser became embroiled in a row with the mayor and the local government concerning precedence: Despenser required that he, too, be preceded by a macebearer as well as the mayor. The secular governors of Lynn responded that this course of action may prove inflammatory to the common townsfolk, but the bishop pressed ahead:

The procession had not got far before the commons, declaring that his action was contrary to their liberties, closed the town gates, bent their bows and shot at him. It may be that they only intended to scare him off. The account noted that it was in the fading evening light that he was hit, and his horse and one of his men injured.<sup>48</sup>

On this occasion, Lynn was forced to acquiesce to the Crown, which, after an inquiry, had backed Despenser. A hundred pounds was paid in compensation, together with the donation of a large candle for the Holy Trinity Church in Norwich. Margery's father's involvement in the shifting political landscape of the time would have afforded Margery something of an insight into the difficult relationships that ecclesiastical and secular governments sometimes endured, and as we shall see, Margery herself was not cowed by the thought of standing up to members

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<sup>47</sup> Charity Scott Stokes, 'Margery Kempe: her Life and the Early History of her Book', *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol 25, no. 1/2 (March/June 1999), pp. 9-68, p. 12; accessed through JSTOR 15/01/2015.

<sup>48</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p 24. The full account of this story can be found on, pp. 23-5, and also Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p. 76-8.

of the Church, if the occasion required. Her political family perhaps equipped her with some of the skills necessary for defending herself during the more formal confrontations that became a feature of her existence.

The Holy Trinity Guild, the most powerful guild in Lynn, was the seat of local government in Lynn, and mayors and chamberlains were drawn from its ranks. Its commercial ‘activities were undoubtedly of central importance in the town’,<sup>49</sup> but like all guilds in Lynn, Holy Trinity had religious affiliations and performed large amounts of charity work.<sup>50</sup> The guild itself extracted a large joining fee for membership, and also operated a system of financial penalties if members were caught in infringement of the rules.<sup>51</sup> Compared to the fiscal reserves of local government which survived on a haphazard system of taxation, the guildhalls were exceedingly wealthy.<sup>52</sup> Wives and widows, moreover, were able to join the Holy Trinity Guildhall, and Margery Kempe became a member towards the end of her life. If one gained access to this elite establishment, important offices were open; although it seems the case that these duties were circulated amongst the town elite: ‘the names of a few families appear and reappear on the lists of officeholders.’<sup>53</sup> We only have to look at Margery’s family (and her father in particular) to understand that medieval Lynn was a small oligarchy, where the leading families were elected to positions of both economic and political power: ‘Power, status and wealth revolved around

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<sup>49</sup> Owen, *The Making of King’s Lynn*, p. 61.

<sup>50</sup> See Owen, *The Making of King’s Lynn*, pp. 60-3. The Guild of the Holy Trinity had its own chapel in St Margaret’s and contributed to various charitable causes including supporting lepers and the blind, giving alms to anchorites and hermits, and helping those members who had fallen on hard times.

<sup>51</sup> See Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 67-8.

<sup>52</sup> According to Goodman, the population of Lynn in 1377 was 4,691, and the size of loans made to the Crown on various occasions suggests that it had one of the largest concentrations of urban wealth in England.

<sup>53</sup> Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p. 76.

a small cadre of merchants whose careers and family dynasties compared equally worshipful, and some even more so, than Margery's father',<sup>54</sup>

Two other guilds of Lynn existed, although these did not wield the same level of power as that of the Holy Trinity. The Corpus Christi Guildhall, of which nothing survives, was located in modern day King Street, as is St George's Guildhall, England's largest surviving medieval guildhall, which now belongs to the National Trust and is used as a theatre and art house cinema; it dates from 1404. The Guildhall of the Holy Trinity itself is mentioned in dramatic style in Margery's *Book*, when she witnesses the burning down of the original building, which was located close to St Margaret's church:

On a tyme ther happyd to be a gret fyer in Lynne Bischop, wech fyer brent up the gylde halle of the Trinité and in the same town, an hydows fyer and grevows ful likely to a brent the parysch chereh dedicate in the honowr of Seynt Margarete, a solempne place and rychely honowryd, and also al the town, ne had grace ne myracle ne ben.<sup>55</sup>

Her prayers of intercession that bring about quenching snowfall will be dealt with later in this thesis as one of the 'miracles' performed by Margery, but the rebuilt guildhall of the Holy Trinity is situated on the Saturday Market Place, dating from 1422 and bears a distinctive chequered façade of flint. The guildhall today is the Town Hall of King's Lynn and houses its civic records.

Of the occupations of the townsfolk, besides merchants, Owen mentions that the 'earliest trades to be differentiated are those concerned with the preparation of food and drink: baker, brewer,

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<sup>54</sup> Michael D. Myers, 'A Fictional True-Self: Margery Kempe and the Social Reality of the Merchant Elite of King's Lynn', *Albion*, vol 31, No. 3 (Autumn 1999), pp. 377-94, p. 381. Accessed via JSTOR, 28/07/15.

<sup>55</sup> *BMK*, p. 162.

butcher, candler, cook, fishmonger, miller, vintner/taverner'.<sup>56</sup> Fourteenth-century poll tax records give some hint as to occupation through surname, or through brief description: 'sadeller', 'candeller', 'wollewynder', 'draper', 'carpentarius', 'mariner', 'schipwryth', 'webster', 'loksmyth', 'schipman', 'taliour' and one mention of a 'braciatrix'.<sup>57</sup> The final occupation is worth closer investigation, as it is not immediately obvious as to its meaning and the feminine '-trix' suffix suggests that this pertains to a woman. The first name of the person is missing: '12d ... Hamond vidua braciatrix',<sup>58</sup> but in paying 12 pence in poll tax she is at the highest end of the tax bracket. Her occupation is that of a brewer, and it worth reminding ourselves that Margery, too, undertook this enterprise, ending in misadventure:

Sche gan to brewyn was on of þe grettest brewers in þe town N a iij zer or iiij tyl sche lost mech good, for sche had neuyr vre þerto. For thow sche had neuyr so good seruawntys & cunnyng in brewng, zet it wold neuyr preuyn wyth hem, For, whan þe ale was as fayr standing vndyr berm as any man mygth se, soddenly þe berm wold falln down þat alle þe ale was lost euery brewyng aftyr oþer.<sup>59</sup>

It is, however, extremely interesting to note the existence of at least one other fourteenth-century female brewer (and presumably there must have been others), indicating not only that Margery had an entrepreneurial spirit that complemented the commercial nature of Lynn, but also that it was entirely acceptable for women to do so. Having given up brewing, Margery attempts to earn her living by a horse-mill, but the horses prove recalcitrant and she is moved to perform acts of penance as a way of removing the apparent curse.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> All found in Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, documents 279 and 280, pp. 221-34.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, document 280, p. 234.

<sup>59</sup> *BMK*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>60</sup> See *BMK*, pp. 10-11.

'Braciatrix' derives from the Medieval Latin 'brachiator', a brewer, and Anglo-Norman 'brachetour', giving rise to the male version, 'brachetour' in English. The *OED* gives the earliest recorded date of brachetour as 1598; braciatrix is not listed as a word at all.<sup>61</sup> Nor does it occur in the *MED*, but there are a number of examples of it being used in statutes and civic rolls,<sup>62</sup> and even as a surname: a Letitia Braciatrix existed alongside the more French-sounding le Braceresse, and an Anglicised Braceress.<sup>63</sup> In addition, there are listed a number of occupations pertaining to the leather industry, and also slightly more niche skills, including bell-makers, soap-makers, spoon-makers and spur-makers.<sup>64</sup> However, the skills and occupations practised in Lynn were those required by the town for its smooth running, rather than for export: 'Only the coverlet weavers and their ancillary workers seem to have existed in sufficient numbers to suggest a large manufacture for sale outside the town.'<sup>65</sup> Goodman also refers to this hive of coverlet-making activity.<sup>66</sup>

Lynn was, therefore, a varied and bustling town and port, administered by the Bishop of Norwich, with its local government drawn from members of the most prestigious guild, the Holy Trinity. Increasingly, it had a cosmopolitan population, and due to its status as a Hanseatic town, it was a conduit of a highly diverse range of goods to and from a diverse range of countries. The effect that this cosmopolitan context might have had on Margery's vocabulary and use of language is a tantalising prospect, and indeed, in one outstanding example, is perhaps entirely due to her being a daughter of Lynn.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22395?rskey=3hM0f0&result=5#>, date accessed 01/04/15.

<sup>62</sup> Bertha Haven Putnam, ed., *Yorkshire Sessions of the Peace*, (Cambridge, 2013), p. 54. Accessed via Google Books, 01/04/15.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Wareing Endell Bardsley, *English Surnames: Their Sources and Significations*, (London, 1815) p. 528. Accessed via Google Books, 01/04/15. Neither the *OED* nor the *MED* list 'braceress' as an alternative to braciatrix.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p. 58.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>66</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> The example is that of 'malendrynes', p. 85 of *BMK*. For a full discussion of this, and the part Lynn has to play, see chapter three of this thesis.

## II: Churches and Religious Houses

The secular preoccupations of commerce, the local economy and trade were the chief concerns of the vast majority of Lynn's inhabitants, but the town was also well-served in terms of its spiritual provision. Margery was able to draw on an array of outlets for spiritual guidance, and the rich and multifaceted assortment of institutions and orders in the town and its surroundings is reflected in Margery's religious experiences. She confesses to an anchorite of the Dominican house,<sup>68</sup> she relies on the friendship and guidance of Master Aleyn, a Carmelite friar,<sup>69</sup> on the occasionally stern words of Robert Spryngolde, her principal confessor and priest of Lynn,<sup>70</sup> on the friendship and defence of Richard of Caister, the priest of St Stephen's in Norwich,<sup>71</sup> is read to by a young priest for a number of years,<sup>72</sup> and visits Julian of Norwich for spiritual reassurance.<sup>73</sup> She is also defended in Lynn by an Austin friar, and also by a Dominican friar, Thomas Custawns.<sup>74</sup> The range of her other spiritual advisors, of course, extends further afield, but within Lynn and Norwich alone, Margery experiences an extensive breadth of pastoral care. In the following pages, I will provide a brief overview of the religious milieu that Margery would have experienced.

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<sup>68</sup> *BMK*, p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> *BMK*, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Referred to as 'principal confessor' see *BMK*, p. 169. For his stern words on her departure without permission to Danzig with her daughter-in-law see p. 247.

<sup>71</sup> *BMK*, p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> *BMK*, pp. 142-44.

<sup>73</sup> *BMK*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>74</sup> *BMK*, pp. 165-67.

## The Monasteries and the Friars.<sup>75</sup>

With the founding of St Margret's church came a small priory of Benedictine monks from Norwich: 'three or four monks lived [there] for spells, though never, it seems, for their whole religious life.'<sup>76</sup> The house owned a number of properties around Lynn, and it was able to retain the profits from the Saturday market. Nothing of the priory buildings remain, except for an archway which has been absorbed into another building. The priory inventories provide a snapshot of information as to the living standard of the tiny number of monks who lived there: 'included in the inventory are such items as tables, chairs, benches and chests, cushions, quilts, bed-covers, tapestries, wall-hangings, fine red curtains, candelabras and gold and silver plate.'<sup>77</sup> They are comfortable, but not overly ostentatious. It does not appear, however, that the monks were amongst the town's most prominent spiritual guides: 'the monks were important as landlords... as employers, and very occasionally, as religious directors, though less often than the friars.'<sup>78</sup>

Margery would, of course, have been fully aware of the monastery at St Margaret's and she also visited the Benedictine house of nuns at Carrow, where Julian of Norwich was immured. In addition, Norfolk had sizeable Benedictine houses in Yarmouth and Aldebury, Binham, Wymondham, and a lesser house at Blackborough, near Lynn.<sup>79</sup> Canterbury Cathedral,

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<sup>75</sup>For an overview of monastic origins and life, see C.H Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, (London and New York, 1984), chapter 1, p.1 ff. Lawrence's book gives a good overview of the establishment and administration of both the monastic and mendicant orders. See also: John R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, (Oxford, 1968); C. N. L. Brooke and W. Swan, *The Monastic World* (London, 1974); and David Knowles, *The Religious Orders of England* (Cambridge, 1948) and also *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge, 1949).

<sup>76</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p. 27.

<sup>77</sup> Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 76.

<sup>78</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p.27.

<sup>79</sup> Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 108.

moreover, was attached to a Benedictine abbey (the foremost in the land), and it was here that Margery encountered some aggressive monks:

‘I wold þow were closyd in an hows of ston þat þer schld no man speke wyth þe.’ ‘A, ser,’ sche seyde, ‘þe schuld meyn teyn Goddys seruawntys, & 3 earn þe first þat heldyn a-3ens hem. Owyr lord amend 3ow.’<sup>80</sup>

The monks do not know what to make of her, and Margery continues to confound them by reciting a moral tale, the consequence of which is the suggestion that she be burnt.<sup>81</sup> Her exposure to and dealings with Benedictine monks on this occasion, therefore, were fairly strained; of course, it is not possible to know the extent or cordiality of her relationship with the monks of St Margaret’s as Margery does not give sufficient information on this point.

It is, perhaps, Margery’s relationship with the mendicants that is worth further exploration, however, as she was acquainted with several of the orders that resided in Lynn. Unlike the enclosed orders, the mendicant mission was to both preach and minister to the citizens of the towns.

Lynn had four orders of friars: Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Augustinians. The Franciscans established their friary and church between present day Tower and St. James streets, the (until recently leaning) ruins of which are a Lynn landmark. The Dominicans located themselves to the north of the Purfleet, in what is now the appropriately named

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<sup>80</sup> *BMK*, p. 27-8.

<sup>81</sup> See the chapter six of this thesis for a more comprehensive account of this example of the persecution of Margery Kempe.

Blackfriars Street; the Carmelites settled in South Lynn and the Austin Friars found a home near the Tuesday Market Place; parts of the friary walls are still visible in Austin Street.

The Grey Friars, as the Franciscans became known, had a religious house in Lynn, and their legacy includes the remains of their friary near Tower Street. Their legacy, however, is not enhanced by Margery, who makes no mention whatsoever of Lynn's Franciscans during the course of her *Book*. Although this could, one supposes, be due to a lack of enthusiasm on their part rather than hers, Margery does appear to gain the support of various Franciscans throughout her life.<sup>82</sup> During her sojourn to the Holy Land, Margery is ostracised by the other travellers but the Grey Friars demonstrate their natural pastoral care:

And þen þe Grey Frerys which had led hir fro place to place receyued hir in-to hem & sett wyth hir wyth hem at þe mete þat sche xuld not etyn a-lone.<sup>83</sup>

On this occasion, her fame precedes her as the Franciscan goes on to inquire '3ft þat wer þe woman of Ingland þe which þei had herd seyde spak wyth God.'<sup>84</sup> It is the Grey Friars who give comfort to her when she has been abandoned by her countrymen on Mount Quarentyne, and again when two Franciscans provide escort to Rome.<sup>85</sup> In Assisi, Margery tells a Franciscan of her conversations with Christ, and he exhorts her to be thankful.<sup>86</sup> Finally, Margery seeks the advice of a Grey Friar when debating as to whether she should accompany her daughter-in-law back to Danzig after the death of her son. He is described as 'a worschepful clerk, a doctowr

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<sup>82</sup> Although Goodman also posits the idea that perhaps the Franciscans of Lynn did not have a brother so well-versed in the meditative literature which provided validation for Margery's brand of devotion. See *Margery Kempe and her World* p. 87.

<sup>83</sup> *BMK*, p. 73.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>85</sup> *BMK*, p. 77.

<sup>86</sup> *BMK*, p. 79.

of diuinyte which had herd of hir leuyng & hir felyngys be-for-tyme.<sup>87</sup> It appears that he had been sympathetic to her cause.

On the other hand, it was a Franciscan that publically denounced Margery and actively preached against her, causing some of her previous allies to question her authenticity. The episode begins when she arrives to hear a celebrated and famous preacher in Lynn.<sup>88</sup> He is warned about her eccentricity by the parish priest. Unable to keep the tears from bursting forth (after a valiant struggle), Margery 'brast owte wyth a gret cry & cryid wondyr sor.'<sup>89</sup> The preacher puts up with the noise initially, but the second time he preaches he comments:

'I wolde þis woman wer owte of þe chirche; sche noyith þe pepil'. Summe þat weryn hir frendys answeyd a-zen 'Sir haue hir excusyd. Sche may not withstand it.' Þan meche pepil turnyd a-zen hir & wer ful glad þat þe good frer held azen hir. Þan seyde summe men þat sche had a deuyl wythinne hir... Ne he wolde not suffyr hir to her hys sermown les þan sche wolde leuyn hir sobbyng & crying.<sup>90</sup>

Further intercessions on Margery's behalf by priests prove fruitless, including the efforts of a Carmelite friar. However, the episode worsens when the Franciscan preacher actually begins energetically to preach against her, with some degree of vehemence. Margery contextualises the incident by commenting on the extreme popularity of the preacher, whom people would follow on his circuit from 'town to town.'<sup>91</sup> One presumes this comment is included in order

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<sup>87</sup> *BMK*, p. 227.

<sup>88</sup> Susan Dickman identifies this preacher as 'probably William Melton'. See 'Margery Kempe and the Continental tradition of the Pious Woman' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Glasscoe, (Suffolk, 1984), pp. 150-68.

<sup>89</sup> *BMK*, p. 149.

<sup>90</sup> *BMK*, p. 149-50.

<sup>91</sup> *BMK*, p. 152.

to amplify the magnitude of the crime committed against her and to give an impression of the multitude who witness it; the more widely she is despised, the closer she becomes to Christ:

Neuyr-þe-lesse as þis day he prechyd meche a-geyn þe seyde creatur, not expressing hir name, but so he expletyd hys conseytys þat men vndirstod wel þat he ment hir.<sup>92</sup>

The preacher ends his diatribe with a warning that he will ‘smytyn þe nayl on þe hed... þat it schal schamyn alle hyr mayntenowrys.’<sup>93</sup> Margery’s experiences with the Grey Friars are, therefore, somewhat mixed.

Lynn’s Dominican friary (the second mendicant order) was located to the north of the Purfleet, and their visible legacy today consists of a street name: Blackfriars Road. Margery’s experiences with the Dominicans (or Frer Prechowrys, as Margery calls them) are, again, a rather mixed affair. Lynn’s Blackfriars are explicitly mentioned when she is instructed by Christ to visit ‘þe ankyr at þe Frer Prechowrys, & schew hym my preuyteys & my counselys... and werk aftyr hys counsel, for my spyrit xal speke in hym to þe.’<sup>94</sup> The Dominican anchor becomes Margery’s confessor, who stoutly defends Margery against the slander of others, who recommended that he distance himself from her: ‘I durst wel say ze wer a good woman, a louere of God, & hyly inspired wyth þe Holy Gost.’<sup>95</sup> He remains Margery’s confessor until his death after her return from the Holy Land in 1415. Goodman also points out that it is in the Dominican chapel that Margery receives her vision of the Virgin and Child.<sup>96</sup> Other positive encounters with the Black Friars include the moment when a Dominican forms one of the party that Margery prays to when she is examined for heresy by the Mayor of Leicester, in which she

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<sup>92</sup> *BMK*, p. 152.

<sup>93</sup> *BMK*, p. 152. Interestingly, the *OED* cites this example as the first recorded usage of the phrase ‘to hit the nail on the head’ meaning ‘to get to the heart of the matter.’

<sup>94</sup> *BMK*, p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> *BMK*, p. 37.

<sup>96</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 88.

describes the friar as a 'worschipful clerke',<sup>97</sup> and the occasion on which a Dominican defends her loud crying. The order was holding a chapter meeting in Lynn, and Master Custawns, who appears to have some experience of Margery's ways, approves of her weeping and even champions it to others:

Thus þe seyde doctowr, confermyng hir crying & hir wepyng, seyde it was a gracyows & a special 3yft of God, & God was hyly magnifyed in hys 3yft. And þan þe same doctowr went to an-oþer doctowr of diuinite which was assigned to prechyn in þe parisch cherche be-for al þe pepil, prayng hym þat 3yf þe sayd creatur cryid er wept at hys sermown þat he wolde suffyr it mekely & no-thing ben a-baschyd þerof ne not spekyn þer-a-geyns.<sup>98</sup>

Although it is impossible to state whether the relationship that Margery had with the Dominicans was better than her relationship with the Franciscans, it is possible to suggest that she seems to have enjoyed a more harmonious relationship with the Lynn Dominicans, whom she mentions on a number of occasions, and who appear to endorse her practices and way of life. However, just as with the Franciscans, Margery also meets with some difficulty when she encounters Dominicans who are not from Lynn. About to cross the Humber, Margery is recognised by two friars who tell two yeomen who she is, resulting in her arrest. Taken before the Archbishop of York, it is a Dominican friar who accuses her:

þe frer cam forth & seyde þat sche disprauyd alle men of Holy Chirche & mech ylle langage he vttryd þat tyme of hit. Also he seyde þat sche xulde a be brent at Lynne, had hys ordyr, þat was Frer Prechowrys, ne be.<sup>99</sup>

The actions of these Dominican friars certainly causes Margery some trouble, but it is perhaps more interesting to note that her accuser considers the actions of the Dominican friary in Lynn to have been significant in keeping Margery from the flames. This may well be a bit of licence

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<sup>97</sup> *BMK*, p. 116.

<sup>98</sup> *BMK*, p. 166.

<sup>99</sup> *BMK*, p. 132.

on the part of a man attempting to drum up charges against her, but it serves to illustrate the closeness of the relationship between the Lynn Dominicans and Margery, and their sympathetic understanding of her; even if it is a case of rumour regarding the potential burning, this friar knows something of the quiet endorsement that his order gives to her.

The White Friars, or Carmelites, had a friary to the south in Lynn. Originating on Mount Carmel, they were a rigorous order which placed high importance on learning:

Austerity was the hallmark of the regime, strict silence being observed except when pastoral duties as confessors or spiritual advisers demanded otherwise. Their intellectual training was stringent and protracted, a doctorate only being awarded at the age of thirty-two or more, after eighteen years of study.<sup>100</sup>

Aleyn of Lynn, a Carmelite, becomes a particular friend of Margery, believing that her gift of tears was a genuine bestowal by the Holy Spirit. There are two potential candidates as to the identity of Aleyn:

Meech and Allen identified him as the writer Alan of Lynn, a Cambridge Doctor of Divinity, born c. 1348, who died after 1423. Another possible identification is with Aleyn Gaywood, one of the Carmelites of Lynn who testified there for the Court of Chivalry in 1408.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 132.

<sup>101</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 88. If Alan of Lynn, Goodman notes that the sixteenth-century 'biographer and bibliophile John Bale named him as the author of a number of works, including indices 'In revelations Brigittae'... If his identification with Master Aleyn is accepted, Margery had as one of her mentors one of the most diligent and learned scholars among the religious in England of his day,' p. 88-9. Aleyn's knowledge of Bridget of Sweden clearly has resonances for Margery, who, as we shall see in the next chapter, used Bridget very much as a role model for her own religious life.

It is Aleyn, one presumes, that defends her against the aforementioned Franciscan friar who preaches vigorously against her,<sup>102</sup> and it is he who declares Margery's brush with death when a portion of masonry falls from the roof of St Margaret's to be a miracle:

Maystyr Aleyn, a Whyte Frer, heryng of þis wondrous werk, inqwired of þis creature alle þe forme of þis processe. He, desyryng þe werk of God to be magnyfyed, gat hym þe same ston þat fel up-on hir bakke & way it, & sythen he gat hym þe treys ende þat fel up-on hir hed which oon of þe kepars of þe church had leyd in þe fyre to bren it. And þis worschepful doctowr seyde it was a gret miracle & ower Lord was heyly to be magnified for þe preseruynge of þis creatur a-zen þe malice of hir enmy, and teld it mech pepyl.<sup>103</sup>

This rather lengthy quotation deserves to be cited fully, as it highlights several of the themes with which this thesis will be concerned. The stunning preservation of Margery, the use of the word 'miracle' and Aleyn's declaration and validation of the event combine to suggest a certain saintliness on Margery's part – a portrayal that will later be argued to be intentional. Margery's relationship with Aleyn of Lynn, however, is imperilled when he is ordered to stop speaking to her, or to answer her questions.<sup>104</sup> After an illness on his part, however, the pair are able to recommence their former conversations. There is no doubt that the Carmelite Aleyn played an instrumental role in establishing (or at least supporting) Margery's credentials as a holy woman in her home town.

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<sup>102</sup> In a preamble to Aleyn's defence of her, Margery describes him as 'a worschepful doctowr of diuinite, a White Frer, a solem clerk & elde doctowr, & a wel-a-preuyd, which had knowyn þe sayd creatur many many ȝeris of hir lyfe & beleuyd þe grace þat God wrowt in hir'. *BMK*, p. 150.

<sup>103</sup> *BMK*, p. 22.

<sup>104</sup> *BMK*, pp. 168-70. These two chapters form a moving episode in which Margery's genuine sorrow at the loss of Master Aleyn, and her unalloyed joy at regaining him indicate the extent to which she has come to rely on his counsel and conversation. See also *Margery Kempe of Lynn*, p. 132-3, and *Margery Kempe and her World*, p.88.

The one mention that Margery makes of the fourth mendicant order, the Augustinian (or Austin) friars, who had a house in in the northern part of Lynn near St Nicholas's chapel, is rather positive:

Afterward in Lenton prechyd a good clerk, a Frer Austin, in hys owyn hows at Lynne, & had a gret audiens, wher þat tyme was þe seyde creatur present. And God of hys godnes enspired þe frer to prechyn mech of hys Passyon so compassyfly & so deuowtly þat sche myth not beryn it. Þan fel sche down wepyng & crying so sor þat mech of the pepil wondryd on hir... And þan þis good man þat prechyd as now at þis tyme seyde to be pepil, 'Frendys, beth stille, 3e wote ful lityl what sche felyth.'<sup>105</sup>

The spiteful crowd is silenced, and the Austin friar's words are wonderfully ambiguous: either they are a simple defence in which he states that the crowd cannot make a window into a person's soul, or he is saying something slightly more exalting; that they are *incapable* of knowing what Margery feels, because Margery is a special case and a conduit of the divine. It is highly unlikely that the Austin house had not heard of the town's holy woman, and it seems that the friar was sympathetic to her. Goodman's comment that the Austin friars were 'unenthusiastic' about her is, therefore, difficult to understand.<sup>106</sup>

Margery's relationships with the monks and friars that she encounters both at home and abroad have something of the flavour of her relationships with many people: she has her supporters and her detractors - although there is some evidence to suggest that she shows a degree of preference for the Dominicans of Lynn, and they treat her with sympathy and understanding. Her touching friendship with the Carmelite Master Aleyn, too, indicates mutual interest and appreciation. During the course of her life, Margery visits a huge number and range of monastic houses, many of which she does not name, and some of which she criticises for perceived

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<sup>105</sup> *BMK*, p. 167.

<sup>106</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 207.

laxities or infringements. She does not appear to be cowed by ecclesiastical authority when it does not come up to her standards, and she wins the backing of one or two staunch allies who smooth her path; often by warning others of her peccadilloes. However, by locating Margery within the context and traditions of the religious orders, houses and people with which she had daily contact, both in Lynn and further afield, we are able to gain an insight into how she negotiated these complex structures, and how they related to her, a lay, married religious woman. Not only this, but Margery's deft navigation of these various different religious institutions, from which she appears to pick and choose her spiritual guidance suggests that there was, perhaps, not a monolithic ecclesiastical hierarchy as such, but an intricate mesh of intersecting and competing religious structures with whom Margery was able to form alliances or pit against each other as the occasion demanded; seeking the affirmation of the Archbishop of Canterbury as a means of forestalling other groups, for example. The answer appears to be that there was no uniform ecclesiastical response to Margery, partly because she was unusual, but partly because no uniform religious authority existed, a fact noticed and tactically exploited by Margery.

### **Margery and St Margaret's Church**

St Margaret's church (now a minster), frequently mentioned in the *Book*, is the place of Margery's daily worship. It is the location of her brush with adultery, and it is the place in which she is miraculously preserved (or chosen for punishment, depending on the audience's sympathies) when falling masonry strikes her. The church was established in 1095 to service the Benedictine priory, but there was 'a substantial rebuilding in the following century, and considerable works continued to be done in Margery's lifetime.'<sup>107</sup> Indeed, the guild of the Holy Trinity played a large role in the maintenance and upkeep of St Margaret's. 'The Great

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<sup>107</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 80.

Gild had its own chapel' writes Owen, who notes that 'most other gilds had no more than an altar dedicated to their patron'.<sup>108</sup> The town as a whole had responsibilities towards the conservation of its churches, including St Nicholas and St James, and registers of the town indicate that its congregations were proactive in carrying out their duties. For example, the damage being wrought to the fabric of the churches led to a cessation of bell-ringing in 1391:

The great bells in all three churches to be rung only for the deceased brothers of the great gild; other anniversaries and other obits to be rung only for one hour, with breaks, because of serious damage to the bell towers.<sup>109</sup>

There are also entries into the registers that account for the 'Purchase of seven new ladders... they are to be lent only to members of the great gild', and for an order 'regulating the mode of rating for holy-bread and wax-scot payments, which are to be based on the rent paid.'<sup>110</sup> The above goes some way to indicating the Great Gild's influence and power; not just in respect of the borrowing of ladders, but that in times of restricted bell-ringing, the departed guildsmen of the Holy Trinity were still given a peal by way of a send-off. The bell tower of St Margaret's was eventually rebuilt between 1433 and 1437, paid for by raising rates on the population of the town.<sup>111</sup> Just as important to the townsfolk of Lynn was the decoration of the interior of St Margaret's, of which 'scarcely any part... was without some form of artistic embellishment. Walls, roof, choir stalls, screens, fonts, font-covers, pulpits, misericords were all enriched with either paint and gilding or carvings and sculptures.'<sup>112</sup> St Margaret's is also particularly notable for its brass, of which there are two principal examples: the depiction of former mayor of Lynn, Robert Braunche and his two wives, and that of Adam de Walsokne and his wife, both dating

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<sup>108</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p. 28.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, document 133, p. 141.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, document 134, p. 141, and document 137, p. 142.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>112</sup> Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 74.

from the mid-1300s.<sup>113</sup> Elaborately carved bench-ends from St Nicholas's Chapel depicting a maritime scene can be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>114</sup>

The disrepair of St Margaret's that Margery herself experienced continued to be put right during the fifteenth century, though much of the work was done after Margery's death:

In 1472 Thomas Thoresby rebuilt part of the south side of the chancel... and at the same time Walter Coney began to rebuild the Trinity chapel... In the period 1472-76 Coney paid for the re-roofing of the north cross aisle and the nave, and in 1481 his executors built and glazed the nave clerestories on each side. In 1438 Edmund Pepyr replaced the roof of the south aisle... and about 1490 Thomas Thoresby rebuilt the corresponding aisle on the north side.<sup>115</sup>

The great storm of 1741 caused a collapse of the south-western tower into the nave, meaning that the interior of St Margaret's as seen today is eighteenth and nineteenth-century renovation.<sup>116</sup> In medieval times, the priory that adjoined the church was responsible for the maintenance of the chancel, but the town bore the expense of the nave and west towers' upkeep: 'Mayors and Congregations took their duties as the collective executive of the parishioners of Lynn very seriously, including their responsibility to maintain the nave and western parts of the fabric.'<sup>117</sup> This demarcation seems logical, as the priory worshipped in the chancel (with only select members of the public being invited to worship there – including Margery herself), and the vast majority of the congregation worshipped in the nave. It is clear, however, that as the fifteenth century wore on, the upkeep of the church became more dependent on individuals rather than organisations or the guilds to administer.

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<sup>113</sup> See Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 74 for a depiction of the frieze at the bottom of the Braunche brass, and Atkinson, p. 70, for a depiction of the brass of Robert Braunche and his two wives.

<sup>114</sup> See Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, after p. 140, for a photograph of these.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn*, p. 28.

<sup>116</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p.80.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

The images and statues found inside St Margaret's must have contributed to Margery's religious consciousness. Goodman notes that the church 'was probably particularly rich in its sculptured images and furnishings, since it was the only church in the borough with full parochial rights.'<sup>118</sup> Studying Margery's visions, Charity Scott Stokes suggests that:

She received in childhood a thorough and orthodox education in the tenets of the church. She was brought up to venerate and celebrate the Trinity and the Blessed Virgin, and also St Mary Magdalen, St John the Baptist, and the virgin saints, St Margaret, St Katherine of Alexandria and St Barbara, all dedicatees of churches, priory, hospital and nunneries in Lynn and the surrounding areas... She became familiar with visual representations, such as pictures and sculptures of the Passion, the Joys and Sorrows of the Virgin, the lives of saints... Her familiarity as a young adult with liturgical and biblical texts, with the rhythms and seasons of the church and with the growing devotional literature in English... would hardly have been possible without extensive religious guidance and familiarity with devotional and mystical texts from an early age.<sup>119</sup>

Certainly the devotional literature of which we know Margery to have been aware (mentioned by her scribe, and in addition to others texts to which she may have had access but are not revealed) was critical in shaping her religious responses, St Margaret's would have also played a sizeable role in providing the necessary religious guidance and visual stimuli that allowed Margery to become conversant with the cycle of the liturgical year, and which informed the visions that she was later to receive. It is interesting that Scott Stokes mentions Saints Katherine, Barbara, and Margaret, as these are all saints with whom Margery identifies over the course of her *Book*, and were clearly visible and familiar, permeating her consciousness.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>119</sup> Charity Scott Stokes, 'Margery Kempe: her Life and the Early History of her Book', *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol 25, p. 21.

## Religious Provision for Women in East Anglia

Having discussed the range of monastic and mendicant orders that were located in Lynn, and the parish church in which she prayed, heard mass, and where she observed and participated in the rhythms and rituals of the liturgical year, it would be fitting also to describe the religious houses that were available to women in the area. Although there were no convents in Lynn itself,<sup>120</sup> Norfolk was home to a number of female religious houses. In East Anglia, 'at least six categories of religious women existed', and in the diocese of Norwich there were eleven convents: 'five were Benedictine houses... and three convents followed the rule of St Augustine. The remaining three were affiliated with different orders: Marham was a Cistercian house; Bruisyard a convent of Poor Clares; and Shouldham was a Gilbertine priory for both nuns and canons.'<sup>121</sup> Of these, Margery makes no mention whatsoever; indeed, the number of nuns whom Margery mentions generally is rather few: in chapter twenty-seven of the *Book* she comments that she 'was howselyd euery Sondag in a gret hows of nunnys & had gret cher among hem' during her stay in Venice;<sup>122</sup> she is kindly treated by some nuns who wish to know her thoughts after priests test Margery's gift of tears,<sup>123</sup> and she is sought out by the Abbess of Denny,<sup>124</sup> who wishes her nuns to have the benefit of Margery's instruction; indeed, Margery is sought 'offtyntymys'.<sup>125</sup> Margery tells us that she misses the boat to Cambridge, but does not

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<sup>120</sup> The closest convent to Lynn was in Blackborough; see Marylin Oliva, *The Convent and Community in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1998), p. xiv. 'The diocese [of Norwich] was home to eleven female monasteries, sixty-three houses of monks and canons and twenty-three friaries,' p. 11.

<sup>121</sup> Roberta Gilchrist and Marylin Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia* (Norwich, 1993), p. 14. For a helpful map showing the distribution of anchoresses, vowesses, convents, hospitals and informal communities in Norfolk, see p. 15.

<sup>122</sup> *BMK*, p. 65-6.

<sup>123</sup> *BMK*, 'Also þer wer nunnys desiryd to haue knowlach of þe creatur & þat þei xulde þe mor be steryd to deuocyon', p. 200.

<sup>124</sup> An Abbey of Poor Clares near Waterbeach, in Cambridgeshire; in previous incarnations it had been a Benedictine monastery and had also belonged to the Knights Templar. The Abbess that summoned Kempe was probably Margery Milley. See: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol2/pp295-302>. Date accessed: 07/04/16.

<sup>125</sup> *BMK*, p. 202. Although initially resistant to making the trip to Cambridge, she is divinely instructed to do so.

tell us anything of her meeting. It could be argued that the strict enclosure rules for nuns accounts for the paucity of her encounters with them, but it is interesting to note that of the few instances we have, nuns are highly supportive of her.

The final option for a religious woman in Norfolk was the possibility of becoming an anchoress; Lynn lacked nuns, but it did have a series of these devotional women throughout Margery's lifetime. Applicants underwent a rigorous selection process in which their vocation was tested and approved by a bishop. The successful anchoress would then take part in a formal ceremony, in which she would lie prostrate in the west end of the church whilst the litany was recited by two clerks. She would then be blessed with water and incense, and given two candles to hold, representing God's love and the love of one's neighbour. There would be psalms and readings from scripture; the candles would be placed on the altar and mass celebrated. Afterwards, she would be led to her cell during which psalms from the Office for the Dead would be sung. Finally, she would be sprinkled with dust, and the door would be closed. The fact that an anchoress would take part in a ritual that was symbolically her own funeral, demonstrates the gravity of the commitment on her part; she would, henceforth, be dead to the world. Her status in society, however, (despite not being an active member of it) was significant.

An anchoress was deemed to be doing the community a great service. She provided essential, round-the-clock prayer and reflection on behalf of those who were unable to do so themselves. As such, their physical maintenance and upkeep was taken very seriously – perhaps more seriously than that of nuns under the care of monks. An anchor or anchoress's surroundings varied: a single cell is recorded at Leatherhead in Surrey; a two-storey building at Chester-le-

Street.<sup>126</sup> Norfolk appeared to have a high proportion of female recluses, however: 'We can identify at least seventy-three anchoresses who lived at forty-two different sites in the diocese [of Norwich]... By contrast, sites of male recluses in the diocese numbered thirty-two.'<sup>127</sup> Gilchrist and Oliva also claim that Norwich 'particularly attracted religious women in the Middle Ages.'<sup>128</sup> If this is the case, Margery's own zealous devotion to God must be seen in the context of medieval Norfolk's apparent surfeit of religious women, and perhaps not judged so harshly (irrespective of what the Lynn townsfolk thought). In Lynn itself there were anchoresses in the Carmelite Friary (Joanna Catefeld, 1421), the East Gate (Anne Whyote, 1384-6), in the Franciscan house (unknown, 1483), and at All Saints (Alice Belle, date unknown) and South Lynn (Isabella, 1449).<sup>129</sup> Although some of these women assumed their vocation after Margery's death, it nevertheless demonstrates that female recluses were a commonplace in Lynn during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Contrary to their title, which summons up images of deep and lasting solitude, anchors or anchoresses could be enclosed with others of the same core beliefs: examples include the aforementioned Gilbert's seven girls, and Hildegard of Bingen, formidable abbess of Rupertsberg, who began her spiritual life enclosed with her mentor. In Norfolk, there is evidence of Leva of Lynn, who left Margery's town for the watery fenlands of Wiggshall to set up a house for a number of recluses, and at Massingham there is Ela and her company from 1256-91.<sup>130</sup> Throughout the thirteenth century, anchoresses outnumbered their male counterparts, and, indeed, enclosure seemed to hold a particular appeal to women: the reason

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<sup>126</sup> Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, p. 77.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit. A very interesting table of all the recluses occupying cells in the diocese of Norwich can be found on pp. 97- 9.

<sup>129</sup> Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, p.97.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

for this can only remain conjecture, but it could be that, enclosed, a woman appeared to have a degree of spiritual authority not available elsewhere (although perhaps the feminist perspective would contend that a woman shut away in this manner no longer posed any religious threat) – and anchoresses were certainly revered. They were not, however, generally literary. It is arguable that, by its very nature, the contemplative life hardly lent itself to externalisation, and the only concrete example of an anchoress's visions and reflections that survive in Britain are those of Julian of Norwich. It is an outstanding moment in the *Book* in which Margery meets Julian, not only for Margery herself, who clearly values Julian's guidance, but for Margery's readers. The meeting of two extraordinary women, both daughters of Norfolk, represents in beautiful concision the energetic and intensive spiritual activity of that county.<sup>131</sup>

### III: Brunhams and Kempes

It was into the culturally and religiously diverse and prosperous town of Lynn that Margery Brunham was born, to a wealthy, respected family. The Brunham origins are obscure, but Goodman suggests that Margery's 'forebears originated in the manor of Burnham'<sup>132</sup>, and that a Ralph de Brunham is recorded as being in Lynn in 1320, and having established himself in the elite by the 1340s. His son, John, is awarded the freedom of the borough on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1353, and is identified by Meech and Allen as having been Margery's father.<sup>133</sup> He was mayor of Lynn five times (in 1370, 1377, 1378, 1385 and 1391)<sup>134</sup>, and Margery was inordinately

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<sup>131</sup> There will be a discussion concerning the uniqueness of Norwich within England as a possible site of Beguine activity in the following chapter.

<sup>132</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 49.

<sup>133</sup> *BMK*, Appendix III, p. 359.

<sup>134</sup> Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 76; Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 49; Myers, 'A Fictional True Self', p. 380.

proud of her father's achievement and of the elevated status that it afforded her. John Brunham also represented Lynn in the parliaments of 1365, 1368, 1380, 1383 and 1384. In addition, he was alderman of the Holy Trinity Guild from 1394-1401.<sup>135</sup> He had died by October 1413. Clearly, John Brunham was a formidable man, and it is interesting to note that Margery 'displayed a just, even boastful appreciation of her father's standing and achievements'.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, 'we infer from her comments that whatever she felt about John Burnham [sic], she derived self-confidence, a sense of importance, and real protection from his status.'<sup>137</sup> It would be difficult not to be somewhat in awe of her father: 'When John Brunham became alderman of the guild he was effectively elected to be simultaneously chairman of the merchant bank, leader of the senior lay religious organisation in the town, and pre-eminent personality in its social life as well.'<sup>138</sup> During a diplomatic row with Prussia, Brunham was entrusted with raising money from all merchants outside of London for an embassy to be sent, including levying men in places such as Beverley and York.<sup>139</sup> Such was the extent of Brunham's reputation and the regard in which he was held, Margery was welcomed by the Bishop of Worcester:

Margery, I haue not somownd þe, for I knowe wel j-now þu art John of Burnamys dowytyr of Lynne.<sup>140</sup>

In times of difficulty, it is the name of her father that Margery invokes as a means of extricating herself from threatening situations:

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<sup>135</sup> Goodman offers an overview of the Brunhams on pp. 48-55 of *Margery Kempe and her World*.

<sup>136</sup> Anthony Goodman, 'The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter of Lynn', in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker, pp. 347-58 (Oxford, 1978), p. 351.

<sup>137</sup> Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 80.

<sup>138</sup> Kate Parker, Kate Parker, 'Lynn and the Making of a Mystic', in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. John H. Arnold and Katherine Lewis, (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 55-73, pp. 59-60.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, pp.60-1. Margery later visited both Beverley and York on her extensive travels.

<sup>140</sup> *BMK*, p. 109.

I am of Lynne in Norfolke, a good mannys dowtyr of þe same Lynne, which hath ben meyr fyve tymes of þat worshepful burwgh and aldyrman also many zerys, & I haue a good man, also a burgeys of þe seyde town, Lynne, to myn husband.<sup>141</sup>

This is where the commercial and spiritual worlds of Margery Kempe collide. Margery's husband is something of an afterthought when she makes her case to the mayor of Leicester who accuses her of being a Lollard. Her father looms large in her mind as a possible means of quelling the attack, either because she feels she may be treated with greater respect due to the status that she has acquired through her father, or that she is attempting to show the mayor that her father is certainly his equal, if not his superior. Under duress, it is the more secular, status-conscious and Lynn-orientated Margery, invoking the name of her father rather than the name of God, who emerges. This is an excellent tactic on her part; her good sense (of which she has plenty) prevails, and she uses her worldly status and her worldly father's achievements to identify herself; her father's name providing temporary relief against hostility. Once her credentials have been established, she can use her spiritual good sense to defuse the situation entirely. Both Lynn and spirituality play their part.

Myers and Parker, however, assert that Brunham and his ilk suffered something of a downfall as the fifteenth century wore on.<sup>142</sup> After the deposition of Richard II in 1399, the new Henry IV did not favour Despenser due to a long-standing family feud. This suited the town, as relations between the bishop and the townsfolk, as we have already seen, were not always cordial. However, unsettled political situations in both Prussia and at home led to instability in terms of trade, leading to a downturn in the local economy. Compounded by the removal of the customs port to Great Yarmouth in 1404, and a decline in wool exports, Lynn saw a dramatic

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>142</sup> See Myers, 'A Fictional True-Self: Margery Kempe and the Social Reality of the Merchant Elite of King's Lynn', *Albion*, pp. 377-94, and Kate Parker, 'Lynn and the Making of a Mystic', in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 53-73 for a more comprehensive account of the vicissitudes of early fifteenth century Lynn's economy and status.

reduction in its profits. When prosperity returned to Lynn in the 1410s due to the rising cloth trade and improved relations with France, a different group of merchants reaped the benefits: 'Sylvia Thrupp noted in her landmark study of merchant dynasties in London that merchant families rarely, if ever, survived more than three generations.'<sup>143</sup> By 1410, Myers argues that Margery's burgeoning identity as a mystic and religious woman of some renown 'coincides with the increased marginality of the Brunhams, the Kempes, and the entire social milieu of Margery's youth in Lynn's post-1400 socioeconomic and political worlds.'<sup>144</sup> The ebbing of the more prosperous days of Margery's childhood and early marriage perhaps spurred her towards a maintenance of her status, albeit in a rather different guise. Myers argues that Margery both rejects and clings to the commercial sphere in which she was brought up; as a young woman, her father's name and wealth creates security, but on a journey towards spiritual enlightenment, Margery seeks to distance herself from that very sphere and forge a new identity in a world in which her old self-identity would have been meaningless. However, Margery continues to reference her father's prominence, because the spiritual world that Margery sought to inhabit was not necessarily reflective of the wider concerns of fourteenth and fifteenth-century England; the astute move is to remain in the latter, whilst seeking the former.

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<sup>143</sup> Myers, 'A Fictional True Self', p.390.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, pp. 378-9.

#### IV: Conclusion

The place of Margery's birth and upbringing was one of commercial success and considerable prosperity: shipping, salterns, cargo loading and unloading, Hanseatic associations and the wrangling that this involved, buying, and selling meant that she grew up in a town that was a major conduit of trade, both import and export. It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of trade to the townsfolk of medieval Lynn, such that it permeates Margery's language, as we shall observe later. She herself was perhaps positioned better than most to absorb the necessity of commerce as a means for producing wealth. In addition, her father's extraordinary prominence, not only as a member of one of the 'ruling' families in the oligarchy of Lynn's local government, but also in a wider sense - nationally, as we have seen, on occasion – together with his extensive political activities meant she had a well-developed sense of pride in her father (and in the early parts of the *Book*, herself), and appreciated the standing that this naturally afforded her.

It was, however, a town that was also steeped in religion. It was well-served by four friaries, the Benedictine priory attached to St Margaret's church, and was home to a number of hermits and anchoresses. Her father's guild, however, was a pre-eminent supporter of the principal church of the town, bearing the expense of its maintenance, which arguably blurred the boundaries between religion and commerce. Although she does not mention many convents, and the town lacked any, it is clear that she had established a link with the reasonably local abbey at Denny, and her meeting with Julian of Norwich indicates that she valued the spiritual input of that remarkable woman. Norfolk was an intensely religious county, and also and intensely commercial one.

It cannot be doubted that her formative years informed Margery's outlook on life, but it is also possible that her interactions with Christ and with others, both detractors and assenters, have been influenced by the highly mercantile world in which she lived: her bargaining for chastity with her husband on the road to Bridlington, the unadorned visions that offer clear interpretations of biblical scenes, and her forthright interactions with aggressive officials, perhaps all speak of the thrusting and enterprise-driven environment into which she was born, and in which she herself partook.

## Chapter Two:

### *'Damsel, forsake þis lyfe þat þu hast, & go spyinne & carde as oþer women don': the Context of Female Piety and Margery Kempe.*

#### I: Introduction

The religious context into which Margery Kempe was born was a complicated one. For much of her life there were rival popes in Avignon and Rome, creating as many political and diplomatic problems as theological. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the religious world was subtly and somewhat bewilderingly arranged into secular clergy (parish priests), and regular clergy (monks and nuns), including the mendicant orders (the friars), all of whom could contribute, to an extent, to the pastoral welfare of ordinary townsfolk. In addition, anchors or anchoresses could choose to spend their lives in solitary contemplation of God.<sup>145</sup> Margery's relationship with each of these was deftly navigated: she chose sympathetic confessors, she cultivated her champions and allies, she visited a range of anchors, religious houses and places of interest; but she was also no shrinking violet – she upbraided monks and friars who did not measure up, and she is not afraid to be seen, or in particular, heard. As we shall see later, her sheer noise attracts attention, but her utterly orthodox theology actually negates any real threat of punishment. As we have already seen, the clergy's reactions to Margery, a lay married pious woman, are as various as the many different types of monastic and mendicant orders that were in existence in the late medieval period. She certainly provoked a response, both good and bad, but the lack of uniformity in response from the religious authorities perhaps says something

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<sup>145</sup> For an overview of the Church during the medieval period see: Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale 2005); R. N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989); Andrew Brown, *Church and Society in England 100-1500* (Basingtoke, 2003); *Pope Innocent III and his World*, ed. John C. Moore (Aldershot, 1999); Jane Sayers, *Pope Innocent III, Leader of Europe 1198-1216* (New York, 1994); Andre Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame, 2010); *A Companion to the Great Western Schism (1378-1417)*, eds. Joelle Rollo-Koster and Thomas M. Izbicki (Netherlands, 2009).

about the absolute irregularity of Margery Kempe herself, and the Church's inability to relate to her. It also says something about the complicated and competing structures of the Church itself that allowed Margery to play opposing forces against each other; if she was met with a lack of sympathy by one order or institution, she might meet with more success elsewhere.

Having touched on the general picture of conventional spirituality in the medieval period through the lens of King's Lynn, it is now necessary, to both narrow and broaden our focus, in a sense, and look at the question of female piety in particular. The notion of female piety in the medieval period is, as we shall see, both specific and wide-ranging: sharpening our focus on the question of the spirituality of women and their religious experiences naturally limits the scope of this chapter, but it will also give it breadth as we consider how Margery might have been influenced by differing Continental and insular practices. This chapter will offer a general overview of the religious and spiritual movements embraced by women that had flowered during the period, how those movements emerged out of and took root in different institutional and social milieux, and how these may have influenced and attracted Margery. Although this overview, for practical considerations, will be by no means exhaustive, it would be impossible to investigate the intent and impact of the language of Margery Kempe without first offering a tentative place for her in the shifting sands of medieval female spirituality, especially concerning notions surrounding sainthood. Such contextualisation serves the purpose of this thesis, partly because contextualisation provides vital background information in terms of the specifically feminine religious milieu in which Margery found herself, but also because I believe that it is difficult to appreciate fully the extent to which Margery's *Book* is indebted to and inspired by the lives, works and legacy of other women without a more comprehensive understanding of who these women were.

The young priest who read to Margery for eight years equipped her with an understanding of the lives of various Continental holy women, and she had only to travel to Norwich to meet the pre-eminent English religious woman of her day. It also equipped her with an understanding of how and why some of these women became saints, despite their worldliness, despite being married, despite, in some cases, their lack of virginity. There can be no doubt that Margery, aspiring to a peripatetic religious existence, was inspired by the stories of these women (perhaps Bridget of Sweden and Marie d'Oignies most particularly), and it is the argument of this thesis that having been inspired she attempted to create her own vita, in conscious imitation of these Continental lay women. In turn, this contextualising information will provide a useful framework which we will be able to utilise in judging whether the text is indebted to the genre of hagiography, especially through the subsequent chapters of this thesis which will concern themselves with a more forensic analysis of the words and register employed in the *Book*.

This chapter will firstly seek briefly to outline how perceived weaknesses on the part of women had become ingrained by the medieval period through a brief analysis of Classical perceptions of the nature of femininity, before moving on to discuss the limitations of women within the structure of the Church, and the rise of the Beguine movement, with a brief discussion concerning the differences between religious appetites on the Continent and in England. It will also offer an analysis of the phenomenon that was arguably of great interest to Margery: the blossoming of female lay sainthood. Thereafter, the chapter will concentrate on the extraordinary women who achieved recognised holy status despite their perceived failings (for example, wifehood, motherhood or being a member of the laity), attempting to establish to what extent Margery subscribes to or subverts the Continental model of female piety.

## II: The Perception of Women.

Female piety in the medieval period was regulated by men, and the perception of women can be considered to be a fusion of classical, biblical and patristic thinking. Women could be lay or religious, but men were a prerequisite: only a priest could administer the sacrament and celebrate Mass. Women, then, were reliant on male intervention in order to be absolved or take communion, and one could argue that being a nun was no guarantee of receiving better pastoral care than a lay woman: men had to be diverted from their missions in order to minister to the needs of the convent, and contact with females could imperil a man's soul.<sup>146</sup> Spiritual authority was located in the hands of the Church, and the Church had particular notions concerning women.

The three recognised statuses of women in the medieval period were wife (a necessary evil), widow (better), or virgin (best).<sup>147</sup> A woman who did not fit into one of these categories would be considered dangerously unconventional. This system allowed the Church to maintain control, but the notion of female suppression was deeply ingrained. Aristotle claimed that 'the male is by nature superior and the female inferior; the one rules and the other is ruled'.<sup>148</sup> Women were considered to be weaker, more susceptible to the pleasures of the senses and the flesh, and more in thrall to their emotions: men, on the other hand, were rational and spiritual. Paul's letters in the New Testament reiterate this masculine superiority:

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<sup>146</sup> See C.H Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, chapter 11.

<sup>147</sup> See Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women, the Politics of Social Classification in Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>148</sup> Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, (York, 1999), p.19.

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was the transgressor.<sup>149</sup>

The substance of Paul's letters echo the earlier, Classical theme of the subordination of women, and Voaden comments on the ease with which this was transferred into Christianity: 'That the seeds Paul scattered should have flourished so well argues for the receptivity of the culture to a message with which it was so familiar'.<sup>150</sup> Aristotle writes in *De Generatione Animalium* that 'A woman is as it were an infertile male' and that 'the physical part, the body, comes from the female and the Soul from the male, since the Soul is the essence of a particular body.'<sup>151</sup> A preoccupation between hot (male) and cold (female) dominated Classical thinking when trying to rationalise the differences between man and woman, as Aristotle suggests:

Once birth has taken place everything reaches its perfection sooner in females than in males – e.g. puberty, maturity, old age – because females are weaker and colder in their nature; and we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature.<sup>152</sup>

Galen, physician to Marcus Aurelius, continues to expound on notions of hot and cold in respect of the variance of male and female generative organs:

For the parts were formed within her when she was still a foetus, but she could not because of the defect in the heat emerge and project on the outside, and this, though making the animal itself that was being formed less perfect than one that is complete in all respects, provided no small advantage for the race; for there must needs be a female.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Cited in *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe, a Sourcebook*, ed. Emilie Amt, (Oxford 2010), p. 16.

<sup>150</sup> Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 22

<sup>151</sup> Alcuin Blamires, ed., *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* (Oxford, 1992), p. 40.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>153</sup> Mary R Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, eds., *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (Bloomsbury, 2005), extract 351.

One cannot help but be amused by the grudging concession granted in the final sentence. This message of Classical male superiority was subsequently taken up and propounded by the Early Church Fathers, who continued to insist on the association between female and the body or the sensual, and male and the soul and the spiritual. Voaden calls on Jerome to prove her point: 'as long as woman is for birth and children, she is as different from men as body is from soul'.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, Augustine was even more direct: 'I do not see what other help woman would be to men if the purpose of generating was eliminated'.<sup>155</sup> Woman cannot escape her generative function, and as long as she is associated with birth, she must be associated with lust and the flesh. To compound this attitude was Thomas Aquinas's notion that women had nothing to do with conception: a child was the result of a man's sperm and the divine intervention of an angel and the heavenly bodies. Women were simply the vessel.<sup>156</sup> Albertus Magnus, a twelfth-century Dominican friar and bishop, did not go quite so far in that he allowed the mother a role in the conception; however, if a female child resulted it was due to the father's sperm having been defeated. Since sperm contained the qualities of intellect and spirituality, a daughter would be deficient in these attributes.

Eve further dishonours the status of women, being easily duped into committing sin and compounding her error by manipulating man. St. Augustine reflects on the Fall thus:

St Paul said, 'For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not seduced but the woman was seduced and fell into sin.' In other words, it was through her that man sinned. For Paul calls him a sinner also when he says 'in the likeness of the sin of Adam, who is a type of the One to come.' But he says that Adam was not seduced. In fact, Adam under interrogation did not say, 'The woman whom thou gavest to be my companion seduced me and I ate'; but 'She gave me the fruit of the tree and I ate'. On the other hand, the woman said, 'The Serpent seduced me.'<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *Commentariorum in epistolam et ephesios libri 3*, cited in Voaden, p. 23.

<sup>155</sup> Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 19.

<sup>156</sup> '[w]omen were... regarded as walking wombs.' Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>157</sup> Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, pp. 80-1.

Woman is clearly at fault: she is the transgressor who is both enticed and enticing. Augustine points out that the word seduction never passes Adam's lips – unlike woman, who admits that the serpent manages to seduce her. Tertullian summarizes his thoughts on the matter thus: 'You [woman] are the Devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law'.<sup>158</sup> Rudolph M. Bell states that St. Thomas Aquinas's misogyny was so entrenched that the Church continued to think that a 'woman who had engaged in sexual intercourse was a living danger to male salvation and could never be trusted to forge for herself an intense relationship with God'.<sup>159</sup> Vauchez encapsulates the clergy's notion of woman thus:

The monastic tradition... constantly emphasized the close connection between women and sin. In the many eleventh- and twelfth-century treatises devoted to *contemptus mundi* the daughters of Eve were generally presented as creatures incapable of rising to and understanding of the things of the spirit. Frivolous, fickle and inconstant, they inspired only distrust and disapproval in writers of the feudal period.<sup>160</sup>

If a woman became a nun, which, early in the medieval period was their only available religious outlet, she might be able to establish a sanctioned, controlled and regulated relationship with Christ. However no woman, whether lay or a member of a religious order, was able to officiate in church, take priestly sacraments or preach.<sup>161</sup> Woman's primary role in the original sin and her secondary role in creation were considered to be reason enough for this stance, despite there being a tradition of women in the Celtic period being able to officiate alongside men until the sixth century.<sup>162</sup> As the period wore on, reforms to convent regulations became the norm. However, 'reform and enclosure were effectively synonyms.'<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p.24.

<sup>159</sup> Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, (Chicago, 1985), p. 85.

<sup>160</sup> Andre Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 370.

<sup>161</sup> Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, trans., Chaya Galai (London, 2003). See chapter three of Shahar for an overview of the roles allowed to nuns.

<sup>162</sup> Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 23.

<sup>163</sup> Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti, eds., *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger (New York: Chichester, 2002) p. 43.

Despite the official view of women that was authorised and perpetuated by the institutional Church, there are many examples of women who resisted and opposed these constructions of femininity; Catherine of Siena, Angela of Foligno, Bridget of Sweden and Marie d'Oignies as individuals, and the Beguine movement as a whole, provided Margery with various models of atypical female piety. Margery was certainly aware of these Continental practices, and because there was no real unifying feature to them, she was able to choose elements from them that suited her. Thus, Margery can be seen to be presenting herself as a highly singular and individual religious woman, but the exploration of these different modes of female piety allows us to see her, if not belonging to a particular movement, then influenced by and in conversation with different movements.

### **III: Regular Religious Life for Women**

The most obvious means for pious women in the high Middle Ages (1100-1450) to devote themselves to religious matters, was to join a convent. Joining a convent necessitated the handing over of a dowry, and thus perhaps, excluded a sizeable proportion of the population. Nevertheless, there was a flowering of monasticism in the twelfth century, in which 'men and women alike participated... marked by an exceptional degree of cooperation and friendship between the sexes'.<sup>164</sup> During this time, over a hundred houses for women were founded in England: an impressive figure if one considers that at the time of the Conquest there were only nine. With an unprecedented choice of establishment, came a concomitant choice of

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<sup>164</sup> Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women, a Social History of Women in England 450-1500*, (London, 1995), p.190.

movement: 'A postulant might become a Cluniac, a Cistercian, a Gilbertine, an Augustinian, a hospitaller, a Praemonstratensian a Fontevraldine, and Arrouaisian, or, as before, a Benedictine'.<sup>165</sup> This array, however, belies the fact that a number of these orders were hesitant in their acceptance of females, and often shirked responsibility for them: monastic reformers regarded women as a problem, as contact with women could imperil the male soul. At the same time, however, women were dependent on their male colleagues, as they could not administer the sacrament, and men were required for their material upkeep – which was not always forthcoming. It was, therefore, something of a contradictory time: ostensibly an era of extraordinary choice for females entering a spiritual vocation, they were nevertheless hindered by the lack of interest of their male counterparts.

Although nuns could join the equivalent orders of their brother monks, and could even become affiliated to the Franciscan and Dominican orders (through the Poor Clares or the Dominican nuns, though certainly not in a preaching or peripatetic capacity), it is interesting to note the way in which their sister organisations were treated. Despite the Cistercian distaste for taking responsibility for females, females were greatly attracted to the order. In the thirteenth century, Cistercian nunneries 'multiplied at an extraordinary rate'.<sup>166</sup> In Germany, the number of female houses outnumbered those of men,<sup>167</sup> but by 1220, the Cistercians had decreed that no more convents could be incorporated into their order; by 1228 no more convents could be erected in the Cistercian name, simply because the burden of responsibility was too arduous. On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that convents were not all obedience: the aristocratic women who became nuns were used to a certain degree of autonomy, and did not necessarily always

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p.191.

<sup>166</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 185.

<sup>167</sup> See Hamberger and Marti, *Crown and Veil*, pp. 41-75.

welcome the masculine impositions of the clergy: doors were barred against monks carrying out visitations, and the fact that abbesses were unable to attend meetings of the general chapter meant that they were 'disinclined to submit to dictation by a distant body of men who showed scant understanding of their problems.'<sup>168</sup> Hardly surprising when a declaration issued by the Premonstratensian monastery of Marchthal read:

Since nothing in this world resembles the evil of woman and since the venom of the viper or the dragon is less harmful to men than their proximity, we hereby declare that for the good of our souls, our bodies and our worldly goods we will no longer accept sisters into our order and we will avoid them as we do mad dogs.<sup>169</sup>

Although the Premonstratensian order was one of the first to dissolve its connection with its female houses, this statement nevertheless articulates conventional ecclesiastical masculine thought concerning the problem of convents and nuns.

Although Margery Kempe appears relatively late in the scheme of medieval religious thought, fifteenth-century England was no less controlling in its treatment of women; indeed, perhaps it was intensified somewhat by the lurking threat of the Lollards, whose philosophy regarded the sexes as equal as far as Christianity went – a notion that was by no means their most radical: 'Every faithful man and every faithful woman is a good priest, and has power to make the body of Christ as any ordained priest'.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p. 186.

<sup>169</sup> Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 36.

<sup>170</sup> Cited in Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 238.

#### IV: The Rise of the (Lay) Religious Woman

The female role model is the Virgin Mary, a woman impossible to emulate as she is simultaneously a virgin and a mother. She is without carnal stain, and the birth of Christ is without the associated pangs that are brought about as a result of Eve's misconduct. Mary is woman's unattainable paragon, and Eve is her stark reality; forever trapped by the indecency of her body, she is deemed inferior; imitation of her designated role model is laughably unrealistic, and even if she escapes carnality by remaining a virgin, woman can never transcend Eve's blunder. The status of medieval women is thus established, and is, ostensibly, immovable. In short:

...it can be said that the ecclesiastical conception of the inferior status of women, deriving from Creation, her role in the Original Sin and her subjugation to man, provided both direct and indirect justification for her inferior standing in the family and in society in medieval civilization.<sup>171</sup>

That is not, of course, to say that female piety did not find outlets, or that they were utterly unheard; it is an over-simplification to suggest that all women were utterly subjugated. There are numerous examples of prominent, respected medieval holy women, and it is certain that Margery had knowledge of at least some of them: her *Book* lists Elizabeth of Hungary, the Beguine Marie d'Oignies, and, on many occasions, mention is made of Bridget of Sweden – a married noblewoman who died in the year of Margery's birth, and with whom Margery particularly identified. She also met and conversed with the local anchoress, Julian of Norwich. These women managed to forge an identity for themselves, and Bridget of Sweden was eventually canonised, thanks to a vigorous campaign conducted by her energetic daughter,

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<sup>171</sup> Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 88-9.

Katarina – who was also later canonised.<sup>172</sup> Added to these are the females of whom Margery may not have heard, but who came to prominence due to their piety: Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Siena, the indefatigable Hildegard of Bingen, Dorothea of Montau, Mechthild of Hackeborn, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Gertrude the Great.<sup>173</sup> Although some of these examples were cloistered sisters, a surprising aspect is that many were not: both Bridget of Sweden and her daughter were married, as were Marie d'Oignies, Dorothea of Montau and Angela of Foligno. Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marie d'Oignies were Beguines, a group of women who devoted themselves to poverty and works of charity, but were not enclosed: they were, in fact, urban-dwellers and highly visible. Indeed, Vauchez points out the extraordinary statistic that '[w]ith the single exception of St Catherine of Siena, all the prophetesses and visionaries of the late Middle Ages were wives.'<sup>174</sup> Catherine of Siena exists in a category of practically her own invention; she eats almost nothing from the age of sixteen, cuts off her hair to avoid marriage, is eventually allowed to join a group of lay sisters (again, she is noticeably un-cloistered), meddles in the political maelstrom of the Great Schism, and dies at twenty-nine having subsisted on water and the Eucharist for thirteen years. One cannot accuse her of being overawed by the patriarchy.

If Bridget of Sweden and Katarina are merely two examples of women who were canonised, and the period witnessed a flowering of female lay piety, then '[t]he rise of the woman saint correlates most dramatically... with the rise of the lay saint.'<sup>175</sup> In fact, there appears to be something of a woman's movement gathering pace over the course of the middle ages, reaching

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<sup>172</sup> See: Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, (Woodbridge, 1999).

<sup>173</sup> See: Valerie M. Lagorio, 'The Medieval Continental Women Mystics' in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany, 1984), pp. 161-93.

<sup>174</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 381.

<sup>175</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, (London, 1988), p.21.

a climax in the fifteenth century. If one takes the number of medieval female saints as a measure of women's acceptance, then they were certainly in the ascendant:

According to Weinstein and Bell, the big rise came between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the percentage of female saints almost doubled (from 11.8 to 22.6 percent). The trend peaked in the fifteenth century (at 27.7 percent), despite the fact that the total number of saints declined. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the total number of saints turned slightly upward, the percentage of women dropped sharply... by the end of the Middle Ages the lay male saint had virtually disappeared. Nuns... continued, of course, to be canonized; but by the sixteenth century almost all the males canonized were clerics and the model of holy behaviour offered to the Catholic laity was almost exclusively female.<sup>176</sup>

This phenomenon is corroborated by Vauchez:

Of all the canonization proceedings instituted by the papacy between 1198 and 1431, more than 18 percent concerned women (though only 14.8 percent of those resulted in approved canonizations). The increase may seem meager [sic] in global terms, but if we eliminate the canonized bishops, all of whom were necessarily male, and the members of the traditional religious orders (Benedictines, canons regular), much higher percentages result: 21.4 percent of the saints belonging to the mendicant orders were female, and of the lay saints, more than half (58.8 percent) were women! If we consider the total number of candidates for canonization after 1200 that the Roman church acknowledged, or at least was willing to take into consideration, we can speak without exaggeration of a very clear tendency, especially marked among the new categories, toward a feminization of sanctity.<sup>177</sup>

Clearly, therefore, there was a decisive trend towards the veneration of lay females, and in order for this to occur, those females must have gained necessary spiritual recognition. This is particularly pertinent for Margery, who, it shall be argued later in this thesis, was positioned perfectly at the beginning of the fifteenth century to benefit from this more inclusive attitude towards female sanctity in general, and female lay sanctity in particular. Margery's awareness

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 20-1. It is, however, also interesting to note that of the regular female orders, the Franciscan affiliated female groups produced a large proportion of women saints in the medieval period: '[I]f we consider the group of women who were objects of canonization proceedings instituted by the papacy between 1198 and 1431, we find that five, that is a to say fully half of them, were attached in some way to the Franciscan movement.' *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, p. 171. One must also acknowledge the relatively small numbers involved. However, Vauchez goes on to state that 'This burst of Franciscan sanctity was part of the more general efflorescence of female sanctity characteristic of the end of the Middle Ages', p. 172.

<sup>177</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, p. 172.

of other lay women, combined with this flowering of female sainthood, could have been the impetus behind the *Book*: it could very easily be read as a self-penned saint's life, and part of Margery's bid for sainthood (the contradictions and problems inherent in this proposition are acknowledged here and will be discussed later).

## V: The Question of the Beguines

The movement towards the increasing sanctification of women was no doubt aided by the rise and rise of the Beguines, communities of women who did not take vows and remained in the world, but nevertheless achieved acknowledgement for their pious acts.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, Lawrence writes that the 'rapid spread of the Beguines is one of the most arresting religious phenomena of the later Middle Ages',<sup>179</sup> in an age that was already characterized by an 'extraordinary spirit of religious fervour',<sup>180</sup> and an era, as we have just seen, that appeared to be tolerant of and recognise lay female spirituality. Beguines filled a gap in the market of female spirituality: the movement allowed women an outlet for religious feeling without bearing the financial burden of finding a dowry for a convent; they were not left to the somewhat patchy pastoral care offered by their brother houses (to whose authority convents were subject); and Beguines were able to forge a life in which they were free to incorporate the rigour that some considered convents to lack.<sup>181</sup> Thus, seeking a meaningful religious existence, they created their own. Beguines originated in the Rhineland and Belgium, expressing a desire to emulate Christ and live an active life dedicated to good works: sewing, spinning, weaving and laundering clothes,

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<sup>178</sup> For an overview of the Beguine movement, see Saskia Murk-Jansen, *Brides in the Desert* (London, 1998).

<sup>179</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 187.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p.186.

<sup>181</sup> On convents, Vauchez writes 'laxity... had affected many nunneries by the late thirteenth century, making them unattractive to high-minded souls in search of perfection.' *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 379.

working amongst the poor and sick. Initially, followers lived in their parental homes; eventually, however, they congregated into houses and lived a more regulated life.

Shahar is at pains to point out that the Beguines were a religious rather than an ecclesiastical organisation; there was no lifetime vow and an official rule was never introduced. Nor did they escape controversy - which is not entirely surprising, considering their apparent lack of regulation. Some Beguines translated scriptural texts into their native tongues of German or French and they also debated theological matters, provoking a hostile reaction from the Church. Marguerite Porete was burnt at the stake in 1310 as a result of her composition of *Mirror of Simple Souls*, which was considered heretical. The Beguines, moreover, caught the attention of the Inquisition in the fourteenth century due to their apparent unorthodoxy, and by the fifteenth century Beguinages had become 'houses of shelter' rather than houses of religion.<sup>182</sup> The Beguine movement, however, represented a hugely popular option for women who wished to express their religious devotion in an active and practical manner, remaining a part of the world, free of a designated rule, and yet still receiving a small measure of papal support: Pope Gregory IX tacitly recognised the Beguines in 1233, and Jacques de Vitry, the biographer of Marie d'Oignies, gave vigorous support to the group.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 55.

<sup>183</sup> Indeed, Murk-Jensen suggests that Jacques de Vitry indirectly instigated the group: 'The Beguine movement is generally held to have started with the papal dispensation obtained in 1215 by Jacques of Vitry from the newly elected Pope Honorius III for women living together in chastity and poverty,' *Brides in the Desert*, p. 23.

Margery Kempe, straddling the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, was born into the momentum of this 'remarkable contemporary feminist movement',<sup>184</sup> and experienced both the advantages and disadvantages that it offered. Bynum states that:

Although holy women were, by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, more likely to be lay and married, to reside in the world, and to have opportunities for significant geographical mobility through pilgrimage, they were also more subject to male scrutiny and in greater danger of being accused of heresy or witchcraft.<sup>185</sup>

If one applies this to Margery Kempe we can instantly see the correlation: she is lay, married, fantastically mobile and accused of heresy by male scrutinisers. In this sense, then, Margery is certainly part of the contemporary feminine milieu:

Everything we know about women in the later Middle Ages indicates that there were hundreds, if not thousands of women like Margery, who attempted to lead quasi-religious lives while remaining in the world.<sup>186</sup>

On a European scale, she is one of a number of agitating women who dared to express their piety, unusual perhaps, but by no means unique. However, it must be borne in mind that all of these women were to be found on the Continent, and Margery was a daughter of Lynn. The times when Margery is abroad, most notably when she spends an extended period in Rome, the locals are more sanguine and accepting of her eccentricities, presumably because they are more accustomed to the idea of holy women outside of the cloister. Margery encounters trouble from

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<sup>184</sup> Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman', p. 152.

<sup>185</sup> Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 23.

<sup>186</sup> 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman', *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, p. 152.

other pilgrims and is barred from staying at the Hospital of Saint Thomas, but after a protracted period of winning round the inhabitants of Rome, she is eventually admitted. Even her crying is tolerated:

þe good women, hauyng compassion of hir sorwe & gretly meruelyng of hir wepyng & of hir crying, meche þe mor þei louyd hir. & þerfor þei, desiring to make hir solas & comfort aftyr hir gostly labowr, be sygnys & tokenys, for sche vndirstod not her speche, preyid hir and in a maner compellyd hir to comyn hom to hem, willyng þat sche xulde not gon fro hem. Than our Lord sent hyr grace to han gret lofe & gret fauowr of many personys in Rome, bothyn of religyows men & oper.<sup>187</sup>

Italy certainly has a fine tradition of holy women, as we shall see later in this chapter. England, however, was more acculturated to Celtic traditions of hermits and recluses, and remained impervious to the Beguine movement, whose 'freer, more experimental type of religious life'<sup>188</sup> was found in Germany, France and the Low Countries. Impervious, interestingly enough, except for East Anglia, and most fascinating, in particular, Norwich. Saskia Murk-Jansen states that:

Norwich is best known for its fifteenth-century anchoress, Julian, but in addition to a number of anchoresses there were also informal religious communities of women in that city up until the sixteenth century. These informal religious communities appear to have been unique to East Anglia. In view of the extensive trade links between this part of England and Flanders it seems likely that, here as elsewhere, ideas travelled along the same routes as trade.<sup>189</sup>

Murk-Jansen goes on to assert that one such group lived in a house belonging to a merchant from the Low Countries. The women were not officially sanctioned by the Church, but they existed on the generosity of people who gave bequests in wills to the 'mulieres pauperulae' and 'sorores commerantae', which gives local approval and awareness of the group.<sup>190</sup> Gilchrist

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<sup>187</sup> *BMK*, p. 98-9.

<sup>188</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 186.

<sup>189</sup> Murk-Jansen, *Brides in the Desert*, p. 31.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p.32.

and Oliva, however, are a little more circumspect, and although they agree that these informal arrangements may have been Beguinages, '[i]t is also possible, however, that the informal groups in the parishes of Norwich resembled *maisons dieu*: flexible, often short-lived communities of poor women and men found in many medieval English towns.'<sup>191</sup> The table that Gilchrist and Oliva have created in their work indicates the number of informal communities in the diocese of Norwich.<sup>192</sup> The earliest settlement appears to be in 1417, suggesting that Beguine-style living (if indeed, that is what it was) was adopted rather late in the period; indeed a number of the women are former nuns, who continue to live together after the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s.

Margery made a number of visits to Norwich in her lifetime, although she makes no mention of the possible Beguines that lived there; as we have seen, the earliest surviving record of a potential Beguinage dates from 1417. However, one cannot help but feel that even in a Beguinage, arguably the 'best fit' for her active devotion, Margery would have perhaps disliked being one of a number of like-minded individuals. The importance, however, of the apparently East Anglian openness to alternative expressions of piety is fascinating when attempting to place Margery in a religious context; outside western Continental Europe, Norfolk is perhaps the only place in England that could have produced her.

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<sup>191</sup> Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, p. 72. They go on to say that 'the danger in classifying these groups into categories of religious life, such as Beguinages, is that it may disguise the true nature of these communities, and so limit our understanding of female piety in medieval England,' p. 72.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95-6.

## VI: A rock and a hard place: an English Mystic on the Continent, or a Continental Mystic in England?

Martin Thornton attempts to characterise the nature of English spirituality of the period, not in order to place Margery within a female context, but rather to place her within a religious context.<sup>193</sup> Medieval English spirituality, states Thornton,<sup>194</sup> has a particular focus on the humanism of St. Bernard and a devotion to the Passion, resulting in three major characteristics: a meeting between affective and speculative piety; an optimistic and humanistic approach; and a balance between the authority of the Church and 'courageous individualism'.<sup>195</sup> The English Church, therefore, appears to be conservative, but also tolerant and moderate: the crucifixion of Christ naturally provides a point of contemplation, but the tragedy of the event is mitigated by the knowledge of redemption. Thornton indicates that there was a solid sensibleness in the attitude of the English in terms of their spirituality, and lacking the more excessive practices of piety that one might find on the Continent. That is not to say, of course, that there was not mysticism at work in England: during the fourteenth century, the writers Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, Walter Hilton and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* were active, and whilst Richard Rolle provoked mild controversy before being accepted, their writings were broadly

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<sup>193</sup> Martin Thornton, *Margery Kempe: An Example in the English Pastoral Tradition*, (S.P.C.K, London, 1960). Thornton asserts that Margery does not belong to a mystical tradition, but rather an ascetic one, i.e.: she retired to solitude, meditated and prayed extensively, and applied herself to rigorous self-discipline by practising celibacy, fasting and labour. Thornton avers that the misunderstanding about Margery arises from too much emphasis being placed on her mystical experiences: 'all mature Christians undergo experiences which can only rightly be classified as 'contemplative', but that does not make them 'contemplatives'... [she] knew 'mystical' experience, but that does not make her a 'mystic'' (pp.3-4). Of her 'cries' Thornton claims that they are 'minor and incidental', and without the crying passages the *Book* would be a 'solid, common-sense account of the ordinary ways of prayer', (p.5) in a way that the *Revelations* of Bridget of Sweden would not. 'She may not,' Thornton states, 'be much of a mystic, but she is a first-class parishioner.' (p.3).

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12 ff.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

approved. Knowles suggests that the spirituality of England actually shifted more towards a Continental model during the fourteenth century:

...the religious climate of the age was sympathetic to a personal and 'mystical' approach to the way of perfection; the older conception of the monastic life as the only secure way of salvation, the ark in the flood, had lost its wide appeal and its place had been taken, for earnest seekers, by way of personal, if not solitary, endeavour.<sup>196</sup>

The 'Englishness' of the mysticism, however, is suggested in the final sentence: solitary endeavour. Solitude is a common theme: Richard Rolle is also known as the Hermit of Hampole, whose life included spells at the Sorbonne and he spent time exposing himself to the harshness of Richmondshire moors, before being enclosed in a cell at the Cistercian nunnery at Hampole for the last nine years of his life. Walter Hilton (born c. 1340-5) studied canon law before becoming a hermit prior to 1386. He died in 1396 as an Augustinian Canon regular in the Priory of St Peter at Thurgarton in Nottinghamshire. His *Scale of Perfection* was the first work in English to circulate widely on the Continent. Julian of Norwich was enclosed as an anchoress in the Church of St. Julian, where she led a life of intense solitary contemplation having had her famous series of visions during an illness at around the age of thirty. Margery, however, does not operate in this manner: she is married and cannot abandon her domestic duties by becoming a recluse, and the boisterousness of her personality makes it difficult to imagine that she would have fitted comfortably as an anchoress herself. As occasionally appears to be the case with Margery, she both adheres to and defies categorization on this point: she rejects the English tradition of enclosure as the conventional method of expressing piety, but she remains solitary in her worldly pursuits, thus resisting the Continental form. As Dickman points out, Margery had no real contact with other religious women, and she did not

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<sup>196</sup> David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, (London, 1960), p. 43.

gather women around her.<sup>197</sup> The solitary pursuit of spirituality is peculiarly English, as, in Europe, communities tended to flourish: witness the Beguines. England, however, did not tend to produce lay or semi-lay religious associations, except with the debatable possibility of the diocese of Norwich, as we have seen, but even then this was too late to influence Margery. Dickman's description of Margery's mode of religious expression being 'rather like that of a solitary Beguine'<sup>198</sup> is understandable, therefore, but still troubling; a solitary Beguine is no Beguine at all, so Margery continues to defy categorisation. Dickman also states that:

...everything we know about women in the later Middle Ages indicates that there were hundreds, if not thousands, of women like Margery, who attempted to live quasi-religious lives while remaining in the world.<sup>199</sup>

This is undoubtedly the case; however, I would posit that, based on English devotional practices, the number of such women in England was vanishingly few, and those who did exist were enclosed. For England, Margery is, as far as we know, unique. She would have been less conspicuous, arguably, on the Continent, where enthusiastic and visible piety in women was reaching a peak.

Moreover, to return to the notion of saints in general, and the meteoric rise of female lay saints in particular, the situation in England was quite different from that of the Continent. Katherine J. Lewis agrees that the growth of Continental holy women is 'linked to the rise of affective

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<sup>197</sup> 'Aside from a visit to Julian in her cell at Norwich, her time with the old woman she served in Rome, and occasional visits to the nuns at Denney, Margery seems to have had no contact at all with other religious women. Neither did she gather about her a spiritual 'family' like Catherine of Siena's, nor nurture a circle of 'sons' like Angela of Foligno, nor ... find any community and support in a third order.' Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman' *The Mystical Tradition in England*, p. 166.

<sup>198</sup> Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman' *The Mystical Tradition in England*, p. 161.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p. 152.

piety, visionary literature and the rehabilitation of the lay religious life,<sup>200</sup> but that if Margery were attempting to tap into this culture, she faced an uphill struggle: no woman since Anglo-Saxon times had been the focus of an English cult, and ‘the general picture of English saints post-conquest, both in terms of cults recognised by the papacy, and others which were not, is almost entirely male.’<sup>201</sup> Eleven English saints were canonised between 1161 and 1457, all of whom were men.<sup>202</sup> As we have already learnt, almost the opposite was true on the Continent, despite there being in England a corresponding rise in the fifteenth century of interest in the lives and cults of saints. Lewis posits that the development of the lay saint in England was different partly because England was less urbanised and therefore friars had ‘less influence on perceptions of sanctity’<sup>203</sup>, and partly because parish priests were extremely popular figures for sainthood, and were male by default. It also appears that England favoured a ‘brand of political martyr-saint’<sup>204</sup>, often of high status:

Cults of varying size... grew up around Simon Sudbury (murdered by rebels in 1381), Archbishop Richard Scrope, Henry VI and even an embryonic one around Henry’s son Edward.<sup>205</sup>

Additionally, child-saints became popular in England, with, according to Lewis, the majority being males: Lewis cites the examples of William of Norwich, Little St. Hugh of Lincoln and

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<sup>200</sup> Katherine J. Lewis, ‘Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England’, in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 195-215, p. 206.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

Robert of Bury, all of whom met a brutal end.<sup>206</sup> England apparently lacked the discernment and sophistication to judge what was genuinely saintly (the Continent being more urbanised and perhaps more adept at distinguishing between shades of sanctity), and used the grisliness of the death as an important criterion:

These are lay saints, but of a very different kind to the Continental model, for perceptions of their sanctity had very little or nothing to do with their manner of life and everything to do with their violent manner of death, which was reinterpreted as martyrdom.<sup>207</sup>

It appears that England preferred its saints to be male, high-ranking political adults or blameless children, who met bloody ends: the end suggesting the sanctity rather than the life. If one contrasts that with the Continent, we see females whose exemplary lives nominate them for canonisation. On the matter of the English attitude towards sainthood, Lewis concludes:

Although some people were very interested in the visionary writings of Continental holy women, they were not really interested in the cults of lay people whose claim to sanctity was their holy way of life.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid, p. 207. Little St. Hugh of Lincoln (to differentiate him from Hugh of Lincoln) was killed at nine years old in 1255, and his body was discovered in a well. It became a popular belief that Hugh had been crucified by the Jewish community of Lincoln, who threw the body down a well when the ground refused to receive it. A cult grew up around the legend, probably fired by anti-Semitism; there is little foundation to the story. Chaucer's Prioress uses it in her *Tale*. See: "Hugh of Lincoln<sup>(2)</sup>" *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, ed. David Hugh Farmer. Oxford, 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*.

Oxford University Press. Accessed through the University of Edinburgh, 30 January 2012 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t100.e834>) Robert of Bury St. Edmunds, who died in 1181 at the age of 10, was also allegedly crucified by the Jews, and an unofficial cult grew around him. See: "Robert of Bury St Edmunds": (<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t100.e1386>). William of Norwich is a third example of alleged Jewish crucifixions; he died in 1144 at the age of 12, making him the first of these anti-Semitic propaganda deaths. See: "William of Norwich": (<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t100.e1639>).

<sup>207</sup> Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England', in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 207.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

## VII: The Continental Female Mystics

It would be impossible to include a chapter on female piety without providing some focus on a few of the extraordinary women who were able to express their spirituality in individual ways, and in modes that may have attracted Margery, despite being excluded from some of these modes due to her personal circumstances. Margery had a good knowledge of a variety of pious women, and it is undoubtedly the case that they served as an inspiration to her. It is fitting, therefore, to spend some time examining certain individuals and their piety, rather than whole groups.

Affective piety came to prominence during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and it is no surprise that this branch of devotion coincided with the surge of female religious expression. It focused on the humanity and passion of Christ, and was often characterised by erotic or nurturing feelings on the part of the women who subscribed to it. Dickman suggests that this type of piety is 'recognizably female',<sup>209</sup> concentrating on more obviously feminine concerns: the infant Jesus, Christ as a bridegroom, and compassion at his death. This section will analyse a handful of these women, beginning with Bridget of Sweden, mentioned frequently in the *Book* and who provided something of a role model to Margery, followed by Catherine of Siena and Angela of Foligno, Marie d'Oignies, and finishing with a brief discussion of some of the notable mystics of the period.

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<sup>209</sup> Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman', *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, p. 152.

## Bridget of Sweden

Margery was familiar with Bridget's life and background, and a quick study yields some interesting analogues. Like Margery, Bridget's revelations are homely and accessible, using foodstuffs or domestic images to describe the soul (cheese in a vat), God (variously a washerwoman, a magpie, a chicken or a goose) and evil (bitter mustard). Her experience of the Passion is accompanied by tears, she is married with numerous children, and she endures a certain amount of persecution. Both she and Margery visit Compostela, Rome, and Jerusalem, both seem to have rather forceful personalities, and both were highly critical of degenerate clergy. Bridget is, however, a more 'successful' lay religious woman (in that she achieves the ultimate recognition of sainthood), and interferes in major religious affairs in a manner that does not appear to occur to Margery, whose interests are more personal and on a smaller scale.<sup>210</sup>

Bridget begins her spiritual journey at a much younger age than Margery, receiving her first vision when still a child. She was married in 1326 to Ulf Gudmarsson, at the age of 13, but later told her daughter, Katarina, that she was a reluctant bride. Morris concludes that this

...belies the gradual erosion in the later middle ages of the traditional perception of marriage as necessarily an inferior state, which was in particular a result of the upsurge in the female mystical tradition, and was forcing the Church to modify its attitude towards devout married women.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> For an extensive overview of the life of Bridget of Sweden, see Bridget Morris, *Saint Bridget of Sweden* (Woodbridge, 1999). 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. Sandra J. McEntire (New York and London, 1992), pp. 203-221.

<sup>211</sup> Morris, *Saint Bridget of Sweden*, p. 41.

Indeed, it was clear that virginity remained the most acceptable state for women, which is reflected in the fact that: 'at the canonisation process of St. Catherina of Siena in 1411-16, during which a Dominican advocate of the saint declared that she was superior to St. Birgitta in not having been married.'<sup>212</sup> As we see with Margery, her married state is something with which Bridget struggled, but she also sought to rehabilitate the status of the married woman. In one vision, Christ remarks: 'a humble and pleasing wife is more pleasing to me than a proud and shameless virgin',<sup>213</sup> and 'accords the role of tempter equally to men'.<sup>214</sup> She has eight children, four sons and four daughters, and like Margery, encounters problems with one of her sons, Karl, whom she considers to be too worldly. Despite her attempts to elevate the status of wife, her lack of chastity must nevertheless have been a source of reproach, as she too gains an agreement to cease sexual activity with her husband. The pair also became tertiaries, and Morris states that it was 'certainly by no means uncommon for devout married couples to decide on chastity and a tertiary affiliation.'<sup>215</sup> Of course, this comment presumably applies to Continental couples, as the tertiary movement made little headway in England, as we have already seen.

Bridget also faced a degree of persecution, although unlike Margery she was never threatened with burning in her home country. She was accused of heresy because:

For a woman... to act in a way that ran counter to convention and custom and to interfere with other people's moral behaviour... and for her to assume an authority which exceeded social expectation, was to run the risk of being accused of witchcraft herself.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

The above sentence could have been written about Margery, except 'to run the risk' of accusations of heresy is too mild a phrasing. Bridget, however, received gentler denunciation, being branded 'pythoness' and 'sorceress', and the worst incidents to be dealt by her detractors in Sweden included her being jostled in court and having a bucket of water tipped over her from a window. Her daughter also remarks on the coldness of some of the Swedish nobility towards her mother's religious zeal.

Neither Margery nor Bridget were above interfering in the affairs of the Church; but whilst the former contented herself with admonishing local clergy and haranguing bishops, Bridget intervened in a far more international fashion. She attempted to heal the rift in the papacy, dispatching an envoy to Avignon to inform the pope of her visions and also to let him know her views on the Hundred Years' War (she sided with the English). In 1349, Bridget leaves Sweden for Rome, never to return. Partly due to her being appalled at the moral decline she finds there, and partly because she needed papal authority to found her order, Bridget attempts to aid the difficult process of recalling the pope from Avignon by sending envoys to act on her behalf. In 1367, Pope Urban V returns to Rome but continues to appoint Frenchmen to elevated positions, which, unsurprisingly, proved unpopular. He removed himself to Montefiascone with the probable intention of returning to Avignon, which prompted Bridget to call on him in person in 1370, to request that he stayed. She had a vision of the pope weakening if he returned to France; irrespective he returned and died a few weeks later; the prophesy is considered to have been fulfilled. When Thornton attempts to characterise the differences between the two women, he mentions the gulf in their aspirations: Margery 'has no mission beyond her immediate circle', whereas Bridget is exercised by the 'international scandal at Avignon'.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Thornton, *Margery Kempe: An Example in the English Pastoral Tradition* p. 52-4.

He suggests that Bridget is ‘cold, hard, fiery and austere’, with a personality that was ‘unpleasantly near to scrupulosity’. On the other hand, he praises Margery’s ‘peculiarly sane, unostentatious expression of the Catholic faith’ – as well as her homeliness – and there is something to be said for this: Margery is nothing if not unswervingly orthodox.

It is no surprise, however, that Margery drew an enormous amount of inspiration from Bridget, and, if one subscribes to Lewis’s view that in the *Book of Margery Kempe* we have an attempt at a saint’s vita, then the canonisation of Bridget, a lay, married woman, must have been extremely encouraging. There was a certain degree of controversy that surrounded Bridget’s canonisation process, and we possibly glimpse something of Margery’s desire to see it carried to fruition during her travels in Rome. Whilst Margery pays a visit to the chamber in which Bridget died, on the anniversary of her death, a storm brews with sudden violence:

Owr Lord sent swech tempestys of wyndys & reynes & dyuers impressions of eyrs þat þei þat wer in þe feldys & in her labowrys wyth-owtyn-forth wer compellyd to entyr howsys in socowryng of her bodijs to enchewyn dyuers perellys. Þorw swech ntokens þis creatur supposyd þat owr Lord wold hys holy Seyntys day xulde ben halwyd & þe Seynt had in mor worshep þan sche was at þat tyme.<sup>218</sup>

Margery clearly believes that the question of Bridget’s as yet unresolved sainthood is answered by God with a resounding affirmative, sending a tempest as a message of encouragement to the bureaucrats in the papacy. It is interesting that Margery should be so anxious about the outcome of Bridget’s case, as there are instances in the *Book* that indicate Margery’s entering a posthumous, but nevertheless intense, one-sided competition with the saint. The occasion in which Margery witnesses the fluttering of the sacrament, is afterwards explained by Christ who informs her that: ‘My dowtyr, Bryde, say me neuyr in þis wyse.’<sup>219</sup> In some aspects, therefore,

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<sup>218</sup> *BMK*, p. 95.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

Margery seeks to surpass Bridget; certainly in the eyes of Christ. However, without Bridget's model, Margery would not have been able to undertake such extensive travel, or draw such inspiration from her. Indeed, Julia Bolton-Holloway calls Margery's life an 'imitatio Brigidiae'.<sup>220</sup>

### **Catherine of Siena and Angela of Foligno**

Extremity of devotion is perhaps a characteristic that unifies the spiritual practices of the Continental lay women, and one who fully embraces more extreme devotional practices and the notion of self-abnegation is Catherine of Siena, who ate almost nothing for most of her adult years. At the age of sixteen, she restricts her diet to bread, raw vegetables and water; by the age of 25, her diet is practically nothing at all. Although originally intended for marriage, Catherine insists that Christ is to be her bridegroom and her father eventually relents. Catherine's routine of self-mortification included thrice daily flagellation, and wearing an iron chain around her hips. She took a three-year vow of silence, excluding confession. In order to formalise her devotion Catherine became a tertiary, and that she does so is in itself interesting: firstly, the tertiary option was available to Catherine, an Italian, and secondly, tertiaries were uncloistered and therefore 'from the outset her vocation was public and reforming, rather than private and penitential.'<sup>221</sup> One could argue the same for Margery Kempe; but Catherine was certainly vocal and determined, both in her colloquies with God and with the dealings she had

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<sup>220</sup> Murk-Jansen, *Brides in the Desert*, p. 209. A helpful map detailing to two women's travels can be found on p. 222.

<sup>221</sup> Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, p. 46. For an overview of the life and writings of Catherine of Siena see Giuliana Cavallini, *Catherine of Siena* (New York, 2005).

concerning the Great Schism; she was ‘in contact with the great personalities of the Church and state,’<sup>222</sup> and like Bridget of Sweden she played a political role.

Catherine started receiving visions at around the age of six, and as she grew in religious zeal, so did her confidence: when her father died, she bargained with God to release him from purgatory and is rewarded with a vision of seeing him ascend into heaven. The price is a continual pain in her hip (although a cynic might consider that this has more to do with the chain she wore than a God-given penance). This transactional approach to her religion is something that Margery shares. During the moments that Margery is seeking to free herself of her husband’s attentions, the couple undergo a tit-for-tat bargaining process, notarised by God. Margery promises to pay John’s debts in return for sexual abstinence, and she prays for guidance. Like Catherine’s intercession on behalf of her father, God sees the expediency of the proposal:

& he xal han þat he desyreth. For, my derworthy dowtyr, þis was þe cawse þat I bad þe fastyn for þu schuldyst þe sonar opteyn & getyn þi desyr, & now it is grawntyd þe.<sup>223</sup>

Christ is positively cunning in his methods to free Margery of her sexual burden; John’s condition of her recommencing eating on a Friday in return for abstinence of another kind means that the lesser virtue is traded for a greater. Giving up her Friday fast in return for chastity is indicative of the compromises that Margery, as a married woman, has to undergo in order to practise her devotion. It is not extreme, and the giving up of a fast, as we shall see, would have been unthinkable for Catherine of Siena.

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<sup>222</sup> Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 57.

<sup>223</sup> *BMK*, p. 24.

Catherine's relationship with food perhaps best illustrates the way in which she expresses her piety, and also the disparity between her and Margery in terms of the extremity of that expression. As stated above, Catherine exists from the age of sixteen on raw vegetables and water. By twenty-three, she has restricted her intake to water, the Eucharist and bitter herbs; she sucked the herbs, but was careful to spit out the substance. She used twigs to bring up any food that she accidentally swallowed. To counter any theological argument that her refusal to eat was tantamount to suicide, she simply stated that death by starvation was a better death, because if she died through eating (such was the torment for her) then she was also guilty of death by greed. The extraordinary lengths to which she took her starvation was obviously an attempt to curb her will, and the suffering she undertook was part of the fourteenth-century predilection for imitative piety: through suffering one is brought closer to Christ. Indeed, it is difficult to find a holy female of this period who did not deliberately cause herself suffering in one form or another, and Margery is no exception: she wears a hair shirt, forswears meat and regularly fasts. The Continental woman's commitment to her own suffering, however, almost beggars belief on occasion.

Catherine of Siena was noted for her charitable work, especially, ironically, in feeding the poor (to the point of being credited with several miracles that seem to borrow from Christ's efforts with the loaves and fishes: loaves multiplied, sour wheat became sweetened, and flour produced more bread than it ought),<sup>224</sup> but when it came to herself, there was almost no stopping her efforts to break her corporeal form: she is notorious for thrusting her mouth into the suppurating breast of a dying woman and drinking the pus. She reflected on the experience

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<sup>224</sup> Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 170.

thus: 'Never in my life have I tasted any food and drink sweeter or more exquisite'.<sup>225</sup> The more revolting the substance to be imbibed, the better. Angela of Foligno, a housewife who underwent a conversion in her thirties, began to impose upon herself more and more stringent penances, culminating in her cleansing lepers' feet and drinking from the washing bowl the resultant broth.

We washed the feet of the women and the hands of the men, and especially those of one of the lepers which were festering and in an advanced stage of decomposition. Then we drank the very water with which we had washed him. And the drink was so sweet, that, all the way home, we tasted its sweetness and it was as if we had received Holy Communion. As a small scale of the leper's sore were stuck in my throat, I tried to swallow it. My conscience would not let me spit it out, just as if I had received Holy Communion. I really did not want to spit it out but simply to detach it from my throat.<sup>226</sup>

She was conveniently freed of her domestic responsibilities with the successive deaths of her mother, children and husband and then 'went through a phase of screaming every time she heard the name of God'.<sup>227</sup> Margery was not granted the same absolute independence from familial duties, but the similarity in the latter instance is pronounced. However, once again, it is the extremity of Angela's devotion that astonishes. Like Catherine, she also self-flagellated, whipping and burning her body (a point on which Margery demurs), and also is noted for her desire to 'go through Foligno completely naked, carrying dead fish and hunks of rotting meat around her neck'.<sup>228</sup> Ostensibly a humiliation ritual, one could argue that the desire to be seen in such a manner is also rather exhibitionist. Margery expresses a similar wish:

And I wolde, Lord, for þi lofe be leyd nakyd on an hyrdil, alle men to wonderyn on me for þi love, so it wer no perel to her sowlys, & þei to castyn slory and slugge on me, & be drawyn fro town to town every day my lyfetyme.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>226</sup> *Angela of Foligno, Complete Works*, trans. and ed. Paul Lachance OFM (New Jersey, 1993), p. 163. Accessed via Google Books, 07/02/2012.

<sup>227</sup> Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, p. 106.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p.112. A similar humiliation ritual is performed by St. Francis of Assisi – see André Vauchez's discussion of this in *Francis of Assisi, The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, trans. Michael F. Cusato (New Haven, 2012), pp. 58-89.

<sup>229</sup> *BMK*, p. 184.

Such an outlandish display of humility is ironic in the extreme, and is one example of Margery's rather vocal attempts to prove her humble nature.

Margery perhaps shares the greatest number of characteristics with Angela. Like Margery, Angela was both wife and mother. She was born in 1248, the daughter of a wealthy family who lived in the town of Foligno, which was situated around ten miles to the south of Assisi. In her early years she lived a conventional life. As a young woman she was interested in fashion and jewellery, gossip and dancing, recalling Margery's preliminary description of her own youth:

Sche weryd gold pypys on hir hevyd & hir hodys wyth þe typettys were daggyd. Hir clokys also wer daggyd & leyd wyth dyuers colowrs be-twen þe daggys þat it schuld be þe mor staryng to mennys sygh and hir-self þe mor ben worshepd.<sup>230</sup>

On dictating this youthful folly, Margery is indicating to her audience that her vanity and pride were impediments to the proper worship of God, and Angela is in agreement. In her *Memorial* she writes that first amongst the steps to penance and perfection is "the awareness of one's sinfulness, in which the soul greatly fears being damned to hell".<sup>231</sup> Both she and Margery become aware of their previous, and at the time unconscious, sinning, holding themselves up for public chastisement by their admission of such deeds. Of course, public scorn is nothing to the punishments that they variously pour on themselves by way of penance.

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<sup>230</sup> *BMK*, p. 9.

<sup>231</sup> Elizabeth Ruth Obbard, ed., *Medieval Women Mystics: Selected Spiritual Writings* (New York, 2002), p. 55.

Another similarity between these two women stems from a great, unnamed sin that both committed early in their lives, and that both confess (or almost confess, in the case of Margery) after a lengthy hiatus and an intense degree of introspection. We are not party to the exact details of the misdemeanour, but Margery certainly only feels compelled to begin to confess her sin thanks to the illness that suffered after the birth of her first child:

And þan sche sent for hyr gostly fadyr, for sche had a thing in conscyens which sche had neuyr schewyd be-forn þat tyme in alle hyr lyfe... Wherfor, aftyr þat hir child was born, sche, not trostyng of hir lyfe, sent for hir gostly fadyr... in ful wyl to be schreuyng of alle hir lyfe-tym as ner as sche cowd.<sup>232</sup>

She is, however, rather in awe of her stern confessor, as it transpires that her courage is somewhat short-lived:

Whan sche cam to þe point for to seyn þat þing which sche had so long conselyd, hir confessowr was a lytyl to haste & gab scharply to vndyrnemyn hir er þan sche had fully seyde hir entent, & so sche wold no mor seyn for nowt he mygth do.<sup>233</sup>

The mode of her language renders this episode rather amusing, as her indignation at having been stopped 'er sche had fully seyde' is palpable, as is her characteristic stubbornness in refusing to divulge the extent of her sin once the confessor had begun his pre-emptive upbraiding. Although there are a number of interesting aspects to this incident, it is perhaps all the more intriguing because we never fully understand what 'þat þing' is that torments her, even after writing so candidly about a range of potentially embarrassing situations. One could

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<sup>232</sup> *BMK*, p. 7.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

hazard that it was a sexual transgression, but this is pure conjecture. Her fondness for handsome faces and the notable occurrence of her being harassed by visions of ‘mennys membrys & swech oþer abhominacyons,’<sup>234</sup> as well as the temptation of her by Christ proffering a man who ‘be-forn euynsong þat for any-thing he wold ly be hir & haue hys lust of hys body,’<sup>235</sup> perhaps lends credence to this theory: Margery is certainly preoccupied by men, both before and after her move towards greater spirituality.

Italy also provides further examples of women who strove to break the body, in order to cultivate their spirituality through suffering. Umiliana de Cerchi was married with two children. Her husband died when she was twenty, and like many medieval wives, she felt the lack of her virginity keenly, and refused to remarry. Instead, she cried incessantly in the tower in which her father had placed her, and fasted on bread and water for five 45-day cycles each year, in addition to fasting on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. She died at the age of twenty-seven, and such was the inspiration that she provided for the women who gathered to take her body, that her corpse was torn to pieces for relics.<sup>236</sup>

In terms of extremity of practice, Margery is perhaps a novice when compared with Catherine of Siena and Angela of Foligno, both of whom elevated self-abnegation to extraordinary heights. However, as lay (and in Angela’s case, married with children) women, their devotions and subsequent recognition must have been highly attractive to Margery.

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>236</sup> See Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, pp. 87-92.

## Marie d'Oignies

The Beguine, Marie d'Oignies (d.1213), makes an appearance in the *Book of Margery Kempe* during the point at which Margery's scribe begins to doubt her gift of tears. Margery's crying becomes a feature of her religious existence, and thanks to the precedent of Marie, Margery's own tears gain credibility. It is not only this, however, for which Marie is noteworthy. Marie is considered to be the first Beguine: 'Starting her religious way of life in Williambroux... Marie was reportedly called by God to start the Beguine community in 1207 at Oignies, where she remained until her death.'<sup>237</sup> Marie embarked on her religious career at an early age, eschewing finery and cultivating an interest in the ascetic life.<sup>238</sup> Marie was married at the age of fourteen, but followed such intensive devotional practices that de Vitry describes them as 'warfare' upon her body.<sup>239</sup> The couple lived chastely, and together with her husband John, she carried out charitable works, particularly with lepers. Unlike Margery, however, the agreement to live chastely appears to have been mutual:

The further he was separated from her in carnal love, so much the more closely he was joined to her by the knot of spiritual matrimony through natural love. For this reason the Lord later appeared to his handmaid in a vision and promised that he would repay her in heaven in reparation for the marriage and for her partner, who, through love of chastity, had withdrawn himself from carnal commerce on earth.<sup>240</sup>

It is interesting that Marie was assured that she would be given a sort of compensation in heaven for the inconvenience of the marriage, a notion that may well have chimed with Margery. In

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<sup>237</sup> See Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of Liege*, (Belguim, 2009), p. 256. This work also offers an overview of the life of Marie d'Oignies.

<sup>238</sup> Jacques de Vitry, *The Life of Marie d'Oignies*, trans., Margot H. King (Ontario, 1993), p. 46.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

addition to these visions in which she is addressed by God, Marie is also given to fits of intense crying:

She found such grace of compunction therein that a great abundance of tears was pressed out by the wine-press of your cross in the passion and her tears flowed so copiously on the floor that the ground in the church became muddy with her footprints.<sup>241</sup>

The combination of her visions, her tears and the manner in which she drew like-minded women to her excited the interest of Jacques de Vitry who '[t]hrough the life of Marie... tried to promote the cause of these holy women to a hierarchy deeply suspicious of all form of spirituality which did not fit its notions of the divinely ordained concept of female submissiveness.'<sup>242</sup> Even the towering spiritual figure of St Francis began a pilgrimage to Liege to visit these unusual holy women.<sup>243</sup> The sympathy of de Vitry, an Augustinian canon who was also Marie's confessor, to these women and their way of life meant that the Beguine movement received a degree of recognition from the Church at a time when unregulated female spirituality was met with suspicion at best. It is no wonder that Margery felt a degree of concord with Marie: lay, married, unusual, visionary, and, most importantly, endowed with the gift of tears.

### The Mystics

As we have seen, it was possible to gain a degree of recognition as a woman if one were prepared to undertake the most extreme forms of religious practice and rigorously to adhere to them. However, there was an alternative to self-abnegation and that was through mysticism. Laurie A. Finke points out it was possible for women to achieve spiritual authority through mysticism, and that 'women in the later Middle Ages were more likely than men to gain a

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

reputation as spiritual leaders based on their mystical experiences.<sup>244</sup> Shahar goes further, stating that 'the most important contribution to spiritual creativity in the Middle Ages was in the sphere of Christian mysticism.'<sup>245</sup> Being a mystic accorded women with a respect and status that was almost unparalleled, and mysticism, moreover, had scriptural precedence: the Old Testament has female prophets.<sup>246</sup>

As the *Book of Margery Kempe* makes clear, Margery was able to visit the local visionary Julian of Norwich during the course of her travels, but it cannot be argued that the manner in which they expressed themselves is remotely alike: even taking into consideration the advantage that Julian's solitary existence perhaps had in helping to realise her contemplations, her calmness of mind is striking. Margery's flamboyance, imperviousness to embarrassment, and sheer volume, however, are at odds with Julian's serenity and quiet meditation. The fact that Julian was physically enclosed almost inevitably gives her more credibility; and indeed, the majority of Continental mystics either belonged to an official order, or were Beguine – that is, not having taken vows, but living in a community founded on a bedrock of contemplation, prayer and good works. Even of the minority who were initially married, many chose to enter orders as soon as their circumstances allowed. Margery, of course, differs in this respect, as even after her husband's death she does not abjure society. Initially, then, Margery appears to be a somewhat eccentric case, thanks, in no small part, to the extraordinary manner in which she conducted herself: she certainly attracted attention. For the purposes of this study, therefore, it would be useful to attempt a brief survey of mystical women, in order to determine

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<sup>244</sup> Laurie A. Finke, 'Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision', in *Maps of Flesh and Light, the Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (New York, 1993), p.29.

<sup>245</sup> Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 56.

<sup>246</sup> The four prophetesses are: Miriam (Exodus, 15:20-1), Deborah (Judges 4:4-5), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and Noadiah (Nehemiah, 6:14).

whether certain characteristics are presented consistently, and therefore draw conclusions as to whether a visionary milieu existed and if so, establish Margery's place within it.

Before embarking on this, however, it would be useful to define exactly what is meant by the terms 'mystic' and 'visionary'. It would not be appropriate to venture into an explicit and exhaustive definition here; but for the sake of convenience, it is possible to classify mysticism as an umbrella term, encompassing all forms of religious experience. It, perhaps, represents an intellectual communion with the Godhead, and inner knowledge of the presence of God. Transcendental experiences, on the other hand, where the recipient sees or hears with spiritual senses, are visionary. One may, as in the case of Hildegard of Bingen, be fully cognisant of this 'other-world' occurrence and continue to operate in reality; but more frequent is the type of vision which wholly consumes the receiver, rendering them incapable until it has passed. Margery certainly appears to have belonged to the latter school. On another point, it is somewhat difficult, and perhaps even artificial, to draw a distinction between the holy and pious women (such as Catherine of Siena) and the mystics, because many of them had overlapping qualities: indeed Margery herself was both a pious woman and a visionary, but it is arguable as to whether she ought to be described as a mystic. It is, nevertheless, a distinction that is found in the scholarly traditions that have developed around these women.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> For an overview of mysticism, see: Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford, 1986); Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience* (Woodbridge, 1995), Wolfgang Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England*, trans., Charity Scott Stokes (Ithaca, 2014); Ray C. Petry, *Late Medieval Mysticism* (Philadelphia, 1980); Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (New York and London, 2006); Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism* (Cambridge, 2011); William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig, eds., *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1997); Rosalynn Voaden, ed., *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1996).

In the first instance, 'opinions vary sharply on the question of Margery's spirituality, and diverge even more radically on her status as a visionary.'<sup>248</sup> In this respect Margery falls at the first hurdle, as she has generated almost as much controversy amongst scholars as she courted during her lifetime. Equally, the question of her authenticity (a question that also repeatedly troubled Margery) is meditated upon at great length. During the course of *God's Words, Women's Voices*, Rosalyn Voaden argues that Margery is simply too visible to fulfil the criteria expected of a female mystic, deeming her an 'insistently physical presence'.<sup>249</sup> The probity of quieter European female mystics, and that of Julian of Norwich, is not interrogated to the extent of Margery, perhaps because they did not attract as much attention and were cloistered, or enclosed. Margery's determination to be heard, and moreover, her rather vocal need to be acknowledged as genuine, ironically, perhaps undermines her authenticity. The weakness of Voaden's argument, however, appears to be a belief that all female mystics were bound by this code of intellectual conduct for which she uses the term 'discretio spirituum', and which was practised to the highest standards by the 'exemplary visionary' Bridget of Sweden:

*Discretio spirituum* defined the visionary experience, it decreed the virtue and deportment of the visionary, it established forms of expression and criteria for assessment. And it facilitated - or restricted - dissemination of the writing of visionaries.<sup>250</sup>

In essence, Voaden argues that *discretio spirituum* was used as a regulatory tool, the enforcement of which enabled the church to control female mystics and ensure conformity. Control and conformity are two concepts that appear to have been alien to Margery, and thus she becomes vulnerable to questions of authenticity. In the face of this dissent, therefore, it is possible to become polarised in one's view, and to see only Margery's faults. However, in

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<sup>248</sup> Voaden, *Gods Words, Women's Voices*, p.109.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, p.108.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40

researching her Continental sisters, it would appear that Margery, although undeniably eccentric, possesses a number of characteristics common to female mystics: indeed, far from the expected shrinking violet, one is greeted by a series of formidable women who also courted controversy, and often bristled with contempt when being scrutinised by what they considered to be a corrupt clergy.

### **Hildegard of Bingen**

In 1098, Hildegard von Bingen was born, 'a figure for whom superlatives seem inadequate'.<sup>251</sup> She was a prolific and varied writer, producing the religious trilogy *Scivias*, *The Book of Life's Merits*, and the *Book of Divine Works*, as well as medical and scientific works, poetry, musical compositions (including a cycle of hymns) and a morality play. Hildegard even created her own language, complete with glossary, for her fellow sisters to use in front of strangers. When she removed herself to Rupertsberg and set up her own convent, she and her nuns became famous for the quality of their illustrations, and Hildegard's own attempts are intended to clarify her visionary experiences. Her industry is recorded in a Latin *Vita*, largely of her own composition, and many of her letters detail the occurrences of her active life.

Hildegard was a vocal and passionate woman, keen for social reform and not afraid to ruffle feathers within both secular and religious society, and she appears to have been impervious to any kind of counter-insult. She lived during a certain amount of upheaval, as secular and ecclesiastical authorities clashed over the control of the Church. Previously, the German

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<sup>251</sup> Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*, p. 15. Beer offers an overview of Hildegard, pp. 15-47, and Fiona Maddocks gives an extensive insight into Hildegard's life in *Hildegard of Bingen: the Woman of her Age*, (Chatham, 2001).

emperor had absolute power, but Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) had done much to increase the profile of the papacy, resulting in a widespread demand for an increase in power for all members of the Church. Hildegard witnessed the subsequent papal split and the 'ecclesiastical squabbling'<sup>252</sup> unsettled her. Her action was to write to the king, Frederick Barbarossa, and, secure in the knowledge that she was doing so as God's representative, roundly criticised him (for supporting a different papal candidate from her), and the precarious state of the nation's church, in a florid style that was nevertheless clear in its meaning:

Woe, woe upon the evildoing of the unjust who scorn me! Hear this, king, if you would live – else my sword will pierce through you!<sup>253</sup>

Aside from the general air of confrontation that pervades this excerpt, her suitably dismissive tone (the contemptuous address of 'king' being a particularly pithy example) indicates a woman of some mettle. Her outspokenness, perseverance and quick wit clearly mark her out as a remarkable woman; especially in view of the fact that the framework upon which medieval religious matters were hung was essentially a patriarchal one. In this respect, she and Margery are similar. Both certainly courted controversy and both were required to draw on their considerable reserves of grit in order to make themselves heard. The point of contrast, however, is that Margery's vocal outbursts tend to focus on her own struggle (as a kind of *imitatio Christi*) for acceptance, which lends them an attention-seeking quality that Hildegard's outspoken letters are without: her desire was to improve the spiritual lives of the masses, which she genuinely believed to be the Church's responsibility. Crucially, however, Hildegard did not attract as much dissent (although she was undeniably contentious) because her speeches were given validity by Eugenius III in 1147, who encouraged her to make a record of her visions: he recognised the *Scivias* as being divinely inspired, and so her future safety was

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<sup>252</sup> Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*, p. 20.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

assured. Hildegard, therefore, had the security of papal approval, and she could legitimately claim to be acting as God's mouthpiece; indeed, she considered herself to be the messenger of the 'verbum Dei'. Margery, however, despite sharing some personality traits with Hildegard, achieved no such success.

Interestingly, for such fearsome women, in their writings they diminish their status as visionary. Margery constantly refers to herself as "creatur", and Hildegard considers herself to be a "homo simplex".<sup>254</sup> Her visions, however, achieve a depth of meaning and sophistication that the uneducated Margery's lack, and she was able to paint, or had paintings commissioned, of her visions. While Margery tends to draw her visionary substance from well-known scenes in the Bible, Hildegard's are vast in scope and theme, allegorical and intellectually solidified. A preliminary description of the vision, often of a dramatic landscape, is then followed by thorough exegesis. It is perhaps worth, at this juncture, a brief foray into one of Hildegard's visions, as it is difficult to appreciate the gulf between Margery's rather homely images and Hildegard's fully realised and extraordinary visions without a clearer sense of what they entail.

*Visio I of Scivias* opens with an image of God atop an iron mountain, complete with wings. Up and down the mountain is a series of windows where pairs of heads are visible. Standing at the foot of the mountain is the sinister robed figure of a human, composed entirely of eyes, and a secondary figure of a child. Flowing directly down the iron mountain from the Creator is a stream of divine light that obscures the child's head. Hildegard interprets this rather arcane vision,<sup>255</sup> explaining that the iron mountain represents stability and steadfastness in the

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<sup>254</sup> Valerie M. Lagorio, 'The Medieval Continental Women Mystics' in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, p. 163.

<sup>255</sup> For an account of this explanation, see Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience*, p. 30.

kingdom of heaven; the brightness of the God-figure represents the ineffable quality of 'celestial divinity';<sup>256</sup> the almost ghoulish eye-figure corresponds to fear of the Lord, as He is all-seeing, and the child is representative of the follower of Christ, who simply walks in His footsteps: the divine light is clearly seen to be favouring the child. The pairs of heads, together with the eye-figure, indicate that our actions, either good or bad, cannot be hidden from the Lord. Margery's visions, however, lack this level of sophistication and depth: they rarely stray outside the sphere of which she is cognisant, and they are firmly grounded in this world. Goodman considers the visions of Margery Kempe to be 'a monument to her lack of originality', indicative of what he judges to be her 'mental banality.'<sup>257</sup> Her visions tend to be without a firm visual basis, and are more a case of the Lord appealing to her auditory sense:

Than on a Fryday befor Crystmes Day, as þis creatur, knelyng in a chapel of Seynt Iohn wythinne a church of Seyte Margrete in N., wept wonder sore, asking mercy & for3yfnes of hir synnes & hir trespass, owyr mercyful Lord Cryst Ihesu, blyssyd mot he be, rauysched hir spyryt & seyde on-to hir: "Dowtyr, why wepest þow so sor? I am comen to þe, Ihesu Cryst, þat deyd on þe Crosse suffering byttyr peynes & passions for þe"<sup>258</sup>.

Here, the Lord approaches Margery in the safety of her local church, St Margaret's, and there is resolutely no physical description; presumably the vision is simply taking place within the church walls. Her first brush with the Divine, however, allows a little in the way of detail; but Margery remains in the familiar setting of her bedchamber:

As sche lay a-loone and hir kears wer fro her, owyr mercyful Lord Crist Ihesu... aperyd to hys creatur which had forsakyn hym in lyknesse of a man, most semly, most

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p.30

<sup>257</sup> Goodman, 'The Piety of John of Brunham's Daughter of Lynn', in *Medieval Women*; ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1978). Both quotations are on p. 350.

<sup>258</sup> *BMK* p. 16.

bewtyuows, & most amyable þat euyr mygth be seen wyth mannys eye, clad in a mantyl of purpyl sylke, syttyng up-on hir beddys side, lokyng vp-on hir wyth so blyssyd a chere þat sche was strngthyd in alle hir spyritys, seyde to hir þes wordys: “Dowtyr, why hast þow forsakyn me, and I forsoke neuyr þe?”<sup>259</sup>

Whilst Hildegard’s visions are other-worldly and brimming with a myriad of possible interpretations, there is no such ambiguity surrounding Margery’s image: the idea of Christ visiting the sick is not radical, and the intimate gesture of his sitting on her “beddys side” seems to suggest that the visions will come to Margery, rather than the other way round. Unlike Hildegard, the vision does not seem to be a result of intense and inward religious meditation, but an unexpected gift from God, and her visions take the form of inner conversation rather than visual educational tool.

It is also interesting to note Margery’s appreciation of the handsome physical appearance of Christ from the outset, as this not only allows us an insight into her personality (indeed, it is slightly diverting to note that although Margery often gives us nothing in the way of a physical description of her surroundings, despite the exotic locations she finds herself in, she is quick to point out the handsomeness of male strangers), and also feeds into a branch of mysticism that she, perhaps unwittingly, subscribed to and which will be discussed in due course.

The nature of Margery’s visions, then, is rather low-key: they are often nothing more than Christ’s voice calling her to attention, and rarely venture outside the territory with which is she is familiar. Occasionally, however, she achieves something more visual in her vivid description of the crucifixion in Chapter 80, but the subject matter remains familiar:

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid, p.8.

& þan ovr Lordys body schakyd & schodered, & alle þe joyntys of þat blissful body brostyn and wenten a-sundyr, & hys precyows wowndys ronnyd down wyth reuerys of blood on euery syde.<sup>260</sup>

Perhaps her most notable divergence from safely established religious norms is in her apocryphal vision of the Virgin Mary's death, although this is more notable for her contretemps with the apostles than for its religious contemplation:

Anoper tyme þe seyde creatur beheld how ovr Lady was... in deying & alle þe apostelys knelyng be-fom hir & asking grace. Pan sche cryid & wept sor. Þe apostelys comawndyd hir to cesyn & be stille. The creatur answeyd to þe apostyles, "Wolde 3e I xulde see þe Modyr of God deyin & I xulde not wepyn?"<sup>261</sup>

By entering into dialogue with the apostles, Margery is shifting the focus of the vision from the lament of the Virgin's death to the recurrent theme of her own struggle for acceptance - even from the apostles, who are clearly irritated by her loud weeping. Hildegard, however, is almost divorced from her visions: she is the harbinger of the word of God, but the vision itself is a complete and functioning world where she comments on the actions contained within, rather than using the vision as an opportunity to converse with God. It is clear that Margery's visions take quite a different form, as she herself takes a central role (either in a colloquy with Christ, or by vocally witnessing certain key events in Christ's life) in proceedings.

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, p.174.

## Mechthild of Magdeburg and the Brautmystik Tradition

Almost unawares, Margery operates within a sphere of mysticism practised by a number of Continental visionaries, which concentrates on the relationship between Christ and the soul. Although Hildegard of Bingen did not explicitly put this theory into practise, she considered that Christ was the best of all possible lovers, and urged her nuns to promulgate this notion. Voaden, however, believes that Hildegard was more a “militant warrior-mother”,<sup>262</sup> than subscriber to the theory of Christ as lover-knight. There were, however, a number of visionaries who write about their relationship with Christ in this manner, and they belong to what is known as the Brautmystik (‘bride mystic’) school of mystical writings.

Born in Saxony, Mechthild of Magdeburg left her aristocratic family in 1233 in order to live the life of a Beguine. The Beguine way of life was ascetic, and her strength of character is evident in her abandonment of her comfortable existence. She is similar to both Margery and Hildegard in that she was not afraid to highlight hypocrisies that existed within the structure of the church (indeed, she even proposed an ascetic model for the Canon of Magdeburg, with the unmistakable implication that she considered him to be living a life of luxury) and she referred to herself as an ‘unworthy sinner’, carrying similar connotations to Margery’s ‘creatur’ and Hildegard’s ‘homo simplex’. After suffering a serious illness in 1281 (many female mystics, including Margery, appeared to be afflicted with varying degrees of ill health), she was impelled by Christ to record her visionary experiences, although, like many, she was initially resistant to the idea.

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<sup>262</sup> Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, p. 55.

Mechthild's visions began at the age of twelve, with the Holy Spirit greeting her each morning, and she is similar to Margery in that a feature of the early stages of her career was a desire to be despised: both women clearly followed the *imitatio Christi*, believing that in echoing Christ's great suffering on earth, one was brought closer to God. Both women also incurred the anger of the established church and had charges of heresy brought against them. Whilst Margery believed that the Lord had granted her the gift of smooth-talking in order to extricate herself from some potentially life-threatening situations, Mechthild sought sanctuary at the Convent of Helfta, a place with a tradition for producing mystics. There, she dictated the seventh part of her book, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, which achieved great success both during her lifetime and after her death.

Mechthild's visions, however, bridge the divide between Hildegard and Margery in that, like the latter, they are a private communion with God, but they also achieve something of the scale of the former. In her vision 'Of a poor maid and the Mass of John the Baptist',<sup>263</sup> God transports her to a vast church in which Mass is heard, youths strew the floor with flowers, and eventually she recognises as herself the maiden wearing a golden wreath in her hair, bearing the words:

His eyes in my eyes,  
His heart in my heart,  
His soul in my soul  
Embraced and unwearied.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> For a full account of this, see Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience*, p. 85 ff.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid* p. 86.

Although Mechthild is young in this vision, the words woven into her hair unmistakably belong to the Brautmystik tradition, and in her later visions she makes full use of the language of the lover.

The first book of *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, concludes with a vision in which Christ appears to Mechthild, exhorting her to array herself in beautiful items (a shift of humility, a white robe of chastity, a mantle of holy desire – she mines an allegorical seam similar to that of Hildegard) before being led to a dance in which Christ has the lead role. All of this is conducted in a language more befitting a medieval Romance (or that which we read in the *Song of Solomon*):

Many days I have wooed her  
But never heard her voice.  
Now I am moved  
I must go to meet her,  
She it is who bears grief and love together,  
In the morning, in the dew is the intimate rapture  
Which first penetrates the soul.<sup>265</sup>

The theme of ‘grief and love together’ is one that preoccupied Mechthild, as she comments that when the Holy Spirit first began his morning salutations, ‘this loving greeting came every day and caused me both love and sorrow’.<sup>266</sup> The result of the above dance, however, is one of spiritual consummation and Mechthild is stridently unguarded in her use of erotic language – for her it is the most natural manner in which to express her relationship with Christ.

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p.94. Compare with the Song of Solomon 2: 3-13.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p.81

Margery gives us details of a similar vision, when she undergoes a spiritual marriage to one third of the Trinity. As stated above, Margery's visions do not occur outside the sphere of the earth, and despite the extraordinary events that take place during this vision, they occur within the easily recognisable realm of the church:

As þis creatur was in þe Postelys Cherch at Rome on Seynt Laterynes Day, þe Fadyr of Hevyn seyde to hir, "Dowtyr I am wel plesyd wyth þe... I wil han ye weedyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn þe my preuyteys & my counselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende".<sup>267</sup>

The language of the marriage ceremony is also distinctly recognisable, although here perhaps Margery once again does not quite adhere to the Continental tradition. The vows of the marriage ceremony are prosaic and almost unimaginative when compared with the openly erotic language used by Mechthild. Margery, however, again uses that which she understood in the language and composition of her visions:

I take þe, Margery, for my weddyd wife, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richer, for powarer, so þat þu be buxom & bonyr to do what I byd þe do.<sup>268</sup>

Whatever Margery's visions lack in scope, it cannot be denied that in her protestations about being parted from Christ, there is something of the Brautmystik in her language:

And þan sche wold not answeyn þe Secunde Persone [i.e.: Christ] but wept wonder sor, desiring to haue stille hym-selfe & and in no wyse be departyd fro hym.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> *BMK*, p. 86.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, p.87

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, p.87

Margery's close relationship with Christ is certainly exemplified by this quotation, as she struggles with the concept of the arranged marriage between herself and the Father, whilst her heart lies with the Son. Indeed, her esteem for the Son is such that she cannot see a handsome young man in the street without reflecting on Christ's suffering, as she appears to equate the two.<sup>270</sup> Although her vision of Christ may seem romanticised, it is no more so than Mechthild's dancing youth.

Although it is not clear whether Margery was aware of the cult of Brautmystik, there were a number of contemporary medieval religious lyrics in circulation with which she may have come into contact. *Quia Amore Languo*, a fifteenth century lyric, deals explicitly with the theme of Christ as lover-knight, as did a great many:

My swete spouse, will we goo play?  
Apples ben rype in my gardine;  
I shall clothe then in new array,  
Thy mete shall be mylk, honye & wyne,  
Now, dere soule, latt us go dyne,  
Thy sustenance is in my skrypp, loo!  
Tary not now, fayre spouse myne,  
Quia amoire languo.<sup>271</sup>

This tradition was certainly pervasive, and it is tempting to believe that Margery was drawing directly on sources that she had encountered; however, whether knowing or unknowing, she subscribes to the rhetoric and visionary experiences that her sister Brautmystiks practised.

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid, p.86.

<sup>271</sup> *English Medieval Religious Lyrics*, ed. Douglas Gray (Exeter, 1992), p.41. Compare with the Beguine Mechthild of Magdeburg who wrote God's description of the soul thus: 'You are like a new bride/ Whose only love has left her sleeping/ From whom she cannot bear to part for even one hour/ I await you in the orchard of love/ And pick for you the flower of sweet reunion/ And make ready there your bed.' Murk-Jansen, *Brides in the Desert*, p. 95.

Indeed, a brief inventory of some Continental female mystics reveals that Mechthild of Hackeborn, Gertrude the Great, Beatrice of Nazareth, the Beguine Hadwijch (who composed a series of Brautmystik stanzaic poems, one entitled *The Perfect Bride*), and Catherine of Siena (who experienced a vision in 1368 at the age of twenty-one, in which she was espoused to Christ) belonged to this branch, and Margery was clearly not alone in her passionate devotion.

Margery's type of mysticism, then, seems both to endorse and repel ideas practised by other leading figures. These women were outspoken, and battled against the moral decline of the Church, often resulting in serious trouble with the authorities. They deliberately courted controversy because their moral rectitude was absolute. Perhaps in Margery's case there is something more selfish at work, as these occasions provide her with the attention that she seems to crave. She does, however, fit well into the Brautmystik tradition, and when viewed in this light, Margery is perhaps at her most convincing. She is by no means unique in her spiritual espousal to God, and the florid language that she uses to describe her feelings of devotion is perfectly in keeping with the overtures of Mechthild of Magdeburg. Margery's visions, however, seem to lack the realisation of her contemporaries, and she is somewhat homely in her settings, implying that Christ comes to her, rather than being transported herself to an alternative landscape. Nor does she enclose herself after her husband's death, a course of action which seriously damages her credibility – perhaps, however, her youngest child was still dependent. Nevertheless, it is clear that whilst Margery very much ploughs her own furrow, there is enough concord between herself and her sister mystics that she ought, at least, to be considered in their vein.

## VII: Conclusion

This chapter has sought to place Margery within a generalised picture of female piety within the medieval period. As we have seen, it was a time characterised by a tremendous flowering of lay female spirituality, by the stratospheric rise in the atypical Beguine movement, and by the Continental interest in and recognition of the lives of holy women. Women were able to lead lives that allowed them to remain uncloistered, but also allowed them to take part in rigorous devotional practices and disciplines. However, there was a difference between mainland Europe and England. Whilst Margery, as a lay female, forging a sort of worldly religious life, would have not been out of place on the Continent, one could suggest that her behaviour in England invited such comment because the national predisposition favoured the male saint. Of course, one cannot wholly ascribe Margery's numerous moments of controversy to an English preference for the male laity, but it would appear that as a visible, voluble woman who does not meet a gruesome death, Margery does not fit comfortably into English notions of sainthood. Unfortunately, she does not quite fit comfortably into the Continental mould, either. Although she displays some of the characteristics of a Continental mystic and religious woman, she is not extreme enough in her practises of self-denial for her to be classed alongside the great Italian women, particularly Catherine of Siena; nor does she possess the reforming spirit of Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen or Bridget of Sweden. Her visions are homely and vernacular, quite different from the other-worldly landscapes of Hildegard; but she does express something of the Brautmystik of Mechthild, and the life-style of Angela of Foligno. She is, moreover, given the gifts of tears, the bestowal of which is validated by the existence of Marie d'Oignies, also married, also worldly, who lives chastely with her husband, and about whom a vita is written by no less than Jacques de Vitry, champion of the Beguines. Margery's dubious practice of crying loudly during sermons is widely ridiculed or even despised in

England; it is a Continental woman who provides the precedent that lends Margery credibility, but not quite acceptance.

Margery's spirituality adheres to certain traditions of the English scene, namely her solitary pursuit of piety and her 'courageous individualism'<sup>272</sup> that was broadly tolerated by a rational Church. Her unrestrained behaviour might have found more sympathy on the Continent, but she perhaps would not have been as visible – which might not have suited her. As the Beguine movement made no real progress in England, with the notable exception of possibly Norwich, the option of becoming a tertiary was closed to Margery; but it is here that perhaps one can see her fitting most comfortably (although judging by her reaction when tasked with relentless domestic drudgery when looking after her husband in his old age, it is also difficult to see her engaged in the type of work undertaken willingly by the Beguines); by the fifteenth century, however, Beguinages had departed from their initial religious purpose. So it is not simply a case that Margery is a Continental mystic transferred across the English Channel, as much of her piety retains an English flavour, and there are many points of disparity between Margery and the Continental mystics; not least of all that when directly compared with some of her Continental colleagues, Margery's practices do not appear extreme enough. She is certainly unusual for reserved and male-orientated England, but her rituals of devotion are only scant imitations of the pious excesses of other Continental religious women. Essentially, Margery is not radical enough in her expression to be explained away as a Continental pious woman in England; yet she is too controversial to be considered 'English' in her piety. It seems, therefore, that Margery is destined to remain something of an outsider. Influenced by, borrowing from

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<sup>272</sup> Thornton, *Margery Kempe: An Example in the English Pastoral Tradition*, p. 12.

and adhering to certain components of various modes of female religious expression has ensured that Margery is unique.

## Chapter Three

### *'Dowtyr why hast þow forsakyn me, and I forsoke neuyr þe?'* Words, Christ and Margery Kempe.

#### I: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse one of the most substantial elements of Margery's *Book*: her colloquies with Christ, and therefore, this chapter marks a transition from the previous chapters, which placed Margery in a variety of contexts, and the remainder of the thesis, which will focus on Margery's use of language. Indeed, it is these linguistic concerns that form the basis of the argument. It may be, therefore, fitting to include a brief reiteration of my overall argument here, by way of an introduction to the second part of the thesis.

Using the etymology of the words in the *Book* as a basis for this research, we can determine the 'placement' of each word in terms of its register. The date of the word, which is taken from the research conducted on the vocabulary of the *Book*,<sup>273</sup> offers a broad (but by no means perfect) tool for placing a word in its correct register. The *OED* and the *MED* offer dates as to the first recorded usages of words, which, when taken together with the language of their etymology, gives the reader a general impression of the tenor of that particular word; this thesis works on the assumption that Latinate and French importations have a higher register, as a general rule, than those deriving from Old English. 'Older' words, therefore, have a lower register, and although there is no hard and fast rule, I have worked on the principle that words that have a recorded entry of c.1300 could be considered as well-established and habitual by the time of Margery Kempe, who was born around 73 years later. Words of potential interest,

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<sup>273</sup> See Appendix.

or what I might venture to term a ‘new’ coinage, date from c.1400 (and these are highlighted in yellow in the appendix): these words could be considered to be as particularly sophisticated. Although there are moments of disagreement between the *OED* and the *MED* as to when a particular word was first recorded,<sup>274</sup> there are only two instances in which words in the *Book* predates both the *OED* and *MED*; they are, therefore, a reliable guide as to dating the appearance of a word in written record.<sup>275</sup> It must, of course, be acknowledged that this system does not, and cannot, indicate when a word entered the language orally, and so a word will always have a later date of record from its first use in the spoken language. Generally speaking, however, the newer the word, the more elevated we can assume that word to be. When one analyses entire sections of the *Book* in this way, it is possible to form an opinion as to the sophistication of the vocabulary given to particular individuals: Christ, Margery, the Virgin Mary, her detractors. This, in turn, can be used to present a particular image of these individuals, based on their use of language; it is arguable that the more elevated their language, the more elevated Margery wished them to appear to the reader. A hierarchy is, therefore, constructed in which we can see these parties placed in a linguistic order. The subsequent chapters of this thesis will deal with the different persons with whom Margery interacts, both real and in her visions, and analyse the use of their language as a way of understanding how she intended them to be presented to the reader. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, we will gain an understanding of the presentation of Margery herself, and whether or not this presentation corresponds with the hypothesis that she is writing a self-penned vita. There is already an extensive body of research that has considered the *Book* a work of autohagiography,<sup>276</sup> and in the chapters that follow, I will contribute to - and develop further - this body of scholarship, with an analysis which is built upon a forensic examination of

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<sup>274</sup> See the Introduction of this thesis for a complete list of these moments of disagreement.

<sup>275</sup> These words are ‘qwietyng’ and ‘whelys’. See Appendix – red highlight.

<sup>276</sup> See the Introduction for an overview of this research.

Margery's language. It is my belief that Margery's strategy of narrating her own saint's life, with herself as the subject, is dependent upon the figure of Christ authorising her claim to sanctity. Margery's colloquies with Christ are substantial both in terms of their length and therefore the make-up of the *Book*, and also because they offer sustained theological discourse, providing useful insights into Margery's religious beliefs, demonstrating to us the daily interactions that she had with her faith, and allowing us to draw conclusions as to Margery's interpretations of that faith.

This section of the thesis will begin with an overview of the qualities that characterise Margery's visions, before going on to analyse the language and themes of selected chapters in which Christ's voice is heard. It will also explore the idea of sacred biography itself, and discuss the hypothesis that Margery uses the conventions of hagiography to construct her text. Margery does not have the advantage of a writer committing her life to print after her death to ratify her holy existence; instead she calls on the highest authority – Christ himself – who confirms her status as a holy woman, and in so doing authorises her claim to sainthood.

The limitations of a thesis mean that I am not able to discuss in detail every passage in which Christ speaks (and this, of course, extends to subsequent chapters and their foci), and so selection of material has been a necessity. The chapters that will be focused on are chapters five and thirty-four; chapter fourteen; and chapters twenty-three and twenty-one. Chapter five offers us the first extended speech by Christ in the *Book* and has a fascinating instance of extremely local language which will be discussed in detail below; chapter thirty-four complements chapter five in its local language. In chapter fourteen, Margery imagines herself dying for Christ's love, and he responds with a lengthy speech offering extensive reassurance for her. This chapter has been selected because it is broadly indicative of the quality and tenor

of Christ's speeches, but it also gives an early indication of the favour shown to Margery by Christ, and this divine support is, as we shall see, important to her claim to sainthood. Chapters twenty-three and twenty-one offer more material that bolsters this claim, including speaking to Christ in intercession and performing a miracle, and assurances that Christ loves wives as much as virgins.

The fundamental aim of the chapter, however, is, through close linguistic analysis, to make an attempt at establishing whether the register employed by Margery when writing Christ's speeches differs from that used when writing the *Book's* female voices or those of Margery's persecutors, both of which will be the subjects of subsequent chapters. The secondary aim of this chapter is to consider whether the manipulation of Christ's register and vocabulary, the employment of certain phrases, or the use of devices consistent with saints' lives or common tropes surrounding certain saints, leads to a portrayal of Margery that inclines itself towards hagiography. If so, one must then reflect on Margery's attempt to construct a self-willed and self-constructed *vita*, and to discuss the obvious tensions that exist if this is the case.

## **II: The Characteristics of Margery's Visions.**

Christ's vocabulary is made up of a broad and comprehensible mix of Latin, French and Anglo-Saxon, representing a universal, articulate and accessible lexis. His meaning is not generally obscured by recourse to allegory or obfuscating words; the sentence of his teaching is, therefore, clear and direct, echoing Margery's own approach to theological reflection, which is rigorously orthodox. Margery seldom exposes her text to ambiguity by venturing into the realms of allegory. As we saw in the previous chapter, her visions are not in the highly imaginative mode of, for instance, Hildegard of Bingen. Margery's visions by contrast, deal

with the homely and the everyday, or they take their cue from well-known biblical episodes, such as the nativity and the Passion. They do not often admit a secondary interpretation (or a third or fourth) because they are literal in what they depict: we simply witness episodes such as the birth of Christ and the death of Christ. That she casts herself in certain roles within them indicates that she is capable of imaginative embellishment, but generally, Margery's visions are not allegorical in nature. This perhaps is the greatest difference between Margery's visions and those of other female mystics; hers are clear, linear and well-defined, but are arguably not as wide in their scope or as nuanced in their depiction. That is not to say that we cannot study her in as much depth, it is simply to say that the *content* is not as original. David Knowles goes further, however, stating that Margery's visions 'do not, in any perceptible way to the reader, deepen the writer's spiritual insight or convey any message or programme to her readers.'<sup>277</sup> This is perhaps too damning, as the clarity and focus of her visions afford her readers a coherent depiction of the most important elements of Christian belief, as understood by an ordinary lay woman of the late fourteenth century. However, a detailed exploration of the language of the visions proves to be extremely fruitful in providing new insights into the spirituality of Margery Kempe.

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<sup>277</sup> David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (London, 1960), p. 142. He goes on to state that '*The Book of Margery Kempe* has little in it of deep spiritual wisdom, and nothing of true mystical experience,' p. 148. How one can distinguish between 'true' mystical experience and those which are not is surely beyond the scope of us all. However, Knowles appears to equate the quality of religious instruction to be gained from their writings to the quality of the mystic: 'Margery Kempe can only improperly and accidentally be classed among the English mystics, and... little of spiritual instruction is to be found in her *Book*,' p.149. If she cannot be classed among the English mystics, it is perhaps because she fits more comfortably in the mould of the continental mystics. Anthony Goodman, too, is rather disparaging, suggesting that 'Margery Kempe lacked... intellectual robustness', see 'The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter of Lynn,' *Medieval Women*, ed., Derek Baker (Oxford, 1978), pp. 347-58, p. 350.

### III: An Illustration of Margery's Relationship with Christ through use of Register.

The pattern of her colloquies with Christ is immediately established: Margery asks short questions to which there are lengthy and moralising answers. Christ's first extended speech to Margery occurs in chapter five, on a Friday before Christmas Day. The speech covers forty-one lines,<sup>278</sup> and so provides ample opportunity for scrutiny. In it, he assures her of the forgiveness of her sins and exhorts her not to wear a hair shirt. Instead, he asks her to eat no meat, and that she should receive the sacrament every Sunday. This second request is rather extraordinary, as Duffy remarks: 'For most people receiving communion was an annual event... In most parishes everyone went to confession in Holy Week and received communion before or after high Mass on Easter Day.'<sup>279</sup> Indeed, Duffy goes on:

Margery Kempe's weekly reception, representing a claim to a particular holiness of life, marked her off from her neighbours, and was almost certainly resented by them... But frequent communion was the prerogative of the few.<sup>280</sup>

Immediately, Margery has been singled out by no less than Christ, for an almost unheard of privilege amongst the laity: the act of weekly communion. Not only this, but she exchanges the wearing of a hair shirt (arguably an unostentatious form of devotion as it cannot be seen by others, only felt and endured by the wearer in a private penance) for the more palatable

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<sup>278</sup> The forty-one lines here refers to the EETS edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, from which all quotations have been taken.

<sup>279</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London, 2005), p.93. Duffy comments that: 'Lady Margaret Beaufort received only monthly, and even so was considered something of a prodigy', p. 93. Christopher Daniell concurs: 'It was very exceptional, and considered exceptionally devout, for laity to take communion more than once a year – as in the case of Lady Margaret Beaufort who received communion monthly.' *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550* (London, 1997), p. 9. Similarly, Owen F. Cummings comments that Margery's weekly communion 'would have been quite extraordinary for the time. For example, Lady Margaret Beaufort... received communion but once a month', before going on to cite Duffy's description of her as a 'prodigy'. See *Eucharist and Ecumenism: the Eucharist Across the Ages and Traditions* (Oregon, 2013), accessed via Google Books, 02/06/15. Although Margery did not live her life in such an extreme manner as Catherine of Siena, there is something similar in their desire to consume the Host – as we saw see in the previous chapter.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit. The resentful neighbours can be found at various points throughout the work, but Duffy cites those on p. 11 of *BMK*: 'Why speke 3e so mech of þe blysse of Heuyn; 3e know it not & 3e haue not be þer no mor þan we.'

substitution of weekly communion, in which the rather public act of consuming the Host, presumably in front of a congregation, the majority of whom will only do so only at Easter, emphasises her special favour and exhibits her holiness. Christ's injunction that she does so requires special dispensation, which involves negotiation of the bureaucracy of the Church (Christ may require it, but it must be authorised), bringing her into contact with the Archbishop of Canterbury:

Whan sche cam to hys presens, sche salutyd hym as sche cowd, prayng hym of hys gracyows lordship to grawnt hir auctoryte of chesyng hyr confessor & to be howselyd euery Sonday, 3yf God wold dysposen hir þerto, vndyr hys lettyr and hys seel thorw al hys prouynce. & he grawnt it her ful benyngly all hir desyr wyth-owtyn any syluer er gold.<sup>281</sup>

The Archbishop's sensitive handling of her requests and the apparent ease with which they are granted is striking. The fourteenth century in England was a time of some degree of shift towards greater independence for lay spirituality, and a focus on the laity's ability to achieve communion with God through divine contemplation. Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* gave lay members of society the handbooks with which to practice their devotions, and thus achieve a holiness that was hitherto restricted to the clergy.<sup>282</sup> It is not, therefore, unreasonable to assume that a number of lay people would have liked to have taken communion on a more frequent basis than merely annually, also requiring an audience with the Archbishop. This throws up three points. Firstly, the fact that the Archbishop acquiesces readily to Margery's requests is highly suggestive of her worthiness and divine

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<sup>281</sup> *BMK*, p. 36.

<sup>282</sup> The medieval Church experienced some difficulties during the fourteenth century, and was unable to maintain its superior standing in the face of chronic dissatisfaction from its followers, both lay and ecclesiastical. There was some appetite for change on the part of the people; the flowering of the mendicant orders - who were perhaps more approachable than conventional monks, the blossoming of mysticism, the increasing voice of women, the explosion of urban living and literate middle classes, and a general level of dissatisfaction on the part of the people meant that the mid to late medieval period was characterised by flux within the Church. See Andre Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame, 2010), chapter one, pp. 3-26, for an introduction to the ideas of the medieval laity's relationship with the Church.

favour – both from Christ and Christ’s highest representative in England. Secondly, it emphasises Margery’s rarity: the Archbishop may not have been inundated with appeals of this nature, but in a climate of burgeoning lay spirituality, it is not unreasonable to assume that other applications were made and subsequently refused; Margery’s success, however, is remarkably rare.<sup>283</sup> Thirdly, Margery comments that all this was effected without recourse to ‘any syluer er gold’. This is interesting, as it simultaneously acknowledges Margery’s awareness of the occasional need to pay for such a privilege, suggesting that a financial transaction was expected and perhaps accepted; but it also shows the reader that Margery stands apart from this kind of behaviour. She has been given the dispensation without needing to pay, thus avoiding any accusation that she has simply bought her weekly communion, and by the Archbishop’s refusal to accept any payment, not even for the scribe to write the necessary letter,<sup>284</sup> we are shown that Margery’s dispensation has been endorsed as genuine by a high-ranking and uncorrupted Church official. Margery’s rather exacting description of the event proves to the reader that she is a more than worthy recipient of the weekly communion, that she is a national rarity in being allowed to do so, and that the endorsement of her worthiness by both Christ and the Church is beyond question. As far as saintliness is concerned, it is a fair beginning.

Christ, however, warns her that she will become an object of derision and scorn as she carries out his work, but that he will always provide her with the correct answers to her detractors, in

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<sup>283</sup> On the other hand, if there was not a climate of requesting monthly or even weekly communion, Margery’s success in gaining it is arguably, more impressive. There is something to suggest that there was a slight Continental desire for more recurrent communion: ‘There were occasionally regional campaigns to increase the frequency of communion: in late-fourteenth century Bohemia the reform movement led by Matthias of Janov was marked by insistence on frequent, even daily, communion. Similar concern for regular reception appears among the thirteenth-century beguines and the later *Devotio Moderna*.’ Robert N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c. 1215-c. 1515* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 99-100. It is interesting to note that Bridget of Sweden and her daughter also achieved the dispensation and took communion every week. See the discussion of Bridget of Sweden in the previous chapter.

<sup>284</sup> ‘[N]e he wold latyn hys clerkys takyn anything for wrytyn ne for seelyng of þe lettyr.’ *BMK*, p. 36.

order to prevent any serious problems arising. Interestingly, this speech contains a lack of Latin or newer French imports:

Dowtyr, why wepyst þow so sor? I am comyn to þe, Ihesu Cryst, þat deyd on þe Crosse, suffering byttyr peynes & passions for þe. I þe same God, forʒefe þe þi synnes to þe vtterest point. And þow schalt neuyr come in Helle ne in Purgatorye, but whan þow schalt passyn owt of þis world, wyth-in þe twnkelyng of an eye þow schalt haue þe blysse of Heuyn.<sup>285</sup>

Despite the fact that Christ is talking about such an elevated subject as Margery's personal salvation, his vocabulary is drawn from a mainly Anglo-Saxon register. 'Peynes' is of Anglo-Norman origin (c.1300), and is paired with 'passyons', which is one of a small group of words that were Anglo-Saxon but came into the language via classical Latin. The *OED* cites its usage in the Kentish *Charter: Oswulf and Beornðryð*. Both are, therefore, early enough to excite no particular interest or generate impact (apart from the stylish plosive alliteration, also used in the *Ancrene Wisse*).<sup>286</sup> 'Purgatorie' (?c.1225) is another early Anglo-Norman example, via Latin, and the other notable word of the extract is 'twinkelyng' (a.1300), which derives from the Old English twinclian. The sense of winking an eye, (that is, a brief moment of time) as Margery employs it in this instance, develops later,<sup>287</sup> but not late enough for Margery to be amongst the first to record this meaning.

The remainder of the Latinate or French words of Christ's extensive speech, in alphabetical order, are as follows: comawnd (a.1330), contemplacyon (?c.1225), contrysyon (a.1300), cownselys (?c.1225), cownsel (?c.1225), grace (c.1175), mageste (a.1300), medytacyon

<sup>285</sup> *BMK*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>286</sup> Geoffrey Shepherd, ed., *Ancrene Wisse: Parts Six and Seven*. (Exeter, 2000), 'Crist þolie pine & passion ant swa habben inʒong in to his riche', p. 9 and 'þah ich dude o mi bodi alle pine & passiun þet bodi mahte þolien', p.19.

<sup>287</sup> Chaucer uses it in the 'Complaint of Mars' in c.1374, l.222: 'Her Ioy... Ne lasteth not the twynkelyng of an eye'. *The Riverside Chaucer*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 646.

(?c.1225), *mervelyn* (c.1380), *point* (c.1225), *prevyteys* (?c.1225), and *sacrament* (c.1175). 'Awter' is perhaps worth noting as another example of classical Latin that transmits straight into Anglo-Saxon. Of these examples, only 'mervelyn' has a first recorded usage that is contemporary with Margery's life.

#### IV: Stokfysch and Local Dialect

Christ's language, therefore, initially appears to be humble and direct, a conclusion further evidenced by his use of imagery:

þow xalt ben etyn a knawyn of þe pepul of þe world as any raton knawyth þe stokfysch.<sup>288</sup>

The derision that Margery will receive from those who disbelieve her is compared to the rats that gnaw at the stockfish. Stockfish, a medieval dietary staple of cod cured by drying in the air without the use of salt, is a striking simile: it lacks any pretension, is practical and domestic, and is geographically apposite. The port of Bishop's Lynn imported high quantities of stockfish from Scandinavia, which were subsequently transferred up the river Ouse to the Midlands, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, and its importance to the local economy (and diet) is

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<sup>288</sup> *BMK*, p.17.

reflected in the fact that there was a Stockfish Row in the town.<sup>289</sup> Lynn grew wealthy on the medieval reliance on stockfish, and Margery would certainly have understood the importance of this cargo to the prosperity of the town: as we have seen, both her father and her husband were merchants involved in trade. However important stockfish was to the local economy, the reference is surprising when placed in the mouth of Christ; partly because of its specificity, and partly because of his apparent knowledge of local commerce. Margery gives him a language that is accessible and which speaks to her local, mercantile concerns and outlook. Indeed, Christ refers to the stockfish once more:

Dowtyr, for þu art so buxom to my wille cleuyst as sore on-to me as þe skyn of stokfysche cleuyth to a mannys handys whan it is sothyn.<sup>290</sup>

Here, Margery's obedience to Christ is so great, that she cleaves to him as the skin of the stockfish cleaves to the hands of men when it is boiled. The notion of cleaving to the Lord is, of course, biblical,<sup>291</sup> but the mode of Christ's expression of this notion, through Margery, is rather novel and arresting. The use of such pertinent vocabulary on Christ's part actually enhances Margery's claim that his colloquies with her are deeply personal, as he appears to tailor his vocabulary to suit her frame of reference: she is, after all, simply repeating his words verbatim to the scribe. This allows the reader to feel the full force of his preference for her,

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<sup>289</sup> See Chapter 1 for an overview of Medieval Lynn. For a helpful map of medieval Lynn, see Deborah S. Ellis: 'Margery Kempe and King's Lynn' in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra McEntire (London, 1992), pp.139-63, p. 163. In this we can see that Stockfish Row runs parallel to the river Ouse, and is present-day King Street. David Bates and Robert Liddiard make a case for stockfish trading being particularly important to Norfolk, trading, sometimes a touch shadily, with Iceland during the fifteenth century: 'In 1433 a ship from Cromer belonging to Thomas Rudd arrived from Iceland and the stockfish had been smuggled into England, presumably because it did not have a licence. In 1438 Adam Horn from Cley and Robert Foulter from Cromer were accused of sailing to Iceland (instead of Bergen) where they loaded their ship with stockfish in exchange for barely and beer.' *East Anglia and its North Sea World in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 213. For a general discussion on the medieval port trade of Lynn, with some reference to stockfish, see Eleanora Carus-Wilson:

[http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-769-1/dissemination/pdf/vol06-07/6\\_182\\_201.pdf](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-769-1/dissemination/pdf/vol06-07/6_182_201.pdf).

<sup>290</sup> *BMK*, p. 91.

<sup>291</sup> The Acts 11:23: 'Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.'

deliberately altering his language when he speaks by adopting the vernacular of a Lynn tradesman. Of course, the alternative view is that, when constructing her treatise and writing Christ's speeches (based on her visions), Margery uses the comfortable language of her upbringing and milieu to impart his teachings. It is almost impossible to divorce Margery from Lynn, as its ethos, culture and the status of her family clearly inform her theological contemplations, as has also been discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis.<sup>292</sup>

The use of anachronistic language was commonplace in religious literature. Although 'stokfysch' pronounced by Christ seems to be a kind of linguistic dislocation to a modern reader, to a contemporary audience it would have been unproblematic. The use of anachronism in medieval literature provides a sometimes necessary bridge between the biblical world and the social and cultural world of the fifteenth century. Collapsing the distance between these two worlds allows the medieval worshipper the opportunity to view religion through the more accessible lens of their own context. It would, therefore, at this juncture, be fitting to offer a comparison with Margery's *Book*, by analysing a different genre of medieval literature in order to examine the use of anachronism and local language within it. The choice of medieval drama is appropriate, as the mystery plays were organised, performed and financed by city guilds; the same social milieu as Margery. Because of this local administration of the pageants, the plays are a good barometer for the use of local language in literature during this period. *The York*

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<sup>292</sup> For an exploration of the influence of Lynn and her family upon Margery, see Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, Deborah S. Ellis, 'Margery Kempe and King's Lynn' in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, Kate Parker, 'Lynn and the Making of a Mystic' in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, Margaret Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, and Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*.

*Mystery Plays*,<sup>293</sup> for example, exhibit a tendency to make use of local colour, and although the scope of the present study does not admit a full analysis of this, it might be useful to provide a small sample of such cases. Modern readers may feel that Margery's use of anachronism reveals a lack of historical awareness or sense on her part, and may also view Christ's use of local dialect as somewhat naïve, but when we examine this alongside devotional literature that self-consciously used anachronism, we are able to appreciate the subtlety and elegance that can characterise Margery's linguistic practice.

I have selected The York Cycle precisely because, like the *Book*, the plays are immutably rooted in the milieu of the city, and they employ language that is not only local, but specific to that milieu. It must, however, be also acknowledged, that the choice of the York Cycle is, to an extent, somewhat arbitrary; although it has a rich and fruitful seam of examples of local language, I could also have selected any one of a number of texts from across England in which local language or dialect is used for broadly didactic or religious ends. Later, I will turn my attention in particular to the *Second Trial Before Pilate*, because of its fascinating use of words with a highly local provenance. Writing on the subject of the mystery plays, Stevens comments that:

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<sup>293</sup> I have used both *York Mystery Plays, a Selection in Modern Spelling* eds. Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King (Oxford, 2009), and the University of Rochester TEAMS online text: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/davidson-play-33-the-second-trial-before-pilate#380>. It is worth noting that anachronisms do not exist solely in the form of local language. In the Crucifixion play, as the soldiers are discussing the best technique for affixing Christ to the cross, the following line is said by the First Soldier:

Strike on then hard, for him thee bought. (p. 215, l. 101)

He urges his companion to hit the nail with conviction, and adds a hearty soldierly oath for emphasis. The assembled crowd watching this scene unfold would have understood the meaning at once, and Beadle renders the phrase as 'for he who redeemed you' in the footnote of his edition. The oath, therefore, is a lovely example of an anachronism at work: the Roman is swearing on the redeemer (i.e.: Christ), which, given the circumstances is somewhat ironic, and somewhat out of joint. It is a case of the spirit of the soldier's words, rather than the sense, being used to stress the dramatic and gruesome force with which Christ was executed. It does, however, neatly predict the whole of Christianity, a fact which might not have been lost on an audience. It also illustrates the central theme of the play: that Christ's death redeems all sinners, and that His mercy extends even to those who are responsible for his death.

Medieval city drama, both in the manner of its production and its dramatic content, presented to its spectators a mirror of their lives and their environment.<sup>294</sup>

This is the vital point: that biblical scenes were deliberately enacted in such a way that the local population would be able to recognise themselves and their lives within them, not only offering them a more accessible approach, but also delivering more spiritual impact and resonance. The use of anachronism, therefore, was almost integral to the text:

The linkage [use of anachronism] helped to incorporate the city's ordinary purpose – its daily ritual of work and human intercourse – into the play action and thus into the grand design of salvation history.<sup>295</sup>

When viewed in this light, Margery's use of stockfish is less surprising; it allows her readership to link the seemingly banal to salvation, and the distance between everyday toil and work and the promise of everlasting life is diminished. The pastoral impact of literary anachronism on the contemporary audience, therefore, is an important one. What Margery is doing is characteristic of the vernacular religious writing of the later Middle Ages more generally: what we see in the York pageants is the paradox that universal truths are most appropriately and most powerfully conveyed in the language of the local and the vernacular. The use of dialect terms and language of such local provenance not only ensures that religious messages are understood by the inhabitants of Lynn and York, but it also highlights the relevance - and the urgency - of these messages to those inhabitants.

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<sup>294</sup> Martin Stevens, *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual and Critical Interpretation* (Princeton, 1987), p.29. Accessed via Google Books, 02/04/16.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit. The use of anachronism in the York Plays, amongst other things, consisted of what Stevens calls 'the quaintness and artlessness of medieval playcraft' (p.29); the Bakers produced the Last Supper, the Sausage Makers produced the Hanging of Judas, with sausages for entrails; the Pinners, with grim inevitability, were responsible for the Crucifixion play. It is, perhaps, a form of medieval product placement. For a more comprehensive overview on the use of anachronism in medieval literature, see chapter one in Stevens.

*The Second Trial Before Pilate* is a play dealing with Pilate's judgement of Christ, at Christ's second appearance before him. Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas are the principal players of the piece, with Christ himself taking a rather minor speaking role. The play is mostly concerned with the debate that rages between the three characters as to whether Christ deserves the harsh punishment that Annas and Caiaphas wish to see meted out. The high priests use certain wiles as a means of provoking Pilate into action:

Caiaphas:     Against Sir Ceasar himself he segges, and says  
                  All the wights in this world work in waste  
                  That take him any tribute – thus his teaching outrays.  
                  Yet further he feigns slike affrays,  
                  And says that himself is God's son.  
                  And sire, our law ledges and lays,  
                  In what faitour falsehood is found,  
                  Should be slain.<sup>296</sup>

Addressing Caesar as 'sir' is clearly another example of the use of anachronism at work, intended to convey the social standing of Caesar in language that the audience would appreciate. Their laws, however, are not enough to convince Pilate, who states that 'For no shame to shend will we shun.'<sup>297</sup> Via allegations of 'sorcery'<sup>298</sup> and further wheedling, it is not until Caiaphas offers a meaningful reason to kill Christ – that Christ poses a challenge to Roman authority by claiming to be king - that Pilate orders the scourging:

Caiaphas:     Not so, sir, for well ye it wot,  
                  To be king, he claimeth, with crown,  
                  And whoso stoutly will step to that state  
                  Ye should deem, sir to be dinged down  
                  And dead.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> *The Second Trial Before Pilate*, p.196.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid*, p. 203.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid*, p. 204.

This line of argument proves efficacious, and the play climaxes with the whipping of Christ by some verbose soldiers who provide a lengthy commentary on their actions. The brutality of this section contrasts with the debate sequence that preceded it, and the play concludes with Pilate washing his hands (with a piquant 'Will ye wash while the water is hot?'<sup>300</sup> from the character of the Beadle) of the affair. The play captures Pilate's conflicted feelings, in which his initial instinct to acquit Christ is diminished as Caiaphas and Annas offer increasingly sophisticated arguments against him.

Taking the *Second Trial Before Pontius Pilate* as a specimen play, we can see the following instances (which are by no means exhaustive) where local dialect or terminology has been used: kevellis (l.218), poustie (l.205), skelp (l.337), brashes (l.351), tytt (l.348), and tarand (l.380). The first, kevellis, is defined by the *MED* as 'a big, strong person' in the third definition of 'kevel', and as a 'low fellow' in the *OED*'s second headword under 'cavel'. A kevel is also a mason's hammer for breaking stones, and here the *OED* notes it as a Scots and northern dialect word. It is not impossible that these two words perhaps share some provenance, as the strength required to wield a kevel in order to break up masonry may naturally have lent itself to a secondary meaning of being powerfully built. The *MED* cites the Old Norse word kefli, a large stick, as the etymology; York's Viking association makes this plausible and adds a local dimension. The *OED*, however, states that the etymology is obscure. The second, poustie, meaning strength, is recorded in the *OED* as now a chiefly Scots and Irish word which entered English via Anglo-Norman, and we also see that in medieval times this form was a northern expression. Additionally, skelp (to strike, beat or whip, and probably imitative in origin – although the *MED* hazards '?ult. Celt') is 'chiefly northern and Scots', and the citations in the *MED* bear out this assertion: they are from the York Cycle, the Townley Play, and the *Wars of*

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<sup>300</sup> *Ibid*, p. 208.

*Alexander*, an alliterative poem from the north-west Midlands. Both *tytt* (a sharp jerking motion) and *brashes* (an attack or assault) are dialectal northern and Scots. These are words that would have resonated with the crowds that gathered to watch, and although the authors of the York plays remain unknown, they clearly understood the power that local words have in grounding their work. As with *stockfish*, they have placed the audience on a surer footing in relation to their understanding of biblical scenes. Dialect, like anachronism, plays an important role in narrowing the distance between the audience and the biblical scene, both geographically and historically; the story of Christ's Passion is conveyed in such a way that the spectators understand that his sacrifice will also redeem *them*. Salvation is, therefore, not a remote concept from a text that many would not have been able to access, but a comprehensible and relevant notion that would have, arguably, strengthened their relationship with God.

The idea that dialectal terms pertain to specific geographic locations is bolstered by a further example of extremely local language that occurs within the *Book of Margery Kempe*. In chapter thirty-four, Margery is asked by a priest in Rome to wear black clothes, changing from her hard-fought white garments. She acquiesces, because she had the 'felyng þat sche plesyd God wyth hir obediens'.<sup>301</sup> However, her apparent fickleness engenders scorn from the women of Rome, who ask if 'malendrynes had robbyd hir'.<sup>302</sup> The term 'malendrynes' is of particular interest, because the *Book* bears the distinction of holding the first recorded usage of this word (meaning highwayman), and the second and only other citation in the *OED* comes from John Capgrave's *Abbreviacion of Cronicles*, from a.1464.<sup>303</sup> Interestingly, Capgrave, too, was a

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<sup>301</sup> *BMK*, p. 85.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*

<sup>303</sup> See <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112750?redirectedFrom=malendryn#eid>.

native of Lynn, and a near contemporary of Margery.<sup>304</sup> Malendryne is not recorded in the *MED*, and these two records in the *OED* suggest that this was not widely used or widely known, except for in the highly specific geographic location of Lynn. Of further interest is the fact that Margery uses it when being derided by Italian women: the etymology of the word is possibly Middle French, *malandrin*, dating from the late fourteenth century; but also could be from the Italian, *malandrino*, dating from the early fourteenth century - Margery was in Italy during 1414-15, either side of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land.<sup>305</sup> It is very tempting to suggest that Margery brought this word back to England with her, having been on the receiving end of it in Rome, and it is, at the very least, apposite that she uses an Italianate word when articulating the derision of Italian women. Of course, Lynn was an important trading post and must have been a repository of unusual dialect words borrowed from Hanseatic traders (although it is worth remembering that Italy was not on the Hanseatic trading route) but it is nevertheless remarkable that the only surviving instances of this word are by Margery and another writer from Lynn. That Margery herself had been in Italy, perhaps conversing with the locals in a mixture of English and beginner's Italian, possibly leading to the creation of certain anglicised adoptions, together with no further citations of 'malendrynes' in the *OED*, gestures towards a specific geographical location for this word. It, too, did not catch on nationally (and as far as recorded usage can demonstrate, enjoyed even less success than 'tarand'), but when viewed in this light, the notion of 'tarand' having a specific locale, understood and used within York but not much further, is not implausible. On the basis of the above, a person from York would not understand what a 'malendryn' was any more than a person from Lynn would understand the

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<sup>304</sup> His *Life of Saint Katherine* attests that his 'cuntre is of Northfolke of the town of Lynn,' l.240 of the TEAMS University of Rochester online edition; see <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/winstead-capgrave-life-of-saint-katherine-prologue> The introduction to this text states that Capgrave was born in 1393, the year in which Margery married, and also provides helpful detail as to his life and education:

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/winstead-capgrave-life-of-saint-katherine-introduction>. There are also tantalising possible explanations for the further instances of Italian in the *Book* in David Russell, 'On Margery Kempe and Caterina of Sienna' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition of England*, ed. E. A. Jones (Boydell, 2011).

<sup>305</sup> For a full chronology of Margery's life, see the EETS introduction to the *Book*, pp. xlvi-xxlix.

term 'tarand'. Of course, orthographic markers will guide a reader as to where a text has originated (for example, the use of <x> for <sch> in the text of the *Book* is characteristic of an East Anglian scribe),<sup>306</sup> but words themselves are also indicative.

The frequent use of dialectal words clearly imbues the *Second Trial Before Pilate* with a localness that is perhaps unusual if one thinks of the content of this piece, but more important than this is that it renders the significance of the religious text in a highly accessible manner to the non- or semi-literate masses that would have gathered to watch. By colouring the script with provincial terms, or perhaps in this case an 'accent', the religious stories would have been clear, comprehensible and leave no room for ambiguities that could cause an unorthodox reading.<sup>307</sup> Not only this, but also, as with Margery's stockfish and her malendrynes, it demonstrates the fact that medieval writers utilised that which they knew when it came to committing their words to paper.<sup>308</sup> Christ's employment of a metaphor concerning stockfish is as apt as Pontius Pilate ordering the soldiers to 'skelp' Christ with scourges; this is religion not just for the English, but for individual counties and towns, accustomed to their own accents, orthography and linguistic characteristics. Use of local idiom would have enhanced the overall experience for a contemporary and semi-literate audience, who may have required their religious stories to be delivered in a more accessible format, allowing the powerful message of salvation to be delivered to all. The difference, however, between Margery's local accent and that of the York Mystery plays is, of course, that Margery tells us that she is relating the words, verbatim, of Christ. The plays were drafted, finessed and performed by a number of unknown

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<sup>306</sup> See Angus McIntosh, M.L. Samuels, and Michael Benskin, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (Aberdeen, 1986) for a comprehensive account of orthography and dialect markers in the medieval period.

<sup>307</sup> Beadle notes that '[i]ts spiritual purpose was the glorification of God, and its didactic intention to instruct the unlettered in the historical basis of their faith,' p. ix, *York Mystery Plays*.

<sup>308</sup> Even Bridget of Sweden employed fairly homely imagery when discussing religious matters: the soul is described as being like a cheese in a vat, moulding to the shape of the container; God is described as a washerwoman; evil is like bitter mustard; and God is also described variously as a chicken, goose or magpie. See Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*. Morris states that 'Birgitta's revelations are a valuable source of information about life in Medieval Sweden', p. 24.

people, depicting well-known stories from the Bible. It is not surprising, therefore, that the York plays contain dialectal words; they were written by men of the town, for the folk of the town. More worthy of comment, however, is the fact that Margery is suggesting that Christ *himself* (not a representation of Christ on stage, as depicted by a writer) communicated in a manner that was local to Lynn, employing a commercial language that was pertinent to the town's mercantile society: everyone in England would have known what stockfish was, but Lynn was a major point of ingress and distribution. Not only this, but Christ is specifically communicating with Margery, a daughter of that town. The implication is that he has moulded *his* language to suit *her* context. One could argue that Christ, as a humble everyman figure, would naturally do so to be as accessible as possible; on the other hand, the use of 'stokfysch' also seems to reveal real divine approval for *her*, and for her locale.

### **V: Margery and Sacred Biography**

The notion that Christ singled Margery out as deserving of special attention, and that his language was altered to suit her is highly suggestive of divine favour, and it is through this marked attention, communicated by her *Book*, that one could argue that Margery begins her campaign for sainthood. As mentioned above, one could argue that it is part of Margery's plan to achieve this by writing a vita about herself, in which Christ validates her claim to sanctity. The concept of autohagiography has already been discussed in this thesis, but it would be useful as this juncture, briefly to reiterate the argument for reading the *Book* in this light. Previous

research has posited the view that Margery was constructing a self-penned vita,<sup>309</sup> in which the accumulated impact of the catalogue of her suffering, her borrowing of the tropes, themes and content of existing saints' lives, the performance of apparent miracles, and her prayers of intercession all contribute to the impression that the *Book* ought to be read as hagiography. As also mentioned, the problem of humility arises; it is difficult to write one's own vita, with the possible intention of the establishment of a local or national cult, whilst maintaining the necessary mode of modesty. It is precisely for this reason, that Christ's language becomes so important within the *Book*. With Christ, Margery does not need to seek the validation of a clerical champion in order to proceed with the composition of her narrative; Christ is the ultimate authority, and his confirmation of Margery's sanctity would seem to bypass the need for any other testimony, however exalted.

Margery was clearly aware of a body of hagiographical literature, and she no doubt understood the importance of a written vita as part of the evidence considered by the papacy during the canonisation process. Richard Kieckhefer summarises the point of vitae thus:

[A] vita sought to persuade the populace that the holy man or woman was in heaven and could serve as an effective intercessor, so that people would pray for the saint's intercession and thus obtain the miracles required for canonization. At the same time, the vita endeavoured [sic] to persuade the papal curia that the holy man or woman was genuinely holy and a faithful child of the church... To appeal to their lay audience, the vitae might contain evidence of charismatic or miraculous powers; to persuade the curia they would relate in detail the saints' virtues.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> For a sample, see: Katherine Lewis, 'Introduction: Saints, Cults and Lives in Late Medieval England', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih, pp. 1-23 (Cambridge, 2010), Gail McMurray Gibson, *Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London, 1989), Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984).

<sup>310</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, p.4.

The odds of Margery achieving recognition, however, were stacked against her for a number of reasons. By the fifteenth century, the bureaucratic hurdles involved in the process of canonisation had dramatically increased.<sup>311</sup> These delays led to a rise in cost to the person making the petition for another's sainthood, not only in submitting the application, but also in housing the commission throughout their investigation. Additionally, the prelates involved at the Curial stage had to be paid if they were to pursue the case.<sup>312</sup> Margery, therefore, would have required a very wealthy sponsor if her case were to make it to the Curia. Secondly, she would have required a sizeable cult to have sprung up around her, perhaps even country-wide:

In the cases of saints from countries on the margins of Christendom, such as Scandinavia, Poland and Hungary, the problem was posed in slightly different terms. In Roman eyes it was *a priori* doubtful whether the servants of God venerated in these distant regions deserved to accede to the honour of canonization.<sup>313</sup>

The geographical spread of a cult made a significant difference to the success or failure of a canonisation bid. Being too similar to other bids also decreased one's chances: 'this was the case with the English bishops' in what Vauchez calls 'the highly organized pressure group constituted by the English episcopate, with royal support.'<sup>314</sup> Margery, at least, would be a distinctive candidate amongst the aforementioned English preference for bishops as their proposed saints; however it appears that she would also have required backing from the king. Moreover, the number of applications that were rejected out of hand increased.<sup>315</sup> There was,

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<sup>311</sup> '[T]he receipt of the documents in the Curia, their authentication, which was sometimes contested, the meticulous examination and rubrication of the acts of the enquiry by the chaplains of the cardinal appointed by the pope to act in the matter, and the compilation of their report, all took years, even decades. Without there necessarily being a conscious desire to stall the proceedings, a dossier, however well prepared, could be blocked at various points before it reached the final stage. Indeed, it only needed one of the three cardinals responsible... to be summoned to other duties, or to die, for there to be a hiatus of several months in the examination of the documents.' Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 62-3. The delays became so elongated that 'it was practically impossible for a process to be successfully completed during the reign of the pope who had ordered it,' p.64.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70.

however, some disconnect between who local churches and their congregations venerated as a saint, and the formal recognition of sainthood offered by the papacy, a fact understood by the papacy itself; there was a multitude of local saints completely unacknowledged by Rome, whom the populations of towns and villages continued to worship without compunction. The instigation of a formal canonisation application, however, was lengthy, extraordinarily tedious and financially crippling, and without any guarantee of success. Without a written document of her life, however, Margery would not have even been in a position to fall at the first hurdle.

The vitae of other saints were generally composed after their deaths, by a third party. Margery's *Book* lacks such a champion (Master Aleyn being dead at this point),<sup>316</sup> although obviously she received enough support from elsewhere that it came into being. However, the criticism that can be levelled at Margery is that in writing her own vita, as it were, she falls foul of one of the basic tenets of the saintly life; namely humility. It is a criticism that cannot be explained away easily, but Margery also has God on her side. The answer to any who might question the legitimacy of her *Book* as a potential document for the establishment of a cult comes in Chapter 88. Fearful that the composition of her work is taking away from her time at prayer, she is reassured:

For, þow 3e wer in þe chirche & wept bothyn to-gedyr as sore as euyr þu dedist, 3et xulde 3e not plesyn me mor þan 3e don wyth 3owr writing, for dowtyr, be þis boke many a man xal be turnyd to me & beleuyn þerin.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Although there is a lovely point later in Chapter 88 that deals with Margery's relationship with Master Aleyn, and their reunion in heaven: 'perfore he schal trewly be rewardeyd for thy wepyng as thow he had wept himself. & beleue wel, dowtyr, þat 3e xal be ful mery in Heuyn to-gedyr at þe last and xal blyssyn þe tyme þat euyr 3owr on knew 3owr oþer,' p. 216. Margery has given away half her tears and half her good works to count for Master Aleyn in Heaven.

<sup>317</sup> *BMK*, p. 216.

The composition of her work, therefore, has received direct endorsement from God. The self-written nature of it does not appear to displease Him; indeed, it will cause a great many people (inspired by Margery's holy life, just as she has been inspired by others) to turn towards Him. Moreover, Margery was not alone in having a hand in the construction of her vita. Kieckhefer notes that 'the fourteenth century produced important specimens of spiritual autobiography':

The best known instance is Henry Suso's *Life of the Servant*... which impresses many readers with its richly poetic expression of intense religious feeling... To this one may add Rulman Merswin's agonizing recollections of his own religious conversion, and from the early fifteenth century we have Margery Kempe's autobiography, the earliest in the language. These works are far from containing unrelieved self-glorification, yet they present their authors as such fervently devout souls that one might speak of the genre as autohagiography. In addition there are frequent autobiographical fragments in that mystical literature which flourished in the fourteenth century; the works of Julian of Norwich and Richard Rolle, for example, present insight into their author's lives.<sup>318</sup>

Kieckhefer also makes a very convincing point concerning the mystics' apparent predilection for spiritual autobiography: 'they alone were in a position to tell of it, however haltingly.'<sup>319</sup> With this in mind, however, I would argue that Margery consciously modelled her life (and therefore, the material for her *Book*) in accordance with hagiographical convention, in order to make her work appear more compellingly saintly. It is worth, therefore, at this juncture a brief discussion on the requirements of hagiography. If Margery were seeking to produce her own sacred biography with a view to becoming an English saint, it would be useful to see how Margery's *Book* follows (or deviates from) the usual format of hagiography.

Katherine Lewis points out that 'it seems entirely likely that the intention was not simply for Margery to be seen as a saint in abstract, exemplary terms, but for her to be concretely

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<sup>318</sup> Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, p. 6,

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

venerated as such by devotees.<sup>320</sup> Part of the necessary arrangements for such veneration included the production of a biography of the subject. However, the biography often subscribed to a set of standards that other vitae employed:

At the level of generic convention, this means that sanctity is frequently established by demonstrating the likeness between the individual life and the lives of other saints or of Christ. Hagiography is full of conventional motifs, which can be openly transferred from one new saint to another.<sup>321</sup>

Margery's *Book* adheres to the basic conventions of hagiography and sainthood in a list described by Lewis as 'her visions, her interrogations, her pilgrimages, her suffering at the hands of others, her preoccupation with virginity, her social criticism and her charity.'<sup>322</sup> Certainly, she endures reproof from others and suffers (albeit in a less extreme manner than many saints in that her suffering does not result in her untimely death), and she is interrogated about her religious beliefs. She also intercedes on behalf of others (an act usually reserved for bona fide saints, already in heaven), and there is even the suggestion that she performs a miracle.<sup>323</sup> A few examples of saints' lives that bear out the broad framework outlined above include St Margaret, St Cecilia, St Catherine, and St Agatha,<sup>324</sup> all of whom suffer persecution, are interrogated by their captors or tormentors, stoutly defend their faith, and die in brutal

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<sup>320</sup> Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England', a *Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 195-215, pp 196-7. She goes on to mention Christ's words to Margery in which he tells her that: 'perfore in þis cherche and in þis place I xal ben worschepyd in þe... Dowtyr, I xal werkyn so mech grace for þe þat all þe werld xal wondreyn & mervuelyn of my goodness'. Lewis states that 'this seems a clear indication that some sort of shrine to Margery would established at St Margaret's, most likely focused on her tomb', pp. 198-9.

<sup>321</sup> Sarah Salih, 'Introduction', *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, pp. 1-23, p. 14.

<sup>322</sup> Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England', p. 200. Kieckhefer comments that: '[Margery] shared in all the tendencies of fourteenth-century saints: she cultivated fervently the virtue of patience, she was keenly devoted to the passion, penitence was a major theme in her life and she enjoyed raptures and revelations in great abundance, and in every aspect of her piety there was a spirit of intensity that made her stand out as a noteworthy character,' p. 185.

<sup>323</sup> See chapter four of this thesis: 'Words and Women' for a more detailed account of the miracle that Margery performs, and how this helps to create an aura of saintliness for her. Margery's preoccupation with virginity is discussed in chapter six.

<sup>324</sup> See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. Christopher Stace (Penguin, 1998). St Margaret pp. 162-4; St Cecilia pp. 317-22; St Catherine pp. 333-38; St Agatha pp. 77-80.

fashion. Margery differs from these examples in that she does not undergo final martyrdom, but she does defend her faith under interrogation.<sup>325</sup> Although there will be a more comprehensive discussion of Margery's emulation of the saints in the chapters of this thesis concerning persecution and virginity, it is worth noting here some of the parallels that can be drawn between Margery and these saints by way of explanation. Both St Agatha and St Cecilia offer stout defences of their faith under duress, just as Margery does when interrogated.<sup>326</sup> It is St Katherine of Alexandria,<sup>327</sup> however, who appears to capture Margery's imagination, bravely and cleverly disputing with her persecutors, summoning up the image of Margery's examinations before the Mayor of Leicester and the Archbishop of York at Beverley. Margery seeks to imitate St Katherine, who attracted crowds during her incarceration, by her telling of tales out of the window of her place of imprisonment, causing emotional upset to the women gathered below.<sup>328</sup>

So far, we have seen that Margery uses highly localised and anachronistic language as a means of conveying religious messages to her readership in a manner not only that Lynn-folk would understand, but also in a way that highlights the relevance of those messages. In this case, it is to demonstrate the relevance and importance of the message that Margery will suffer and be tormented by other people throughout her life because of her religious conviction, and her mode of expressing it. We have also seen that Margery appeared to enjoy the favour of Christ, giving her a special status that could be viewed as imitative of the saints. Both of these points set up early in the *Book* the author's expectation that the work should to be considered as hagiography. It is now pertinent, therefore, to return to chapter five of Margery's *Book*, as the rest of Christ's

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<sup>325</sup> See chapter five of this thesis for a full discussion of the persecution that Margery suffers, and how this emulates the saints.

<sup>326</sup> *The Golden Legend*, St Cecilia pp. 317-22; St Agatha pp. 77-80.

<sup>327</sup> *The Golden Legend*, pp.333-38.

<sup>328</sup> See chapter fifty-three of *BMK*.

first extended speech neatly addresses some of the religious points that will come to dominate

Margery's existence:

And, dowtyr þu hast an hayr vp-on þi bakke. I wyl þu do it a-way... Also, my derworthy dowtyr, þu must forsake þat þow louyst best in þis world, & þat is þe etyng of flesch... Thys is my wyl, dowtyr, þat þow receyue my body euery Sunday, and I schal flowe so mych grace in þe þat alle þe world xal meruelyn þerof. Þow xalt ben etyn & knawyn of þe pepul of þe world as any raton knawyth þe stokfysch. Drede þe nowt, dowtyr, for þow schalt haue þe victory of al þin enmys.<sup>329</sup>

Ideas of self-mortification, eating no meat, receiving the sacrament every Sunday, and the derision that she attracts from doubters are ideas that she frequently revisits in her *Book*. Suffering on earth is an essential quality of those who achieve sainthood, and the public nature of the suffering, followed by public acknowledgement of that suffering, comprise part of the machinery for beatification and canonisation.<sup>330</sup> As I have mentioned in chapter two of this thesis, the number of lay saints, particularly women, vastly increased as the medieval period wore on: Catherine of Sienna refused to join an order;<sup>331</sup> Bridget of Sweden never became a nun, despite having instituted her own order;<sup>332</sup> Elizabeth of Hungary served daily in the

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>330</sup> Salih discusses the notion that public suffering through slander is part of Margery's martyrdom process, requiring 'supporting players' from society not only to act as her detractors and so cause her suffering, but who are simultaneously bearing witness to this sanctifying procedure. See *Versions of Virginity*, pp. 137-8. Gail McMurray Gibson also argues for the idea of 'martyrdom by slander' and the implications of such suffering in 'St Margery', chapter three of *The Theatre of Devotion*, asserting that 'protestations of the public hostility she faced must be read in the context of her deliberate attempt to participate in the martyrdom pattern of Christ and his saints. (p.48). Kieckhefer also argues that excesses in a saint – and one could argue that courting suffering through public slander is excessive behaviour – was actually desired by the populace as there was a need to feel as though they were praying to someone different from themselves and their own everyday practices of devotion. See 'Margery Kempe: The Harvest of Fourteenth century Spirituality' in *Unquiet Souls*, pp.182.

<sup>331</sup> Catherine chose to become a tertiary affiliated with the Dominicans after protracted negotiations between the sisters, her family and herself. Bell argues that joining the beguines allowed her to use her spirituality in the world: 'from the outset, her vocation was public and reforming, rather than private and penitential'. (Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, p. 46.) Petroff concurs: 'The status of tertiary was congenial for her because she wanted to live outside any detailed fixed rule,' and Catherine became the first virgin to be admitted to be a Dominican tertiary (*Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p. 239).

<sup>332</sup> Leyser, *Medieval Women*, p. 204.

hospital that she founded,<sup>333</sup> and Marie d'Oignies (who was beatified only) volunteered in a leper house with the help of her husband.<sup>334</sup> These are a few examples of energetic lay women who achieved sainthood. It is possible that Margery, certainly aware of Marie and Bridget, took some inspiration from their efforts and in writing her *Book* sought to advertise her own, supported by Christ himself.

Christ's speech to Margery in chapter five initially appears to be an innocuous list of religious requests and reassurance; however, its position near the beginning of the *Book* indicates to the reader that these issues of suffering and deprivation will be recurrent (although his assurance suggests that Margery will forbear, highlighting her special favour in the eyes of Christ), and also implies that he is including her in the special group of lay women that achieved sainthood. He is, in effect, presenting her as a potential saint. These women's preoccupations concerning food, communion and public slander, as well as the hours they devoted to contemplation and meditation all help to demonstrate their virtue. Margery's renunciation of meat, therefore, is quite conventional, and she begins to fast on Fridays. This course of action provides her with a useful bargaining chip in the negotiation of her chastity with her husband, who agrees to cease sexual contact, if she recommences 'etyn & drynkyn wyth [him]... as [she] wer wont to don.'<sup>335</sup> Having consulted Christ, who consents to John Kempe's terms, the bargain is struck.

Public slander is an almost necessary part of the aspiring saint's earthly life, as suffering brings one closer to Christ, in accordance with the *imitatio Christi*. His words on the subject here,

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<sup>333</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York, 1996), 197. Anthony Goodman mentions both Margery's and Elizabeth of Hungary's 'special compassion for lepers'.

<sup>334</sup> Marie and her husband John avoided the temptation of sexual pleasure by working in a hospital for lepers: 'Indeed, they utterly degraded themselves for the Lord, when they, for a time, laboured in a place called Williambrouk, near Nivelles, for the sake of the Lord.' (*The Life of Marie d'Oignies* by Jacques de Vitry, trans., Margot H. King (Ontario, 1993), p. 49.

<sup>335</sup> *BMK*, p. 24.

therefore, anticipate Margery's detention in Beverley, the occasions when various townspeople threaten to burn her, the examinations she undergoes to test her orthodoxy, and the humiliating experiences she suffers during her pilgrimage to Jerusalem, subtly manipulating the reader's perception of Margery before her treatise has even properly begun. Although the structure of the *Book* appears to be somewhat haphazard, there is a real sense of preparation here and anticipation of the events to come. Moreover, by placing these words in Christ's mouth, she is providing very necessary distance from any notion that she might be manoeuvring herself into position for sainthood; they are not her words, but the word of the Lord. Margery must be seen to be acting as merely a conduit of Christ's words if she is to appear both authentic and orthodox. This distance is necessary if she is not to seem as though she is nominating herself for sainthood, a position which requires humility and modesty, and inherently, therefore, cannot be self-selective. However, this tension is avoided if Christ makes the recommendation. Being lay (and a woman) Margery is not permitted to preach, and so she, and other female visionaries, manage to circumvent charges of heresy by claiming a direct line to Christ; they had no hand in its composition or control over the substance, therefore, they are not committing any transgression. In Margery's case, this has a double benefit: not only is she simply communicating the message of Christ to the letter, skirting any notion that she could be regarded as heretical by appearing to preach, but that message also indicates that she is worthy of veneration. By maintaining a distance from her own words, Margery is able to construct a hagiography, even if it happens to be her own.

In chapter five, Christ's final exhortation is for her to spend time in spiritual contemplation:

I schal zeyn þe leue to byddyn tyl sex of þe cloke to sey what þow wyld. Þan schalt þow ly stylly & speke to me be thowt, & I schal zeft to þe hey medytacyon and very

contemplacyon. & I byd þe gon to þe ankyr at þe Frer Prechowrys, & schew hym my preuyteys & my cownselys which I schewe to þe.<sup>336</sup>

Christ institutes a limit on the amount of prayer that Margery may utter in a single day; instead he will transmit visions to her. Like Bridget, Margery is instructed to seek out a single person to whom she can relate the substance of her revelations.<sup>337</sup> The anchor attached to the Dominican house in Lynn remains her principal confessor until he dies during Margery's pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Christ's language, in this opening extended speech is arresting in its simplicity (and in the case of the 'stokfysch', assumes a local flavour) and in the manner in which prominent themes are introduced for subsequent discussion. There can be no doubt that the introduction of the notions of slander, fasting and self-mortification, and visions and meditation, set up the reader's expectations: we are already being encouraged to look on her in the same light as other female mystics, and the fact that Margery is acting as the mouthpiece of Christ's words indicates that she is treading the same path as them. In terms of vocabulary, Christ is, initially, given an accessible and homely lexis.

In chapter fourteen, Christ offers another extensive speech in which he reassures Margery that he will be forever a source of comfort and aid. His speech extends for sixty lines (in a chapter that contains seventy-two in total), and on this occasion, it is worth comparing his vocabulary with that of Margery. Margery contextualises the vision thus:

Than þis creatur þowt it was ful mery to be reprevyd for Goddys lofe; it was to hir gret solas & cownfort whan sche was chedyn & fletyn for þe lofe of Ihesu for repreuyng of

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<sup>336</sup> *BMK*, p. 17.

<sup>337</sup> Barry Windeatt, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harlow, 2000), p. 73.

synne, for spekyng of vertu, for comownyng in Scriptur which sche lernyd in sermowyns & be comownyng wyth clerkys.<sup>338</sup>

Suffering reproof for the love of God allows Margery to imitate the sufferings of Christ, and it is interesting to note that she discusses this notion in reasonably exalted terms. The following groups of words are drawn from Margery's introductory remarks, which comprise twelve lines:<sup>339</sup> comownyng (a. 1393), cownfort (?c.1225), inpacyens (c.1230), reprevyd (c.1330), Scriptur (a. 1300), sermownys (a. 1200), solas (c.1290), vertu (?c. 1225), and ymagyned (c.1380). Of these, 'comownyng' raises the most curiosity, as it is a relatively new recording. She relates that she is taunted for speaking on weighty subjects such as sin, scripture and sermons, and when she does so her vocabulary takes on a more sophisticated mantle: she receives 'solas' and 'cownfort' for being 'reprevyd', and 'ymagyned' herself being bound to a stake and killed for the sake of Christ. The religious aspects of her comments are expressed in a more elevated register, and her portrayal of her own death is rendered in straightforward, impactful Old English:

...þat was to be bowndyn hyr hed & hir fet to a stoke & hir hed to be smet of wyth a scharp ex for Goddys lofe.<sup>340</sup>

Christ's language, however, is almost entirely Anglo-Saxon in derivation. With the exception of 'suffer' (a.1250, and therefore naturalised), the impression of the first eleven lines (until 'possybyl') is that of Old English, as he thanks Margery for her thoughts of self-sacrifice, and assures her that she will never suffer bodily pain at the hands of the people who deride her. Although simple and unpretentious, Christ's language has stylistic flourishes:

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<sup>338</sup> *BMK*, p. 29.

<sup>339</sup> *BMK*, p. 29-30.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

& 3et schal no man sle the, ne fyer bren þe, ne watyr drynch þe, ne wynd deryn þe, for I may not for-3etyn þe how þow art wretyn in myn handys & my fete.<sup>341</sup>

The insistent repetition of 'þe' positions Margery at the centre of Christ's words, and the quartet of reassurances have balance and a certain cadence. The inclusion of 'no fyer bren þe' and 'no man sle the' in the list surely anticipates the course of action proposed against her on several occasions, when townsfolk dismiss her as a Lollard and a heretic. We are, again, shown (before the more turbulent chapters of the *Book* unfold) Christ's special favour. The fact that Margery escapes unscathed from a number of examinations and hostile environments must, therefore, be read as a mark of divine preference; Christ openly acknowledges that he will protect her, and the reader now knows that she will be saved regardless of the circumstances. We are to conclude that her preservation is entirely providential, and once more, Margery has managed to distance herself from the perception that she might be manufacturing her own legacy in order to achieve a cult status, and potential sainthood.

The Latin or French examples in the remainder of his speech are as follows: adversities (?c.1225) compassyon (1340), compunccyon (a.1340), dalyawns (c.1400), devocyon (?c.1225), dyscyples (c.900), felyng (c.1175), grace (c.1175), meryte (c.1230), pacyently (c.1384), passion (eOE), peyn (c.1300), possybyl (c.1384), precyows (?a.1300), presens (c.1330), and spowse (c.1200). Margery often refers to her colloquies with Christ as 'dalyawns', and although the word had been in existence for some time (it is first recorded in c.1385, with a definition of to flirt, play or sport), it is employed here in the later sense of to converse, often with frivolous connotations, but also meaning a serious discussion. That Margery chooses to use the word in its newer sense perhaps suggests an attempt at

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

sophistication. 'Compunccyon', 'devocyon' and 'compassyon' taken separately are not new coinages, but here are employed to produce a stylistic triplet that throws particular emphasis on the gift of tears. This clearly has relevance for Margery, whose ostentatious sobbing becomes a hallmark of her existence. It is worth noting that she, at this point in the narrative, has not yet acquired her gift, and Christ tells her that 'terys of compunccyon, deuocyon, & compassyon arn þe hyest & sekerest 3yftys þat I zeue in erde.'<sup>342</sup> We, in effect, are being groomed to accept Margery's copious tears when they come, and to regard them as divinely bestowed. Moreover, Windeatt points out that these three types of tears are mentioned in:

*The Privity of the Passion...* when Mary Magdalene weeps over Christ's dead body: 'the fete that scho weschede before with terys of compunccione, aftyrwardz scho weschede theme wele better with teres of devocyone and bitter compassione.'<sup>343</sup>

Margery's knowledge of this trio helps to establish her own gift's authenticity, and she seeks the assurance of others (Julian of Norwich amongst them) in order to cement their credentials. Julian, strikingly, uses similar phrasing:

And mech mor, whan God visyteth a creatur wyth terys of contrisyon, deuosyon, er compassyon, he may owyth to leuyn þat þe Holy Gost is in hys sowle.<sup>344</sup>

Margery's report of Julian's affirmation of the tears provides a similar measure of authenticity to Christ's own affirmation of the gift. Thus, when Margery's sobbing is greeted with scepticism by others (not least of all from the priest and scribe of her *Book*, who expresses doubts in this regard; but he is forced to acknowledge the existence and credentials of Marie

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>343</sup> Barry Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harlow: 2000), p. 100.

<sup>344</sup> *BMK*, p. 43.

d'Oignies)<sup>345</sup> she is able to offer proof of her own authenticity. Margery's own *Book*, therefore, can be read as a similar attempt to glorify her deeds and gifts; after all, the existence of a written account of a holy person's meditations and exploits certainly aided their chances of achieving sainthood. Of course, the striking difference between Margery and Marie is that the latter's holiness became subject matter for a third-party writer, and so Marie had no need to maintain a distance from her own story to stave off questions concerning self-promotion.

The speech in chapter fourteen continues to portray Christ as an everyman figure, who converses easily with his devotee. The use of simple and homely imagery persists:

For, whan þow gost to chyrch, I go wyth þe; whan þu syttest at þi mete, I sytte wyth þe; whan þow gost to þi bed, I go wyth þe; & whan þow gost owt of towne, I go wyth þe.<sup>346</sup>

The repetition goes some way to offering certain assurances about her relationship with Christ, in a manner that expresses the omnipotence of God in simple terms. In addition:

Sum-tyme þow wetyst wel þe sunne schynyth al abrod þat many man may se it, & sum-tyme it is hyd vndyr a clowde þat men may not se it, & zet is þe sunne neuyr þe lesse in hys hete ne in hys brytnesse.

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<sup>345</sup> 'for afterward he red of a woman clepyd Maria de Oegines & of hir maner of leuving, of þe wonderful swetnesse þat sche had in þe word of God heryng, of þe wonderful compassyon þat sche had in hys Passyon thynkyng, & of þe plentyuows teerys þat sche wept, þe wech made hir so febyl & so weke þat sche myth not endur to beheldyn þe Crosse, ne heryn owr Lordys Passyon reheryd, so sche was reoluyd in-to terys of pyte & compassyon.' *BMK*, p. 152-3. In the *Life of Marie d'Oignies*, the gift of tears comes upon her thus: 'She found such grace of compunction therein that a great abundance of tears was pressed out by the wine-press of your cross in the passion and her tears flowed so copiously on the floor that the ground of the church became muddy with her footprints' (p.50). Her tears continued without abatement that Marie 'used up so many veils... and often had to change her wet veil for a dry one'. (p.52.) Like Margery, Marie also faces a degree of uncertainty concerning her tears, albeit in a gentler manner than is meted out to Margery: 'One of the priests of the church softly but firmly exhorted her to pray in silence and to restrain her tears. She was always timid and, with the simplicity of a dove, tried to obey in all things... she slipped out of the church [and] tearfully implored the Lord that he show this priest that it is not in man's power to restrain the intensity of the blowing spirit (p. 51). The priest is, accordingly, sent a rebuke from God in the form of abundant tears, which disrupts the mass he was performing. The moderate opposition that Marie encounters is, as one may have come to expect, nothing compared to the storms of derision suffered by Margery on the same account.

<sup>346</sup> *BMK*, p. 31.

The metaphor is without pretension, providing an easily digestible message from the almighty concerning his unconditional love. One could argue that one of the great strengths of the *Book* is its artless mode of communicating religious ideas, rendering Margery's work highly accessible. There is nothing esoteric in Christ's language that might cause misunderstanding or provoke questions; his words to Margery bespeak Margery's own understanding of her faith: straightforward and orthodox.

We have already seen that Margery's suffering will help to portray her in a saintly attitude, and that her language helps to legitimise the contentious gift of tears; these holy qualities are enhanced through an analysis of chapter twenty-three, which is particularly interesting when viewed not only as a companion piece to chapter twenty-one, but also if the entire *Book* is viewed as a hagiography. The chapter contains an inventory of occasions when Margery is asked to intercede for various people, or when she receives special communications concerning the dead or the sick directly from Christ. The structure of the chapter is rapidly established, setting up an incident that requires some communication with Christ, before going on to assert that the foretelling came to pass. Her usefulness in this regard suggests that she is seen locally as a holy woman, and even if she is not called upon to offer prayers of intercession, the revelations that Christ imparts correctly predict the outcomes of future events. Thus, her visions are tested and found to be robust.

The first occurrence concerns a 'vykary' who initially asks Margery to pray for him, before requiring counsel on 'whedyr he xuld mor plese God to leuyn hys cure & hys benefys or to

kepe it styлле'.<sup>347</sup> The vicar's crisis of confidence is such that he is uncertain that he does any good amongst his parishioners. Praying, Margery receives the following answer from Christ:

Bydde þe vykary kepan styлле hys cure & hys benefyce & don hys diligence in prchyng & techyng of hem hys owyn persone and sumtyme procuryn oþer to teche hem my lawys & my comawndmentys so þat þer be no defawte in hys parte, & 3yf þei do neuyr þe bettyr, hys mede xal neuyr be þe lesse.<sup>348</sup>

The pragmatism of the response is rather striking: the vicar should keep ministering to his flock, should exert himself in terms of teaching and sermons; if his congregation is not improved by his words then it is not for a lack of trying on his part, and his ultimate reward shall be no less: it is the spiritual equivalent of a suggesting that one can lead a horse to water. Christ's tone at this juncture mirrors the straightforwardness of his advice, but there is a relatively high number of sophisticated words in the seven lines of response: benefyce (an ecclesiastical living, 1340), comawndmentys (a divine command, 1325), defawte (a.1300), diligence (1340), prechyng (a.1300), and procuryn (to acquire or obtain, c.1325). Techyng is recorded in 1175, and therefore must be considered naturalised.

Margery delivers the message '& þe vykary kept style hys cure'.<sup>349</sup> Her intercession has kept a priest in office, and a good deed has been done. That Margery is seen to be able to offer intercession indicates that she was considered to be not only an authoritative figure to the local population, but also a credible one: they solicit her powers. Her second example briefly states Christ's revelations concerning a body at rest in St Margaret's, and the body's husband, who had come to pay his mass penny:

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<sup>347</sup> *BMK*, p. 53.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

Lo, dowtyr, þe sowle of þis cors is in Purgatory, & he þat was hir husband is now in good hele, & zet he xal ben ded in schort tyme.<sup>350</sup>

A brief analysis of the language used in these lines reveals their simplicity, but it is worth pointing out the stabbing monosyllables of the final few words, conveyed in earthy Old English, which establish a portentous tone and suggest divine might. Whether subconscious or deliberate, Margery is certainly capable of matching vocabulary to content. Of this revelation we are informed: 'so it be-fel as sche felt be reuelacyon.'<sup>351</sup> As Margery is not compelled to apprise any other person of this information (in that it has not been requested of her), one has to question her motives in including it in her *Book*. Coming after an episode that indicates her own abilities in communing with Christ, and before further examples that display the same quality, one possible interpretation is that she hopes to build up a case that persuades her readership of her powers by overwhelming them with evidence. Even when Margery is not publically displaying the result of her revelations, she includes them at a later point in her autobiography to bolster her record of prescient revelations. Not only this, but the fact that she is the secret bearer of divine disclosures, exhibits the particular favour that she is shown.

Her third example concerns a further request of intercession from a priest: a woman lies near to death, and Margery obligingly begins to pray. This time, however, the prognosis seems bleak. Christ is in an unforgiving mood: 'Dowtyr, it is gret need to prey for hir, for sche hath ben a wykkyd woman & sche xal be ded.'<sup>352</sup> Margery is, however, undaunted:

'Lord, as þu loust me, saue hir sowle from dampnacyon'. & sche wept wyth plentyuows teerys for þat sowle. & owyr Lord grawntyd hir mercy for þe sowle, comawndyng hir to prey for hir.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, op.cit.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, p. 53-4.

In this instance, it is clear that Margery's direct intervention proves efficacious. By invoking his love for her as a method of achieving mercy for the woman, the particular regard that Christ reserves for Margery is both displayed and noted. Arguably, it also suggests that such is the influence that she is able to exert over Christ, Margery is able to change his mind irrespective of the moral qualities of the dying woman. Following this is a further act of intercession. Margery's 'gostly fadyr' asks her to pray on behalf of another woman 'wech lay in point of deth to mannys sygthe'.<sup>354</sup> In this case, the character of the afflicted person is not remarked upon, and Christ's words are merely reported: 'owyr lord seyde sche xuld levyn & faryn wel, & so sche dede.'<sup>355</sup> Examples four and five follow rapidly, the fourth concerning a great friend of Margery herself, who lay ill for many weeks before making a full recovery; the fifth, however, dies of his illness. The sixth example concerns a holy woman who was a 'specyal frende'<sup>356</sup> to Margery, who also became gravely ill. Margery's interceding prayers produce the following reassurance from Christ:

'Sche xal not deyn þis x 3er, for 3e schal aftyr þis makyn ful mery to-gedyr & han ful good communycacyon as 3e han had be-for.'<sup>357</sup>

The revelation is borne out, as Margery's friend lives. Having given six clear examples of the revelations that she experiences, Margery (or perhaps even the scribe) concludes the chapter by adding that '[m]any mo swech reuelacyons þis creatur had in felyng; hem alle to wryten it xuld be lettyng perauentur of mor profit.'<sup>358</sup> As intercessory, Margery presumably relayed Christ's words to the clergy and families associated with the victims of the illnesses, although

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, op. cit. Windeatt notes that this is a 'rare reference to editing and selection of material', p. 140.

she is not explicit as to whether she did so. However, that she was asked to pray for these people suggests a wider faith in her abilities, and, even if she did not impart Christ's words concerning the sick at the time, she is certainly doing so in her *Book*. By committing the words to paper, she makes them a matter of public record, and one cannot help but be struck by the similarity between this and the *vitae* of saints. The accuracy of her revelations, and the fact that they were requested by the clergy, adds authenticity to her petition and bolsters her public image, and public image is not a casual expression: there is a necessary public element to the composition and dissemination of a *vita*, as, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it becomes part of the proof required to begin the process of canonisation.<sup>359</sup> As we have seen elsewhere in this thesis, the religious climate in England did not lend itself to the veneration of female laity (unlike, perhaps, Italy, France and Germany in the later Middle Ages, which, as we have already observed, witnessed an expansion here) preferring to worship children or the male clergy. In this respect, perhaps we should give credit to Margery's enterprising attitude. Indeed, Salih compares Margery's self-written hagiography to that of Christina of Markyate:

A *vita*, of course, is a necessity for any aspiring saint, and Margery was not alone in providing her own. Christina of Markyate's *Life* conceals the circumstances of its composition more thoroughly than the *Book*, but it seems to me the same kind of text. If Margery's *Book* did not have the preface explaining her difficulties with scribes, it would look very like Christina's *Life*: a third person account of a holy woman's life, miracles and visions, written by a clerical scribe who makes the occasional first-person appearance in the text, but based on extensive conversations with the woman herself. I think it entirely possible that Christina were the driving force behind the composition of her *Life*.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Vauchez suggests that there was a shift in the criteria for sainthood as the medieval period progressed, leading to a diminution of saints in the latter part of the period. 'Forty-nine processes were decreed by the papacy between 1198 and 1304, compared with twenty-two between 1305 and 1431,' *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* p. 66. For the early canonisation process see pp. 33-57; the evolution of the process pp. 66-84; and the evolution of the criteria of sainthood pp. 387-412.

<sup>360</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 174-5.

It is interesting that, assuming that Christina of Markyate was the power behind her own vita, there is a woman who managed to create her own hagiography and not incur any sort of reprimand from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It is, however, more interesting that the label 'autohagiography'<sup>361</sup> has not been linked with Christina's name, together with all the tensions and challenges that the term itself poses. If we accept Salih's view that she persuaded a priest to write her story, then surely she is the instrument of her own vita as much as Margery is the instrument of hers. That she has not been considered in the same light, which might, in turn, diminish her standing as a holy woman, Salih argues is because Christina's scribe did not include an explanatory preface in the work. We know that Margery is the agent of her own hagiography because neither herself nor her scribe see the difficulty in making explicit who is behind the text. If Christina's scribe had been even gently coerced into producing the vita, the fact was not openly acknowledged. Of course, it must remain mere speculation as to whether this was a conscious decision, or whether the structural norms of hagiography informed the composition of the text and therefore the matter of Christina's input never arose; however, one must admit that the impression of Christina's vita is quite different from that of Margery's *Book*. Christina's death approximately two hundred years before that of Margery's birth is clearly a lengthy period, over which time England's spiritual landscape had shifted. It would be difficult to compare that which would be acceptable in the twelfth century with that of the fifteenth, and it is possible that Margery felt more able to put her name to her text, living at the crest of a period of sustained and protracted veneration of Continental lay females. On the other hand, presupposing Christina's influence in the composition of her work, it is possible that she foresaw the difficulties of acknowledging it as such; the tension of Christian humility and self-promotion are difficult to reconcile, as we can observe in Margery's work; especially when the merits of sainthood demand self-abnegation and modesty.

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<sup>361</sup> Richard Kieckhefer coined this term; see *Unquiet Souls*, p. 6.

## VI: Conclusion

This chapter has sought to argue that Margery used the various, recognisable conventions of hagiography when presenting herself to her readership, and that she used the authority of Christ's testimony to validate claims made within the *Book*. These claims, as we have seen, include the special favour that Margery receives from Christ; the intercessory powers that she possessed, requested by members of the clergy and lay people; their efficacy; and the public slander that she endures by way of an imitation of Christ. Margery is able to present Christ's words of validation and comfort, which portray her in a favourable light, because she is acting as the mere conduit of his words: for her to claim anything further would be to risk greater controversy. In this way, Margery is presented as a potential saint, for which she has the support of Christ. Christ's language, moreover, is accessible, clear, and linguistically diverse; it is drawn from a range of registers and is, therefore, the language of an everyman figure: exalted, but also able to mingle with the housewives of Lynn. For Margery, perhaps, it is interesting to note that His language is highly accessible at moments when he is offering reassurance or expounding theological points: his use of 'stockfish' is testament to this, borrowing from the parlance of Lynn. Although Knowles suggests that little may be gained in the way of religious edification from Margery's *Book* if read as a work of mysticism, I would posit that, firstly, Margery's Christ is not a character who attempts to offer complicated exegesis on points of academic interest; instead He offers solid, conventional doctrine to the masses in an apposite register. This is not surprising if one reflects on the fact that He is revealing his thoughts via a lay woman (technically illiterate, but nevertheless well-versed in the structure and content of religious writing), but this does not mean that Christ's words are devoid of merit simply because He does so: a stock revelation about the passion is as relevant (perhaps more so), to

the everyday fifteenth-century worshipper than a lettered and cloistered cleric. Indeed, the fact that Margery appears to fit register to suit the occasion or person is worthy of our interest and shows an understanding of the art of writing which goes beyond Knowles's estimation.<sup>362</sup>

Secondly, Margery's *Book* is, arguably, not meant to be read solely as a work of mysticism from which we expect mental stimulation and intellectual challenge; and indeed, it perhaps does not quite stand up to the more richly imagined works of other female mystics. However, it is more successful if read as the life of a saint. We are offered facts, evidence and anecdotes in support of her bid for sainthood, and the revelations that she receives are part of this process. They are not intended to be the sole component of her work, but are a complementary aspect that bolsters her petition, aided by her portrayal of Christ as her champion.

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<sup>362</sup> See Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*.

## Chapter Four

### *'I spak to Seynt Bryde ryte so I speke to the, dowtyr'*: Words and Women.

#### I: Introduction

Although Margery is, naturally, the most prominent female religious figure in her *Book*, there are a number of occasions in which other religious women make an entrance. This chapter will explore the relationship that Margery has with other women, by undertaking a detailed analysis of her language and the language she gives to other female characters. Through her travels and through her visions, Margery encounters a variety of females with whom she has discourse, and through whom she can build a sense of self in a world that was becoming increasingly receptive to the notion of female spirituality in general, and lay female spirituality in particular.<sup>363</sup> It must also be noted that a number of the women whom Margery presents are what we might term 'characters'; they are biblical rather than actual people whom she meets, and so their speeches, rather like Christ's, are the result of Margery's visions and presumably subject to a certain degree of invention. It must be acknowledged, however, that for Margery and her readership, these protagonists are not 'fictional' but 'real' – their indeterminate ontological status lies in the fact that we, as twenty-first century readers, no longer share Margery's assumptions about the world. For the purposes of this thesis, I assume that – even unconsciously – Margery is exercising a degree of choice in the register she assigns to these protagonists; the purpose and result of any such choice will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

The first section of this chapter will discuss Margery's visions that include the Virgin Mary, offering a linguistic analysis of her language used in these visions, and how it relates to the

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<sup>363</sup> See chapter two of this thesis.

language that Margery herself uses. The visions that will be examined occur in chapter six (in which Margery witnesses and in some cases, plays a part in, the birth of Mary, John the Baptist and Christ), chapter seventy-three (Christ's leave-taking of his mother), chapters seventy-nine and eighty (the events leading up to and including the Passion), and chapter eighty-one (in which Margery tends to Mary). There will also be a brief analysis of the portrayal of Mary Magdalene during these scenes, before conclusions are drawn as to Margery's linguistic presentation of the two Marys in her visions. There will then follow a brief examination of *The Mary Play*, including linguistically, which, as we shall see, will offer an interesting point of comparison to Margery's depiction of the Virgin Mary.

Thereafter this chapter will focus on Margery's emulation of other lay female visionaries, particularly focusing on chapter seventy-four (in which Margery kisses lepers, in what I shall argue is an imitation of the examples of Angela of Foligno, Francis of Assisi and Marie d'Oignies), chapter seventy-five (where Margery performs the miracle of restoring a deranged woman of Lynn to her wits, in an imitation of St Margaret), before finishing this triad of chapters with an analysis of chapter seventy-six (in which Margery must look after her husband, John, as he descends into old age). I shall argue that these three chapters, when taken together, offer not only strong linguistic evidence of the author's intention that her *Book* should be read as hagiography, but also strong contextual and structural evidence. The argument will then move onto an analysis of the language used in the meeting between Margery and Julian of Norwich, in chapter eighteen.

## II: Margery and the Marys

When we choose our words, we initiate a deliberate mental process of weighing and sifting. Depending on the context or formality of the situation, we actively discount certain words or phrases in favour of others, and we adopt the appropriate register.<sup>364</sup> When committing words to paper (with the potential of posterity), the process is especially marked. In dictating her spiritual experiences, Margery appears to have instinctively understood register shift and employed it in a particularly interesting manner. As we have already seen with Christ, the surprising inclusion of local dialect colours his usage, rendering his words in a manner that a native of Norfolk might have done. This gives an unexpected flavour of local commerce to His speeches that is remarkably effective, imbuing doctrine with an accessibility and immediacy that it might otherwise lack. Turning our attention now to Margery's connection with the women of the *Book*, we are able to explore Margery's perception of herself, compared with other religious female figures, in a new light.

Margery's vocabulary in relation to other women potentially offers an insight into how she viewed her competition for Christ's favour, and also how she attempted to identify herself. The women given speaking roles in the *Book of Margery Kempe* comprise the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Julian of Norwich and various women of Lynn to whom Margery renders service. Bit-parts are also given to her detractors. It is more interesting to note, however, that frequently, Margery offers them no voice: their words are merely reported. Here we will attempt to establish whether there is any correlation between the vocabulary given to the other women in the *Book* and the vocabulary used by Margery herself, and if so, what conclusions we may draw

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<sup>364</sup> For an overview of sociolinguistics see: Robert Bayley, Richard Cameron and Ceil Lucas, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (Oxford, 2013); Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M. Fuller, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Seventh Edition* (West Sussex, 2015); Rajend Mesthrie, ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge, 2011).

from this. Particularly striking is the complicated nature of their relationship, in which, due to Margery's exploitation of vocabulary, female characters are ostensibly revered yet ultimately undermined.

The woman who plays the greatest part in Margery's visions is the Virgin Mary. During the visions which deal with the major and conventional aspects of Christ's life (Nativity and Crucifixion), Mary is naturally present. Indeed, the nativity vision is rather extensive, commencing with the births of the Virgin herself and John the Baptist, and Margery's serving of the infant Mary, before the scene moves to Bethlehem. The lengthy Crucifixion vision also features much of Mary, and the depiction of her in these circumstances shall be discussed below. Margery's visions come to her during moments of what she terms 'medytacyon',<sup>365</sup> and there is a real sense that Margery retreats inside herself in order to access the substance of the visions – she mentions physical places where she might receive visions more seldom than the metaphorical site of her soul. Liturgical rituals can trigger Margery's visions (as in the case of Christ's leave-taking of his mother, discussed below, prompted by the Holy Thursday procession), but she is equally likely to have a vision spontaneously, such as when she visualises Christ's Crucifixion. The visions themselves, as we briefly discussed in chapter two, are solid biblical fare, and do not embroider on scripture, leading Goodman to remark that her visions are 'a monument to her lack of originality'.<sup>366</sup> However, there is much to discuss in terms of the particularly interesting relationship that Margery appears to have with the Virgin Mary, who is given a not inconsiderable role in the *Book*.

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<sup>365</sup> *BMK*, p.18. The Nativity vision occurs during a meditation (p.18); Christ's leave-taking of his mother occurs during a Holy Thursday procession (p. 174), the Passion visions occur in 'hir sowle' (p. 187), and continue in 'hyr contemplacyon' (p.191).

<sup>366</sup> Anthony Goodman, 'The Piety of John of Brunham's Daughter of Lynn', in *Medieval Women*; ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1978), p. 350.

A preliminary study of register suggests that the Virgin Mary speaks in a lower register of naturalised French and Anglo-Saxon. A wider survey of the vision passages (in which Mary makes her appearances) indicates that the character assigned the most elevated register, with the highest frequency of later French or Latin derivations, is Margery herself. Despite her lack of education, she is capable of producing the most unexpected vocabulary; unexpected on an intellectual level because of her illiteracy, and also unexpected on a linguistic level. In Shibata's brief study of Margery Kempe's vocabulary we see that she is credited with several early and even one first recorded instance (of "erroneous") in the *MED*.<sup>367</sup> Shibata, however, perhaps should have also consulted the *OED*, as it contends a date of c.1400 (from *The Testament of Love*), illustrating the usefulness of cross-referencing between the two.<sup>368</sup> Shibata's article only concentrates on words beginning with *e* or *f*, but Stone goes further, sampling *b*, and a smattering of *a* and *c*.<sup>369</sup> His findings are of equal interest, as they also produce a number of first instances and many early recordings, indicating that Margery's vocabulary, if all her own work, was at the very least current. Whilst Shibata seems somewhat surprised that 'the text is studded with a fairly high proportion of "hard" words',<sup>370</sup> I believe that the development of Margery's vocabulary would have been aided by everyday encounters with scripture, sermons, and certainly by the priest who read to her for seven years: illiteracy is not a bar to retaining information, as her *Book* makes evident. Indeed, illiteracy is thought to foster the cultivation of memory.<sup>371</sup> The question arises as to whether Margery was aware of register shift, and whether she deliberately employed particular modes of expression when relating her prayers, sermons and conversations.

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<sup>367</sup> Shozo Shibata, 'Notes on the Vocabulary of the Book of Margery Kempe' in *Studies in English Grammar and Linguistics*, pp. 209-220 (Tokyo, 1958). The *MED* cites *BMK* as being the first recorded usage in having the sense of false, untrue or heretical beliefs.

<sup>368</sup> The *OED*'s definition of 'erroneous' is: 'Of doctrines, opinions, statements, etc.: Containing errors; of the nature of error; incorrect, mistaken, wrong.'

<sup>369</sup> Robert Stone, *Middle English Prose Style: Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich* (The Hague, Paris, 1970).

<sup>370</sup> Shibata, 'Notes on the Vocabulary of the Book of Margery Kempe' in *Studies in English Grammar and Linguistics*, p. 210.

<sup>371</sup> See: M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford, 1993).

There will inevitably be some overlap between the language of Margery's visions and the language assigned to the female characters in her *Book*, because often these women play roles in her revelations. To start with chapter six, from page eighteen of the *Book*, Margery is giving herself over to meditation, 'nowt knowing what sche mygth best thynke'.<sup>372</sup> Christ responds with a vision in which he exhorts her to think about his mother, and Margery then witnesses the births of the Virgin Mary (whom she is entrusted to look after until the age of twelve), John the Baptist and finally Christ himself. Margery busies herself with practicalities of childbirth:

Also sche beggyd owyr Lady fayr whyte clothys and kerchys for to swathyn in hir sone whan he wer born; and whan Jhesu was born, sche ordeyned beddyng for owyr Lady to lyg in wyth hir blyssyd child.<sup>373</sup>

The vision is too lengthy to reproduce in full here, but of the direct speech that Mary is given (which is admittedly not very much), *conseive* and *servyse* are the only words not of Anglo-Saxon origin. Margery's direct speech is not particularly sophisticated, but the language with which she describes the vision has more interest. In alphabetical order: *compassyf* (a.1438), *compassyon* (c.1340), *ordeyned* (to make arrangements, a.1387) *plesawns* (c.1350), *potel* (meaning two-quarts: a.1382), *purchasyd* (to obtain or get, pre-1300), *pyment* (c.1230), *receyved* (c.1318), *reverens* (c.1300), *servyse* (early ME). Although the dates of these words suggest that many were commonplace by the time that Margery was writing, there is the rather interesting *compassyf*, which the *MED* cites as a first recorded usage in the *Book*; the *OED*'s first citation is that of 1612, in Richard Shelton's *The First Sermon After his Conversion*, representing a considerable amount of difference in terms of time between these two first

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<sup>372</sup> *BMK*, p. 18.

<sup>373</sup> *BMK*, p. 19.

recordings. This rather outstanding word is used twice more by Margery, and of the three definitions given by the *MED*, the *Book* accounts for two. Her register can be, therefore, both contemporary and rather elevated.

If the Nativity offered Mary little in the way of linguistic sophistication in comparison to Margery's startling 'compassyf', then the trend continues as Margery's visions embark on the Passion. In chapter seventy-three we begin the cycle of Margery's visions that depict the Crucifixion. On Holy Thursday, she goes to church in procession, but with her 'gostly eye' sees Christ's leave-taking of his mother. Margery is affected by the scene to the extent that 'sche cryid, sche roryd, sche wept as þow sche xulde a brostyn þer-with.'<sup>374</sup> This commences a sequence of events in which the Virgin figures prominently, but which are ultimately dominated by Margery. Margery's dramatic reaction to Christ's valediction to his mother actually usurps Mary's position as the maternal character, as Margery concentrates on her own feelings; they are such that she 'myth not mesuryn hir-self ne rewlyn hir-self.'<sup>375</sup> Her lack of emotional control is what we might expect from a mother who is preparing to witness the execution of a son, but of Mary's emotional state there is no mention. Instead, we learn that Margery is unconcerned about the exhibition she is making of herself and the consternation of the people that surround her, because 'hir mende was occupyd in owr Lord'.<sup>376</sup> Although her thoughts might be turned towards Christ's predicament, and an acknowledgment of the complicated emotions that it arouses (simultaneously 'swemful' and 'joyful'),<sup>377</sup> the picture is overwhelmingly one of Margery and her reactions, rather than a meditation on the nature of the crucifixion.

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<sup>374</sup> *BMK*, p. 174.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

Margery begins a colloquy with Mary, and unusually, Mary is given an extensive direct speech in reply. In seventeen lines, the Virgin has the following imports: confermyd (a.1300), grace (1175), grawnted (c.1300), penawnce (a.1300), plenowr (full or complete, a.1325), purchasyn (pre-1300), remissyon (?c.1225), vertu (c.1225). These words are not especially significant, as is suggested by their early dates. Moreover, the remainder of Mary's speech is marked by repetition and a lowly register:

& dowl þe not, dowtyr, þat þu xalt comyn to vs ryth wel & be ryth wolcome whan þu comyst. But þu mayst not comyn 3et, for þu xalt comyn in ryth good tyme.<sup>378</sup>

One could argue that Margery's style in general is rather repetitive and that this characteristic is not solely confined to the Virgin's speeches. However, it is Mary's lack of words, together with the unremittingly Old English tenor of the few speeches that there are, that combine to suggest Margery's deliberate, but subtle, undermining of the Virgin.

The case continues in chapters seventy-nine and eighty, during which the Passion of Christ occurs. Immediately before the crucifixion, Christ receives his mother's blessing, eliciting a response of some nine lines from Mary:

A, der Sone, 3yf þu wilt al-gatys dey, late me deye befor þe & lete me neury suffyr þis day of sorwe, for I may neuyr beryn þis sorwe þat I xal han for þi deth. I wolde, Sone, þat I myth suffir deth for þe so þat þu xuldist not deyin, 3yf mannys sowle myth be so sauys. Now, der Sone, 3yf þu haue no rewth of þi-self, haue rewth of þi Modyr, for þu wost ful wel þer can no man in al þis worlde comforyn me but þu a-lone.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> *BMK*, p. 175.

<sup>379</sup> *BMK*, p. 187.

The vast majority of the words contained within these lines are Old English derivations, with the exceptions of 'comfortyn' (c.1300), 'joy' (? c.1225) 'sauyd' (c.1225) 'suffyr' (c.1250), all of French origin, and 'al-gatys' (a.1250), which is from Old Norse. Although these examples lend some degree of sophistication to Mary's words, their early importation dates actually suggest that they would have become common parlance by the early fifteenth century. 'Rewth' (a. 1225) is interesting as its origin is unclear: it is possibly Scandinavian, as one can compare it to the Old Icelandic 'hyggð.' However, Old Icelandic does not provide an elevated register, and Mary's speech here is essentially rather homely. One could argue, however, that the register of homeliness is apposite: they are the unpretentious words of comfort given by a mother to a son at the hour of his execution; the need for aureate language is not necessary. However, the religious significance of the scene is pivotal to Christianity itself, perhaps demanding a more elevated register. It is at moments such as these that Margery's visions are, arguably, a product of her exceptionally conventional understanding of the events in question.

Perhaps it is not so much the language of Mary, however, as the language and actions of Margery when Mary is present, that suggest a degree of undermining at work. Mary is stuck dumb by Christ's parting, but Margery 'toke owr Lord Ihesu Crist be þe clothys & fel down at hys feet, preyng hym to blissyn hir, & þerwyth sche cryid ful lowed & wept rith sor'.<sup>380</sup> It is perhaps fanciful to suggest that, having disposed of the Virgin in her vision, Margery is able to become the focus of Christ's attention, but it is certainly interesting to note Mary's silence versus Margery's cries. However, Margery attends to the prone Virgin and exhorts her to rise:

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid, p, 189.

A, blissyd Lady, risith vp & late vs folwe 3owr blissyd Sone as long as we may se hym þat I may lokyn j-nōw up-on hym er he deye. A, der Lady, how may 3owr hert lestyn & se 3owr blissful Sone se al þis wo? Lady, I may not dur it, & 3yt am I not hys Modyr.<sup>381</sup>

Margery's words here are an exercise in self-promotion, yet they manage to maintain a sense of reverence towards the Virgin. Her solicitousness indicates Margery's humility and her concern for Mary, albeit at Christ's instigation. Indeed, at this juncture Margery's language is broadly no more elevated than the Virgin's has been, with the exception of 'dur.' This is perhaps the most notable word in her speech, with a date of c. 1386 which falls within Margery's lifetime. This indicates a certain sophistication in her language, or at least a contemporariness that Mary's language is entirely lacking. Margery's feelings about Christ's incipient death are in no doubt, but nevertheless she is subtly at pains to indicate that whatever Mary may be feeling about her son's inevitable death, her feelings are as nothing to the throes that Margery is experiencing. In pressing Mary to rise up and follow Christ, Margery is essentially seeking permission to join the scene, the justification for which is that Margery herself wishes to see Christ before he dies – note the use of 'I' in her rationale. Moreover, although Margery is forced to concede that she is not Christ's mother, there is perhaps a rebuke in her tone as she indicates that, despite this, *she* cannot bear the situation. Mary's passivity allows Margery to take centre stage, and although the latter's direct speech on this occasion is not particularly complicated, her indirect speech throughout this chapter is a different matter.

Throughout the subsequent description of their pursuance of Christ, his betrayal by Judas and his treatment by the crowd, Margery's vocabulary rises or falls, depending on the content of her vision. Her language contains examples of commonplace words throughout this passage,

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid. op. cit.

including (in alphabetical order) bobyng (1280), bofetyng (a.1200), despite (c.1290), peler (c.1150), scorgys (a.1225), specialy (1297), and verily (1250). However, this section also includes contemptibly (*OED* cites 1586; *MED* cites *BMK* as a first record), freshly (in a sense of renewed vigour, a.1375), innocencye (1340), malefactowr (a first recorded usage in both *OED* and *MED*), multitude (c.1350), polexis (1355, borrowed from Middle Dutch 'pol', meaning top, and OE æx), repref (c.1300), venymowslych (a.1425), and violentlyche (1380s). To have two first recorded usages in one passage is quite remarkable. 'Contemptibly' is of particular interest as, although the *MED* cites its earliest (and sole) usage as being the *Book*, the *OED* gives the earliest example as being a.1586, from Sir Philip Sydney's *An Apologie for Poetrie*. The two publications are in agreement, however, regarding 'malefactowr', a strikingly sophisticated and Latinate term. Also, 'venymowslych' deserves attention, as it came into existence in the early fifteenth century. The general tenor of this section, therefore, is marked by complicated language and a high degree of erudition. However, it is interesting to note that during Margery's description of the scourging of Christ, her vocabulary becomes more uncultured and harsher, deriving mostly from Old English:

Pei sparid not to spittyn in hys face in þe most schamful wise þat þei cowde... & þei wolde not spare to luggen hys blisful erys & drawyn þe her of hys berd. And a-non aftyr sche saw hem drawyn of hys clothys & makyn hym al nakyd & sithyn drewyn hym forth a-forn hem as it <had> ben þe most malefactowr in al þe worlde... And per þei bowndyn hym to þe peler as streyt as þei cowde & beetyn hym on hys fayr white body wyth baleys, wyth whippis & wyth scorgys.<sup>382</sup>

There is a force to this passage that reflects the content: the sibilant hiss of the first line that illustrates Margery's contempt of the mob's behaviour; the triplet structure of the final sentence; the punctuation of the brutality of the language with the single, outstanding word, 'malefactowr'. There is also a sense that Margery's vocabulary has descended, the unrefined

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid*, p. 190.

scene being expressed by an unrefined register. The violent words in this passage are mostly of Old English origin: baleys, beetyrn, bowndyn, drawyn, ferd, fowle, luggen, schamful, sparid, and spittyn. It could be argued, therefore, that Margery has deliberately chosen her register to suit her purpose, in order to provide the passage with cruelty and aggression, and yet to use 'malefactowr' to describe Christ – at least, his tormentors consider him to be a malefactor – elevating him to an outstanding Latinate status amongst the lowly Old English.

Chapter eighty deals with the events of the crucifixion itself, and Margery's vision details another scourging of Christ, his shouldering of the cross, and a graphic description of his being nailed to it. It finishes with Margery comforting Mary, and Joseph of Arimathea taking Christ's body for burial. Direct speech in this chapter is kept to a minimum, and is often of short duration; the action is mostly reported by Margery in extended passages. However, the Virgin Mary is given three short speeches (the number that Margery gives to herself), Christ has two, and Mary Magdalene has one. In terms of contribution to the scene, therefore, Margery has placed herself on an even footing with Mary; indeed, I would argue that her conduct during the crucifixion once more usurps the position of the Virgin.

To turn first to the direct speech in this chapter, it is Mary who is given the most to say: she has nine lines, Margery has eight, and Christ and Mary Magdalene have two. Christ's words are restricted to those recounted in the Gospels, and Mary Magdalene makes a request to kiss Christ's feet. Mary's language is a continuation of previous form: mostly Old English derivations, with three exceptions in her final speech:

Serys, wolde 3e takyn a-wey fro me my Sonys body? I myth neuyr lokyn vp-on hym j-now whil he leuyd; I pray 3ow, late me han hym now he is ded, & partith not my Sone & me asondyr. And, 3yf 3e welyn alगतys beryin hym, I prey 3ow berith me wyth hym, for I may not leuyn wyth-owtyn hym.<sup>383</sup>

Partith (?c.1225), pray (a.1250) and serys (1297) are Anglo-Norman or French in derivation, and the thirteenth century dates of these examples indicate that they would have been rather commonplace by Margery's time. A final example is cruel (1297), in Mary's words towards the brutal Jews:

Alas, 3e cruel Iewys, why far 3e so wyth my swete Sone & ded he 3ow neuyr non harm?<sup>384</sup>

There is nothing particularly striking about Mary's vocabulary at this juncture (or perhaps at all), but it is striking that as soon as Mary rebukes the Jews in this manner, Margery follows suit:

3e cursyd Iewys, why sle 3e my Lord Ihesu Crist? Sle me rapar & late hym gon.<sup>385</sup>

Margery's dramatic offer to die in his place is entirely in keeping with the behaviour that she exhibits throughout the scene. Not only does it rather undermine Mary's paler reprimand, but it also establishes Margery's grief as more keenly felt, more desperate, and more sincere. By associating her remarks so closely with those of Mary, and indeed, to go further in her displays

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid, p. 194.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

of anguish, the heartache that is due to the Virgin is transferred to Margery, allowing the latter to remain at the centre of the crucifixion scene. Indeed, this can be clearly seen in Margery's words of comfort to Mary:

I prey 3ow, Lady, cesyth of 3owr sorwyng, for 3owr Sone is ded & owt of peyne, for me thynkyth ze han sorwyd a-now. &, Lady, I wil sorwe for 3ow, for 3owr sorwe is my sorwe.<sup>386</sup>

The final words are certainly worthy of comment: although one could read '3owr sorwe is my sorwe' as words of genuine consolation, imbued with a shared sense of loss, one could also argue that they continue to allow Margery to borrow the status of the Virgin. Her counsel automatically elevates Margery (it might have been more appropriate for Mary to offer wise words to the assembled mourners, than be their recipient), as it paints her as the person who can offer the wisest guidance to Christ's mother on the occasion of his death. Her advice is also eminently reasonable, and for Margery suddenly to adopt a tone of reasonableness is rather ironic, considering that she herself 'ran al a-bowte þe place as it had ben a madwoman, crying & roryng'.<sup>387</sup> The extremity of her reaction further highlights her insistence on playing a central role in her vision; the sheer ostentation of her grief ensures that the reader's focus is concentrated on her, and Mary's quietly swooning at the point at which Margery is running, crying and roaring guarantees that Mary is not given undue attention. Outside of the vision, the congregation in Margery's church 'wondryd on hir body'<sup>388</sup> thanks to the sheer volume of her weeping. She is, therefore, the centre of attention in both her interior and exterior worlds.

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid, p. 193.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid, p. 192.

Margery's reported language, throughout this chapter, also bears close study. It must be admitted that the length of the reported sections naturally produce a greater number of Latinate and French words and it would be disingenuous, therefore, to suggest that there is a greater concentration in this chapter in particular. Indeed, Margery's elevated register here is drawn mostly from the fourteenth century. Examples include: *boytows* (c.1300), *comendyd* (a.1340), *compassyon* (1340), *desyryng* (c.1386), *encreysed* (c.1380), *gracyows* (a.1300), *morteys* (c.1390), *petows* (c.1300), *plentyowsly* (1340), *precyows* (a.1325), *renewyd* (a.1382), *reverens* (c.1300), *sotyl* (in the sense of profound, 1340), and *spirynt* (a.1300). Despite this, however, the register is clearly an articulate one, and certainly more sophisticated than anything the Virgin Mary is given to say; but this chapter is more distinctive for its reliance upon repetition of certain words or phrases; particularly during the action of the crucifixion itself.

Over the course of the chapter, the repetitions (measured by three or more appearances) fall thus: *wept* and *cryid*, *petows*, and *boystows*, are each mentioned three times; *swete* has four appearances; *peyne* has six; *wept* (singly, rather than as part of the phrase 'wept and cryid') has seven; *sorwe* appears twelve times either directly or indirectly; and *precyows* is mentioned a remarkable thirteen times in reasonably quick succession. The last example is certainly interesting. Margery employs it solely to describe and emphasise the physical aspect of Christ: indeed, of the thirteen examples, in nine instances it is followed by 'body', in two it is followed by 'woundys', and there is one each of 'feet' and 'blood.' The repetition of 'precyows' is clearly intended to emphasise the humanity of Christ, reflecting the fourteenth century penchant for affective piety. The insistent conjunction of 'precyows' and 'body' particularly highlights the incarnation, and Margery's preoccupation with the physicality of Christ perhaps is indicative of the quasi-sexual overtones of the *Brautmystik* tradition, which has been briefly explored in chapter two of this thesis. The reliance on 'precyows' as an adjective in this passage

could perhaps indicate a certain shortcoming on the part of Margery's vocabulary; however the specificity with which it is deployed, i.e. solely in terms of the corporeal nature of Christ, suggests otherwise – that this is a deliberate stylistic point, intended to persuade the reader of Margery's all-consuming piety as well as offer a more elevated counterpoint to the generally rather gruesome description of Christ's death:

And þan sche sey the Iewes wyth gret violens rendyn of owr Lordys precyows body a cloth of sylke, þe which was cleuyn & hardyd so sadly & streitly to owr Lordys body wyth hys precyows blood þat it drow a-wey al þe hyde & al þe skyn of hys blissyd body & renewyd hys preiows wowndys & mad þe blod to renne down al a-bowtyn on euery side.<sup>389</sup>

During this lingering description of the crucifixion, the figure of Mary continues to be marginalised. Although Mary is given her allotted role (Margery could hardly do otherwise), our narrator's irruptions onto the scene are noticeable and vocal: the Virgin's thoughts on the situation are markedly absent. Margery talks of 'a newe sorwe' that affects her directly, having witnessed the callous tearing off of the silken cloth that, having dried, had adhered to his wounds. If Mary is mentioned, Margery is quick to point out that she herself also witnessed the events and felt grief:

Hys blisful Modyr beheldying, & þis creatur, how hys precyows body schrynkyd & drow to-gedyr wyth alle senwys & veynes in þat precyows body for peyne þat it suffyrd & felt, þei sorwyd and mornyd & syhyd ful sor.<sup>390</sup>

Mary's role as grieving mother is borrowed by Margery in her parenthetical '& þis creatur', effectively signalling to the reader that this is her tragedy, too; that she bore witness to the crucifixion at Mary's side. There is perhaps too much self-aggrandisement here to read simple female solidarity in her words, even though that is clearly what she is aiming for in the final

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid, p. 191-2.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid. op. cit.

line of the above quotation: '*pei sorwyd*' (italics my own). Although it could be argued that Margery is simply sharing her grief with Mary as a devout Christian and mother, there is something rather presumptuous in her actions. It is not simply that she is supporting Mary, it is that she is *seen* to be supporting Mary, and in joining with her sorrow, Margery denies the Virgin the opportunity to articulate her despair independently. Instead, we are offered a portrayal that shows Margery's anguish to be the equivalent of Mary's, which, whilst not sublimating Christ's mother entirely, certainly affords Margery a status that is equal. Her heartache is, therefore, perceived to be as valid as Mary's, and Margery manoeuvres herself into a position that shows her piety in the most grandiose manner: she suffers not as an ordinary Christian suffers at the passion, but feels the loss as intensely as Mary. This obviously suggests that the level of her devotion exceeds that of the overwhelming majority, singling her out – a concept that rather flies in the face of her humility. Indeed, one could go further: the second most repeated word in this passage, 'sorwe', is not only suggestive of Margery's emotional state, but the twelve instances of it allow her to express that emotion. Mary is not afforded the same opportunity: she has only one significant speech (although it is linguistically rather insignificant, as discussed above) which communicates the extent of her misery, and it occurs after Margery's pain has been explained to the reader.

Chapter eighty-one is a continuation of the previous scene, in which the Virgin is tended to by Margery, bringing her a drink which she exhorts Mary to take. Peter knocks at the door, and Mary comforts him by stating that although he forsook Christ, Christ did not forsake him. Mary Magdalene buys ointment to anoint the body, and Christ is resurrected. This chapter is again characterised by repeated words or phrases, notably *comfortyn* (five instances), *wept* (five instances) and *sorwyd* (six instances). The tone is, therefore, mournful, but there is also clearly a shift towards the aftermath of the event, and the need to console.

Mary is given six direct speeches in this passage, two of which are between five and six lines in length. Mary is given more prominence in this chapter: she speaks to John and Peter, and her grief is more adequately realised. She replies to Margery's encouraging remarks thus:

A, dowtyr, wher xulde I gon er wher xulde I dwellyn wythowtyn sorwe? I telle þe certyn was þar neuyr woman in erth had so gret cawse to sorwyn as I haue, for þer was neuyr woman in þis world bar a bettyr childe ne a mekar to hys modyr þan my Sone was to me.<sup>391</sup>

Mary's anguish is articulated convincingly in this speech, and she is sympathetically portrayed. Margery, strikingly, adopts her former pose of reasonable counsellor, attending to the practicalities of ensuring Mary's physical comfort:

Than þe creatur thowt, whan owr Lady was comyn hom & was leyd down on a bed, þan sche mad for owr Lady a good cawdel browt it hir to comforyn hir.<sup>392</sup>

Margery's solicitousness demonstrates her homely, housewifely instincts and a concern for the basics of food and drink that is repeated throughout the text. However, just as when Margery elevates her status above that of the Virgin in the previous chapter by appearing to offer calm, reasonable comfort, she does so again here. As Mary swoons for the third time, she is helped away by Mary Magdalene and St John. Margery, however, lingers by Christ:

þan þe sayd creatur, desiring to a-bydyn stille be þe graue of owr Lord, mornyd, wept, & sorwyd wyth lowed crying for tendyrness & compassyon þat sche had of owr Lordys deth & many a lamentable desyr þat God put in hir mende for þe tyme... Hir thowt sche wolde neuyr a partyd þens but desiryd to a deyd þer ben berijd wyth owr Lord.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, p.194.

The image of Margery being the last to quit Christ's grave usurps the position of Mary as chief mourner (once more dismissed from the scene) and her dramatic wish for interment with Christ reiterates her desire to die with him, indicating the extent of her piety. Although Mary voices a similar wish to die with her son at the end of the previous chapter, Margery voices it twice. Her loud crying once again arouses the hostility of the congregation, allowing her, as before, to dominate both the exterior world of her own life and the interior world of her vision.

Mary's language in this chapter remains homely and lowly, having only 'absens' (c.1384) as a reasonably late addition to the vernacular. Despite having lengthy speeches, Mary is given only one other Latinate word, *comfortyn* (c.1225), which hardly qualifies as exotic considering its date of entry. The remainder of her words are of Old English derivation. Margery is not given much in the way of direct speech in this chapter, but *cesyn* (c.1320) and also the early *comfortyn* (c.1225) make an appearance. On the other hand, Margery has several interesting examples in her lengthier sections of reported speech: *abaschyd* (c.1303), *anointyn* (1303), *compassyon* (1340), *compleynt* (c.1384), *contenawnce* (c.1290), *desiryng* (c.1386), *despite* (c.1290), *desyr* (c.1230), *lamentabyl* (?c.1422), *merveyl* (as a cause of surprise, a.1300), *onyment* (c.1300), *supportyn* (c.1382), and *tendyrnes* (a.1382). 'Lamentabyl' proves to be another example of the *OED* and the *MED* of not always agreeing: the former places the earliest usage at ?a.1475, and the latter gives ?c.1422, in Hoccleve. Even the earlier date, however, is interesting, as it suggests that 'lamentabyl' is extremely sophisticated. The remainder of the vocabulary is indicative of her usual articulacy. We have seen, therefore, a manipulation of Mary's register, even if unconsciously done, on the part of Margery. Margery's Passion visions clearly demonstrate that Mary is consistently given speeches that linguistically lower her status,

whilst Margery has an articulate, and on several occasions, outstanding vocabulary. When this is coupled with the usurping of Mary during the vision itself - by remaining with Christ after Mary is led away, by her excessive mourning - we can see that Margery continually subtly and not so subtly undermines Christ's mother.

Hitherto, Mary Magdalene has played only a minor role in Margery's visions, but in this chapter, her encounter with Christ, whom she mistakes for a gardener, is recounted. In a rare foray in dialogue, the scene is played out:

'Woman, why wepist þu?' Mary, not knowing what he was, al inflawmyd wyth þe fyre of lofe, seyde to hym a-geyn, 'Sir, 3yf þu hast a-wey my Lord, telle me, & I xal takyn hym azen'. Þan ovr Merciful Lord, hauyng pite & compassyon of hir seyde, 'Mary'. And wyth þat word sche, knowing ovr Lord, fel down at hys feet & wolde a kyssyd hys feet, seying, 'Maistryr'.<sup>394</sup>

Being 'inflawmyd wyth þe fyre of lofe' certainly conjures connotations of the affective piety tradition, and it is interesting that Margery seems to be able to relate to the situation of Christ's crucifixion both as mother and as woman. Margery does not appear to engage in such intense competition with Mary Magdalene as she does with the Virgin Mary, possibly because she felt some kinship with the former; Margery's sexual activity was a source of constant reproach to herself, and it is certainly true that she identified with the married saint, Bridget of Sweden.<sup>395</sup> However, Margery offers an aside during her vision of the meeting between the resurrected Christ and Mary Magdalene which allows her a moment of attention. Taking John 20:17

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid, p. 197.

<sup>395</sup> Identifying with Mary Magdalene, however, also allows Margery to adhere to the saintly category of penitent prostitute, an idea which will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter of this thesis.

(‘Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my father’) as the basis for the exchange between Christ and Mary Magdalene, Margery writes the following:

‘Towche me not.’ Þan þe creatur thowt that Mary Mawdelyn seyde to our Lord, ‘A, Lord, I se wel 3e wil not þat I be so homly wyth 3ow as I haue ben a-forn,’ & mad heuy cher. ‘3ys, Mary,’ seyde our Lord, ‘I xal neuyr forsake þe, but I xal euyr be wyth þe wyth-owtyn ende.’ And þan our Lord seyde to Mary Mawdelyn, ‘Go telle my bretheryn & Petyr þat I am vp-reson.’ And þan þe creatur thowt þat Mary went forth wyth gret joye, & þat was gret merueyl to hir þat Mary enioyid, for, 3yf our lord had seyde to hir as he dede to Mary, hir thowt sche cowd neuyr a ben mery. Þat was whan sche wolde a kissyd hys feet, & he seyde, ‘Towche me not’. The creatur had so gret swem & heuynes in þat worde þat euyr whan sche herd it in any sermown, as sche dede many tymys, sche wept, sorwyd, & cryd as sche xulde a deyde for lofe & desir þat sche had to ben wyth our Lord.<sup>396</sup>

This necessarily lengthy quotation gives the reaction of Mary Magdalene at Christ’s resurrection: Margery tells of her happiness, and her willingness to carry out his request to inform the disciples of his reappearance. Margery’s reaction, however, is rather more subdued. As we have seen in the previous chapter, her emotions are highly visible, and Margery gave us a lingering account of her grief and anguish during the crucifixion; partly, as I have argued, because she is attempting to outshine the Virgin Mary. One might expect, therefore, a similarly extreme, if rather more joyful, reaction on the occasion of the resurrection. Instead, Margery mentions nothing of her own happiness; indeed, she questions Mary Magdalene for displaying hers. In doing so, Margery manages to elevate herself above Mary and flaunt her own piety. She makes it abundantly clear that if Christ had exhorted *her* not to touch him, she ‘cowde neuyr a ben mery’. The fact that Mary accepts this proclamation is considered by Margery to be something of a ‘gret merueyl’, which attempts to portray the former as naive, as though Mary does not quite understand the gravity of what has just been said to her. Margery would have clearly taken the words as a personal slight, and she tries to undermine Mary’s joy by casting herself as the more serious follower. By acquiescing to Christ’s will and doing his

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid, p. 197.

bidding, Mary is actually behaving in a manner that befits one of disciples; Margery, however, arguably uses Christ's resurrection as a moment to promote her own devotion.

### III: The Mary Play

It would be useful at this juncture, having examined the manner in which Christ's mother is portrayed by the *Book*, to compare this depiction with an alternative. Although it appears that Margery is deliberately attempting to remove some of the Virgin Mary's status and establish herself as chief female in Mary's stead, it is not the case that other works portrayed Mary in such a manner. We can then more comprehensively appreciate the decision Margery appears to have made in representing Mary in a somewhat diminished fashion. *The Mary Play*,<sup>397</sup> which cannot predate 1425 was another product of East Anglia, and is, therefore, perhaps a natural candidate for comparison in this case. *The Mary Play* belongs to the N-Town plays, observes a fairly strict metre and rhyme structure, and charts the events of Mary's life, from her birth, her betrothal, the annunciation, and her visit to Elizabeth. The majority of the story is apocryphal (apart from the obvious biblical episodes) and it draws on sources such as the Latin Gospels of Pseudo-Matthew and the Greek Protevangelium. Just as with the case of the York Cycle in the previous chapter, therefore, *The Mary Play* offers a different genre from that of Margery's *Book*, but its Norfolk provenance and contemporaneous date make for an interesting comparison.

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<sup>397</sup> *The Mary Play*, ed. Peter Meredith (London and New York, 1987), which has an excellent introduction. For an overview of medieval East Anglian drama, see A.C. Crawley, Marion Jones, Peter F. McDonald and David Mills, *Medieval Drama* (London and New York, 1983); Penny Granger, *The N-Town Play: Drama and Liturgy in Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 2009); Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Cranbury, 2001); Gail McMurray Gibson, 'Bury St. Edmunds, Lydgate, and the N-Town Cycle', *Speculum* 56 (1981), pp. 56-90.

The first event of the play is Mary's conception, which naturally offers little in the way of comparison between the vocabulary assigned to Mary by Margery, and the author of *The Mary Play*. However, the second event depicted shows a rather precocious and vocal three year-old Mary, being presented to the temple by her parents, where she stays willingly until she is fourteen. The scene begins on line 271 of the play. Her vocabulary in this section contains the following examples: applied (c. 1384), captivite (c.1400), comendacyon (?c. 1225), concorde (a.1300), degree (c.1230), edyfyed (a.1340), habitacyon (c.1374), iniquite (c.1330), inquisissyon (1382), obedience (c.1225), peraventure (c.1300), petycyons (?a.1400), planetys (c.1300), prostrat (c.1390), recomendynge (1591), redolent (?a.1439), revylyd (1393), specyaly (1297), and vesselys (a.1300). Of these, clearly 'recomendynge' and 'redolent' are of particular interest. Although the *OED* places the former at 1591, the *MED* has a quotation placing the word a.1425 in *Mandeville's Travels*, fitting more closely with the earliest composition date of the play. 'Redolent', however, is a word upon which both the *OED* and the *MED* agree, assigning Lydgate the first recorded usage. As the *Mary Play* cannot predate 1425 it is difficult to establish whether the play has the prior claim; either way, the word itself is a certainly something of a new addition and suggests the astonishing refinement of three year old Mary's vocabulary.

During the betrothal scene, from line 735, Mary is not given much to say; speech falls mostly to Joseph who feels that he is too infirm for the girl: 'But I am so agyd and so olde/ Pat both myn leggys gyn to folde'.<sup>398</sup> Mary, however, has sworn chastity, and the bishop is confused as to what to do with such irregular behaviour. An angel intercedes, and distributes wands. The

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<sup>398</sup> *The Mary Play*, II. 799-800.

owner of the wand that blooms may marry Mary. Joseph enters, somewhat perplexed as to why a proclamation has been issued ordering wands to be brought. He is reluctant to offer up his wand, which bears flowers. His unimpressed reaction at the news that he has been chosen to marry her emphatically renders him a comic figure: 'it were neyther sport nere game'.<sup>399</sup> Indeed, just as Mary's register elevates her status, Joseph's register serves to underline his role as light relief. His reluctance at the prospect of marrying Mary produces some amusing rhymes ('It xal not be [I] ley a grote.../ Now wolde God I wore at hom in my cote'),<sup>400</sup> but his register is one that is routinely Old English. From line 748 to line 1059 (the betrothal and wedding), Joseph's vocabulary has only *preuyly* (a.1250), *gracyows* (twice; c. 1325), *rage* (c.1250), *perform* (c.1300), *doloure* (1370), *necessary* (c. 1376), *ordeyn* (c.1300), *sustenauns* (c.1300), *plesyng* (a.1398), *poverté* (a.1225), *refusyng* (a.1325), *maynteyn* (a.1325) and *jentyl* (c.1225) that derive from Latin or French, and of these, *plesyng* is the only example that has a fairly late date of record. Joseph's vocabulary is low, not only to serve as a counterpoint to Mary, but also to emphasise his comic credentials.

The betrothal scene is dominated by Joseph, but there are some examples in Mary's vocabulary that excite interest and illustrate her intellectual powers: *celestly* (1400), *charite* (1154), *claryfieth* (1340), *conclave* (1393), *custommably* (1303), *dispose* (1340), *shenschepe* (1303), *specyaly* (1297), and *vertuysful* (?a.1475). The last of these simply does not exist in the *OED*, and the *MED* has only a single quotation, taken from the *Ludus Coventriae*. *Vertuysful* is certainly not, therefore, a commonplace word, and once again highlights the complexity of Mary's vocabulary, exalting her. This is not, however, a portrayal that is replicated in Margery's *Book*, where Mary's language is consistently composed of Old English and early-

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 844.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 772-74

adopted importations. The author of *The Mary Play*, however, is assiduous in elevating Mary's status.

The Annunciation scene, from line 1275, also has a number of noteworthy prospects. Having been visited by Gabriel, Mary is told the news that she is to bear Christ; she exhibits further concern for the state of her virginity. She subsequently conceives immaculately through the Holy Spirit, and is informed of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy. Her vocabulary includes: carnalite (a.1400), comendyd (1340), expresse (c.1390), incarnacyon (1297), inspyracyon (1303), parfyte (c.1300), prerogatyff (1387), prevylage (eOE, via Latin), solacyth (1297) and virginite (a.1300). It is during the visit to Elizabeth, from line 1462, that Mary's superlative command of Latin is revealed. In order that the audience do not get left behind, Elizabeth translates Mary's words. It is a dazzling display of intellectual merit, and some way adrift of Margery's presentation of Mary.

It is quite clear that the even the three year-old Mary is extremely articulate, to say nothing of the self-possessed Mary who vows to maintain her chastity. She is, therefore, quite different from the portrayal offered by Margery Kempe; Mary here is the dominating figure (as one might expect from an eponymous character), and she is an intellectual force. Her answers to the priest in the temple prompts the response: '3e answe as 3e were twenty 3er old.'<sup>401</sup> Not only this, but she speaks Latin fluently, with the passages helpfully translated by Elizabeth during her visit. She is the antithesis of the homely, unsophisticated and slightly passive figure that we see in the *Book*. Although Margery appears duly reverent of the mother of Christ, her

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<sup>401</sup> *The Mary Play*, 1, 296.

rampant self-regard does not allow either the Virgin or, to a lesser extent, Mary Magdalene, to encroach on her territory, that is, the worshipping of Christ. Margery strives to be the sole beneficiary of Christ's comfort, words and advice, and to be the most pious and devout follower of his teachings. Despite the biblical status of the Marys, Margery does her best to make sure that she appears the more favoured. Of course, one could argue that Mary's language in the *Book* is passive and humble because it befits the status of the mother of Christ. I would argue that if this were the case, and one has to acknowledge the apparent rivalry that Margery feels towards Mary, then Margery's language would have lacked even the modest sophistication that Mary's has.

### III: The Other Women

Having analysed Margery's linguistic portrayal of the two Marys in particular, it is now fitting that we turn our attention to the other women whom Margery mentions. In doing so, we will be able to examine to what extent we can draw conclusions about Margery's feelings towards them, and their status within the *Book*. In chapter seventy-four, we see Margery's attitude towards these historical women emerge. Although Margery was somewhat restricted by her circumstances from fully expressing her devotion in the manner of other religious women (for instance, Bridget of Sweden, who was aristocratic and freed after the death of her husband, or Catherine of Siena, who never married and became an example of the Beguine movement), she does attempt to emulate some of their actions, perhaps in a bid to appear to adhere to as many saintly conventions as possible. The chapter commences with reassurance from Christ that she is as worthy of his love as Mary Magdalene, before going on to give details about Margery's scheme to kiss lepers. Kissing lepers is almost a rite of passage for the medieval mystic:

Catherine of Siena, Angela of Foligno and St. Francis of Assisi are all examples of the lengths to which some would go in order to subjugate the will of the flesh.<sup>402</sup> Angela of Foligno goes so far as to drink the broth that resulted having washed lepers feet in a basin, choking on a scrap of leprous skin as it becomes lodged in her throat.<sup>403</sup> Catherine of Siena perhaps goes further by sucking the pus directly from a patient's suppurating breast.<sup>404</sup> In light of these practices, merely kissing lepers appears restrained. St. Francis's conversion to the practice of kissing lepers coincides with his own conversion, prior to which he found lepers repellent.<sup>405</sup> It is not a surprise, therefore, that Margery petitions her confessor for permission to kiss lepers herself:

Than sche teld hir confessor how gret desire sche had to kyssyn lazerys, & he warnyd hir þat sche xulde kyssyn no men, but, yf sche wolde al-gatys kyssyn, sche xulde kyssyn women.<sup>406</sup>

The confessor's 'al-gatys' suggests that he is slightly hesitant in granting Margery's request, but is nevertheless aware of the force of her personality and her determination to do it anyway:

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<sup>402</sup> For an overview of medieval attitudes towards leprosy, see: Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2006); and Saul Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, 1974).

<sup>403</sup> This is such a famous episode that it deserves extensive quotation. Angela writes: 'lavimus pedes feminarum et lavimus manus hominum, maxime cuiusdam leprosy qui habebat manus valde fracidas vel marcidas et perditas, et bibimus de illa lotura. Et tantam dulcedinem sensimus, quod per totam viam venimus in magna suavitate ac si communicavissemus. Et videbatur mihi recte quod ego communicassem... Et quia quaedam scarpula illarum plagarum erat interposita in gutture, ego conabar ad glutendum eam. Et reprehendebat me conscientia expurare sicut si communicassem...' [we washed the feet of the women and the hands of the men, and especially those of one the lepers which were festering and in an advanced state of decomposition. Then we drank the water with which we had washed him. And the drink was so sweet that all the way home we tasted its sweetness and it was as if we had received communion. It seemed to me truly that I had communicated... When a scab from the wounds remained in my throat, I tried to dislodge it. My conscience restrained me from spitting it out, as though I had communicated.] Quoted in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Harlow, 2000), p. 326.

<sup>404</sup> St. Catherine reflected on the experience thus: 'Never in my life have I tasted any food and drink sweeter or more exquisite', Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p.115.

<sup>405</sup> See: Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, (Harlow, 2000), p. 326. See also Andre Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi, The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, pp. 21-25.

<sup>406</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe* (EETS edition), p. 177.

& so sche kyssyd þer ij seke women with many an holy thowt & many a deuowt teer, &, whan sche had kyssyd hem & telde hem ful many good wordys & steryd hem to mekenes & pacyens þat þei xulde not grutchyn wyth her sekenes but hyly thankyn God perfor & þei xulde han gret blysse in Heuyn thorw þe mercy of owr Lord Ihesu Crist.<sup>407</sup>

Margery's no-nonsense approach to the lepers is entirely in keeping with her approach to piety: if kissing lepers is a practice adopted by the more notable female lay mystics who were also candidates for sainthood, then it is, too, a practice that Margery will adopt. Here she exhorts the leprous women to endure their affliction humbly (admittedly in the manner that Christ would have borne it, but it is, nevertheless, easy for Margery to say), and not to 'grutchyn' about their lot; a magnificently onomatopoeic word of Old French derivation, first recorded in the *Ancrene Wisse* in c.1230, although it has a distinctly Anglo-Saxon tone that suggests an early adoption. It no longer appears in the *OED*. Margery leaves the women with the cheering thought that they will be rewarded in heaven for their forbearance. It is another example of Margery taking an event that ought to highlight her piety, but, in fact, highlights her egotism. P. H Cullen analyses Margery's kissing of lepers as a 'reflection of a rather old-fashioned piety, found more typically in the twelfth than the fifteenth century,'<sup>408</sup> noting that leper houses were in decline by Margery's day, perhaps reducing her act to something that could be considered to be an affectation. Leprosy itself was still feared, but it is possible that Margery's desire to kiss lepers, whilst ostensibly to show sublimation of personal will, could be another case of competitive piety: Cullum points out that 'leprosy was also often thought to be a punishment which God visited on sinners, and Margery evidently took this view of it.'<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid, p. 177.

<sup>408</sup> P.H. Cullum, 'Spiritual and Bodily Works of Mercy', *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 179-88, p. 180.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

Margery's 'many an holy thowt & many a deuowt teer' suggests that this is an event that must be endured: unlike Angela, Catherine or Marie d'Oignies, Margery does not devote herself to the care of lepers (understandable, perhaps, considering her husband is still alive. John also seemed to exert a measure of control over her, and he might have protested at leper-kissing on a grander scale), but kisses them once, one cannot help but feel, out of a sense of mystical obligation – it being the 'done' thing. Indeed, her thoughts on the matter indicate that she might see the act of kissing lepers as a rung on the ladder towards enlightenment:

Now gan sche to louyn þat sche had most hatyd be-for-tyme, for þer was no-thing mor lothful ne mor abhomynabyl to hir whil sche was in þe zerys of werdly prosperite þan to seen er beheldyn a lazer, whom now thorw owr Lordys mercy sche desyryd to halsen & kyssyn for þe lofe of Ihesu whan sche had tyme & place conuenyent.<sup>410</sup>

The rapid conversion and previous loathing of lepers is redolent of St. Francis of Assisi, and, together with the numerous examples of other female mystics indulging in such behaviour, gives Margery an air of authenticity. However, the phrase 'whan sche had tyme & place conuenyent' rather suggests that she considered this to be a kind of administrative task; it certainly does not give the impression of her heart truly being in it. If one were being cynical, one might suggest that Margery saw the kissing of lepers as a necessary evil if she were to ever be considered for sainthood. Nevertheless, as the kissing is done at her own convenience, it is surely the case that this is Margery showing off her credentials rather than a deeper reflection on the significance of the act. The brevity and simplicity of her comments on the subject are in sharp distinction to the more elegant ruminations of Angela of Foligno, who compares the experience to receiving communion, and who remarks on the sweetness of the taste in manner

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid, p. 177.

that underlines her belief that she has performed a holy act: 'Et videbatur mihi recte quod ego communicassem.'<sup>411</sup> By equating the leprous water with communion, Angela is demonstrating that she has sublimated her will to the point of utter humility, and thus, is imitating Christ. She gives a sense of having deepened her own spiritual understanding as a result of drinking the water, and her readers, therefore, perceive a progression in Angela's religious journey. Margery, however, gives no such impression. Instead, she regales her readers with the words of wisdom that she uttered to the unfortunate women (although she does not include specifics), suggesting that humility had very little to do with her desire to kiss lepers. She does not serve them or offer them aid, unlike Angela, Marie d'Oignies or Catherine of Siena, which would have helped to cast her in a humbler light. Moreover, Margery's motivation in kissing the lepers is somewhat vague: she is aware that she is doing it for 'the lofe of Ihesu', but there is no clear articulation of any deeper processes, the like of which drove Angela, nor is there insightful comment on any personal revelations, or, indeed, a hint that she experienced any, after she has done the deed. Telling them that they will reap their reward in heaven, Margery goes on, almost as a non-sequitur, immediately to discuss various torments that assailed her thereafter. We are not, therefore, left with a sense that having kissed the lepers, Margery's spirituality has deepened significantly. As an episode, it suggests that she is aware, perhaps from precedent, that this is something to be accomplished as a means of ensuring sainthood, rather than a means of gaining further spiritual enlightenment.

During the narration of this chapter, Margery's vocabulary is composed of her usual, articulate selection of words although the majority here are thirteenth century: *abhomyabyl* (in a moral sense, 1340), *confessor* (c.1200), *convenient* (c.1374), *delayd* (c.1290), *desyrd* (c.1230),

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<sup>411</sup> [It seemed to me truly that I had communicated.], quoted in *BMK* (Harlow, 2000), p.326.

devowt (c.1225), governyd (1297), grutchyn (1230), pacyens (c.1230), prosperite (c.1225), revolving (c. 1425), and temptacyons (1225). 'Revolving' offers the most interesting example with its date of c. 1425. The sense of the word is 'to consider' in this case, and although the *MED* has cited the above example from Lydgate, the *OED* does not acknowledge that it exists with this definition until 1597. It is apposite that Margery should use the most refined word when she is reflecting on the weighty matter of her death and her despair that it is 'so long delayd'.<sup>412</sup> Her longing for death in order to be in the presence of the Lord perhaps has a more authentic spiritual purpose than her desire to kiss lepers, and it is interesting that when Margery asks when she will die, the answer is at once characteristically no-nonsense yet once again affirms Margery's status as being comparable to that of the Virgin Mary:

'Alasse, Lord, how long xal I thus wepyn & mornyn for thy lofe & for desyr of thy presens?' Owr Lord answeyrd in hir sowle & seyde, 'Al þis xv 3er.' Than seyde sche, 'A, Lord, I schal thynkyn many thowsend 3erys'. Owr Lord answeyrd to hir, 'Dowtry, þu must bethynkyn þe of my blissyd Modyr þat leuyd aftyr in erth xv 3er, also Seynt Iohn þe Evangelyst, & Mary Mawdelyn, þe which louyd me rithly'.<sup>413</sup>

Margery's visions often have a matter-of-fact tone, perhaps indicative of her own status as an illiterate Lynn wife and mother; there is a limited sense of nuance or delicacy in many of her visions, having instead a solidness and surety that the visions of other mystics perhaps did not. Christ's voice, here, then, is typical of Margery: there is no room for extensive theological exegesis; he simply tells her that she will live for another fifteen years, that despite her wish to be united with him in heaven she will have to wait, and that Mary had to live fifteen years without him. The fact that Margery is given the same number of years is appears to be quite

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<sup>412</sup> *BMK*, p.176.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

deliberate, and could be seen as an attempt to consolidate her status as Mary's equal in the eyes of the reader. In chapter seventy-four, therefore, we have seen Margery attempt to imitate the lives of other religious lay women (and St Francis of Assisi), by kissing lepers. Although the practice seems to be somewhat old-fashioned by Margery's time, the episode nevertheless helps to bolster her saintly credentials. These credentials are further burnished in the chapter that follows.

Chapter seventy-five redirects its focus from the biblical and saintly women on whom Margery models herself, and concentrates on Margery's miraculous powers of intercession. She tells us of the plight of a normal woman from Lynn who is suffering from a mental disorder, having given birth. Margery's personal experience in this area makes her a natural choice in attempting to alleviate the woman's suffering, but one must also note the positioning of the chapter itself: the previous is concerned with her attempts to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena and Angela of Foligno by consorting with lepers; in this chapter, Margery consolidates her position by ministering to a sick woman, and, arguably, bringing about a miraculous recovery.

Margery is approached by the woman's husband, who states that 'it stod ryth hard wyth hym, for hys wife was newly delyueryd of a childe & sche was owt hir mende'.<sup>414</sup> This recalls Margery's own difficult first birth, especially as the husband continues:

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid, p. 177.

'&, dame', he seyth, 'sche knowyth not me ne non of hir neyborwys. Sche roryth & cryith so þat sche makith folk euy a-feerd. Sche wyl boþe smytyn & bityn, & þerfir sche is manykyld on hir wristys'.<sup>415</sup>

Margery's own symptoms were uncomfortably similar, although there is no suggestion in the text that this is why Margery is selected as a potential source of aid. Instead, arriving at the deranged woman's house, we are told that she is comforted by Margery's presence:

'For 3e am', sche seyð, 'a ryth good woman, & I beheld many fayr awngelys a-bowte 3ow, & þerfor, I pray 3ow, goth not fro me, for I am gretly comfortyd be 3ow'.<sup>416</sup>

This description is no doubt an attempt to show the reader the esteem in which Margery was held in her own town. Bridget, Catherine, Angela, and Marie all gained reputations for holiness within their cities, and indeed, beyond. Margery is demonstrating to us that she, too, was considered by the inhabitants of Lynn to be a 'ryth good woman', and potentially a holy one; the woman sees angels surrounding Margery, but no-one else is singled out for such an honour: 'whan oþer folke cam to hir, sche cryid and gapyd as sche wold an etyn hem & seyð þat sche saw many deuelys a-bowtyn hem'.<sup>417</sup> With Margery's credentials thus established, she goes on to effect her cure:

And þe seyð creatur went to hir iche day onys er twyis at þe lest wey, whyl sche was wyth hir, sche was meke a-now & herd hir spekyn dalyin wyth good wil wyth-owtyn any roryng er crying. And þe sayð creatur preyid for þis woman euery day þat God xulde, 3yf it were hys wille, restoryn hir to hir wityys a-geyn. And owr Lord answeryd in hir sowle & seyð, 'Sche xulde faryn ryth wel'.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid, pp. 177-8.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, p. 178.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

These words cause Margery to pray with renewed fervour, and eventually the woman is restored to her wits and is purified in a religious ceremony, as all post-natal women were. Indeed, McMurray Gibson points out the significant spiritual and physical danger that childbirth posed as in 'many parts of Europe, local custom forbade burial on holy ground to women who had died in childbirth, until ritual churching and purification had taken place.'<sup>419</sup> Margery's own experiences with multiple childbirths and the effects that they can wreak perhaps moved her to favour this woman's cause; she had, of course, given birth fourteen times herself, and in restoring the disturbed woman to her wits, there is a sense that Margery has exorcised the demon that lurked since her own difficult first birth, and that she has completed a significant part of her spiritual journey. Indeed, the appositeness of Margery's 'miracle' carries more weight with the reader than her sudden impulse to kiss lepers; she has, in a sense, achieved enlightenment by transforming herself from the afflicted to the healer.

Although Margery is careful to credit 'owr Lord' with carrying out the miracle, it is clear that such a miracle would not have happened if it had not been for Margery's intercession. The description of her as a good woman, surrounded by angels, whose prayers cure a woman's ailment are highly suggestive of her presenting herself as the English successor to the Continental female mystics, a presentation borne out, to a certain extent, by the scribe. The scribe invades the text at the end of this chapter, and he endorses the woman's transformation:

It was, as hem thowt þat knewyn it, a ryth gret myrakyl, for he þat wrot þis boke had neuyr be-for þat tyme sey man ne woman, as hym thowt, so fer owt of hir-self as þis

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<sup>419</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, p.61.

woman was ne so euyl to rewlyn ne to gouernyn, & sithyn he sey hir sad & sobyr a-  
now, worschip & preysyng be to owr Lord wyth-owtyn ende for hys hy mercy & hys  
goodness þat euyr helpith at nede.<sup>420</sup>

Endorsement of the transformation, however, is not endorsement of Margery Kempe: his wording acknowledges that a ‘gret myrakyl’ has taken place, but he does not mention Margery’s part in it, crediting only divine intervention. However, the episode in general could be read as a calculated attempt by Kempe to boost her holy position: she casts herself as the conduit through which the miracle took place, and if the composition of the *Book* was Margery’s attempt at the establishment of a cult or sainthood (that this is, in effect, Margery’s *Vita*), then this is her statutory miracle.

#### IV: Autohagiography

Margery’s statutory miracle opens up the debate for discussion about the other potentially miraculous interventions that she makes during the course of the *Book*, and the effect that these have on the assumption that we are reading a work of autohagiography. Katherine Lewis posits that Margery is associated with a number of miraculous incidents which help to bolster her presentation as an aspiring saint: in chapter nine, nine pounds of stone and wood falls on her and it is pronounced a miracle by Master Aleyn that she is unhurt; chapter twenty-three is an inventory of various intercessions; in chapter sixty-seven she prays for rain or adverse weather to halt the progress of a fire that threatened to engulf St. Margaret’s church – a snow storm ensues and the building is preserved; and in this chapter, as we have seen, Margery’s

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<sup>420</sup> *BMK*, pp. 178-9.

intercessions effect a miraculous cure.<sup>421</sup> Lewis's essay seeks to establish why no cult of Margery took root in England, despite the range of miracles that accompany her; indeed Margery is presented to the reader as a potential saint 'and moreover, that she was actually recognised as such by others during her lifetime'.<sup>422</sup> Christ himself mentions in Chapter twenty-two that Margery will be worshipped after her death:

'Dowtyr, I be-hote þe same grace þat I be-hyte Seynte Kateryne, Seynt Margarete, Seynt Barbara, & Seynt Powle, in so mech þat what creatur in erth vn-to þe Day of Dom aske þe any bone & beleuyth þat God louyth þe he xal haue hys bone er ellys a bettyr thing... & men in erth schal joyn in God for þe for he xal werkyn meche grace for þe and makyn al þe world to knowyn þat God louyth þe. Þu hast be despised for my lofe, & þerfor þu xalt be worschepyd for my lofe. Dowtyr, whan þu art in Heuyn, þu xalt mown [...] askyn what þu wylt, & I xal grawnte þe al þi desyr.'

As Lewis goes on to comment:

The text could not be more explicit. After her death Margery will be worshipped and she will be able to ask anything she wants of Christ on behalf of her grateful devotees. It is significant that this is couched not simply in general terms, but by specifically granting Margery the same intercessory powers already enjoyed by four of the so-called universal saints; those who were venerated across medieval Europe.<sup>423</sup>

As we have seen, Lewis's argument is that the *Book* should be understood as autohagiography; Christ's words in the above quotation rank her as highly as four other venerated saints, who, vitally, are in the upper echelons of the saints that they can be appealed to in their own right by prayer. It is not, therefore, that Margery is attempting mere sainthood, but sainthood on a grand scale: she has her sights set on a position amongst the greatest and most popular intercessory saints, as promised by Christ himself. The *Book*, therefore, leaves clues hinting at Margery's sainthood with Christ telling her on four separate occasions that the entire world will know her; in the present chapter we have the greatest, most dramatic, and most concrete example of a miracle performed. Indeed, both Lewis and McMurray Gibson point out the fact that Margery's

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<sup>421</sup> Katherine Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England', *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* pp. 195-215.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201-2.

miracle involves childbirth, usually the province of St. Margaret, and of course, the dedicatory saint of Margery's local church. Both posit the idea that Margery assumes the role of St. Margaret in this chapter, and, indeed, her intercession on this occasion proves to be as efficacious as that of St. Margaret herself, leading the reader to conclude that Margery's place in the pantheon of saints is justifiable: 'the Book here strives to present Margery as one of their number, both in terms of intimacy with Christ and her abilities'.<sup>424</sup> The saints she is seeking to emulate are ancient, or indeed, biblical, and could be termed canonical. One has to marvel at the audaciousness of portraying a housewife from Lynn in the same light; indeed, that the housewife from Lynn would portray *herself* in this way. Lewis, however, avers that such a portrayal was necessary as 'miracles, not a reputation for holy living, would be the decisive factor'<sup>425</sup> in generating a cult to Margery. The *Book*, therefore, all but tells its readership that a posthumous cult ought to be established.

McMurray Gibson's essay suggests that Margery's sainthood would be based on martyrdom by slander, and that her many instances of persecution and the suffering that resulted were part of a calculated attempt to court sainthood: the 'protestations of the public hostility she faced must be read in the context of her deliberate attempt to participate in the martyrdom pattern of Christ and his saints'.<sup>426</sup> Her suffering through humiliation and revilement is directly equated to the physical suffering of Christ during the crucifixion, a concept borne out by Christ himself: 'Dowtyr, it is more plesyng vn to me þat þu suffer despitys & scornys...'.<sup>427</sup> Although this bolsters the argument that Margery was seeking sainthood, McMurray Gibson makes a further

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid, p. 202.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, p. 205.

<sup>426</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 48.

<sup>427</sup> *BMK*, p. 131.

point that Margery's visions were not simplistic and almost unimaginatively orthodox because she was a mere housewife: her domestic preoccupations during the visions are not 'naive or childish attempts at mysticism... but rather deliberate and self-conscious emulation of the Marian model.'<sup>428</sup> Margery's preoccupation with serving the Virgin during her visions feeds, Gibson believes, into the ideas espoused by Pseudo Bonaventure in *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, written as a series of instructions to a nun belonging to the Poor Clares. It was later adapted by Nicholas Love into the *Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesus Christ*, of which Margery was aware. The nun was urged to meditate on consoling Mary's sorrow in order that she could eat a little after Christ's death, and to assume the role of handmaiden. Margery, as we have seen, brings Mary food and drink after the Crucifixion. She also carries the luggage when Mary and Joseph visit Elizabeth, and she swaddles the newborn Christ. McMurray Gibson suggests that Margery took the advice of the *Meditationes* to heart, as her practical aid during the sequence of visions places Margery firmly in the position of handmaid. Indeed, as McMurray Gibson points out, Margery's adoption of this model recalls the Virgin herself, as her assistance to Mary often in the guise of a nursemaid. McMurray Gibson suggests that in recalling the figure of mother, Margery is simply adhering to a medieval notion 'invented, or at least popularised'<sup>429</sup> by the *Meditationes* of the veil as an image that linked the Nativity with the Passion: Christ is covered by Mary's veil in both. At Aachen, Margery sees various relics that have domestic connotations, including 'owr Ladys smokke'.<sup>430</sup> It is interesting to note that:

St Bridget of Sweden and Dorothea of Montau were among those who went on pilgrimage to the relics at Aachen, which included: the smock the Virgin wore at Christ's birth, the cloth which received St. John the Baptist's head, and St Joseph's stockings, believed to have been used to swaddle the new-born Christ Child against the cold.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, p.50.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>430</sup> *BMK*, p. 237.

<sup>431</sup> *BMK* (Harlow, 2000), p. 407.

Clearly Margery was influenced by the objects that she encountered on her travels, as well as the ideas propounded by the *Meditationes*. McMurray Gibson states that although one might be intrigued by the homeliness of Margery's role in the visions, 'what seems idiosyncratic in the *Book* and Margery's devotion can actually be traced to popular late medieval texts, images and relics sanctioned by the orthodoxy of her time.'<sup>432</sup> This may well be true, however, when taken in conjunction with Margery's usurpation of the Virgin via language, her behaviour is rather more than handmaidenly or an attempt to follow the Marian model. It is a whole-scale usurpation of Mary's role that Margery achieves, through a calculated series of actions: Mary's language is consistently of a low register; her voice is silenced; her grief is taken on by Margery; her child is clothed; and she herself is cared for by Margery as a child. Margery is portrayed as mother throughout the visions, which deftly suggests that her status is equal to that of Mary; linguistically, it is higher.

In addition, chapter seventy-five presents the clearest case of Margery's miracle, endeavouring to position her amongst the saints, or perhaps provide support for a later petition for St. Margery. The vita quality of this chapter is particularly indicative of a certain ambition in this direction. Indeed, the image of Margery as handmaid continues into the following chapter, resulting in a clever piece of structuring. Chapters seventy-four, seventy-five and seventy-six, are a triad that present Margery in an extraordinarily holy light. It commences with the kissing of the leper, climaxes with the miracle performed and continues to show Margery as handmaid of God with the nursing of her stricken husband. An accident befalls him:

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<sup>432</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 59.

It happyd on a tyme þat þe husbonde of þe seyde creatur, a man in gret age passing thre scor 3er, as he wolde a comyn down of hys chambyr bar-foot & bar-legge he sledereyde er ellys faylyd of hys fotyng & fel down to þe grownd for the gresys, & hys heuyd vndyr hym greuowsly brokyn & bresyd in so meche þat he had in hys heuyd v teyntys many days whil hys heuyd was in holyng.<sup>433</sup>

One cannot help but notice the slightly aggrieved tone of this description. In giving the details of the fall, she mentions the fact that he was 'bar-foot & bar-legge', causing him to slip. One may surmise, reading between the lines, that his wife considers that if he had not been so under-attired, his accident might never have occurred. The townsfolk berate her for failing to look after her husband properly ('þe pepil seyde, 3yf he deyde, hys wife was worthy to ben hangyn for hys deth... They dwellyd not to-gedyr'<sup>434</sup>), and Margery is initially concerned that Christ's exhortation to care for John will impinge on her devotions:

'Nay, good Lord, for I xal þan not tendyn to þe as I do now.' '3ys, dowtyr,' seyde owr Lord, 'þu xalt haue as meche mede for to kepyn hym & helpyn hym in hys nede at hom as 3yf þu wer in chirche to makyn þei preyerys. And þu hast seyde many tymys þat þu woldist fawyn kepyn me. I prey þe now kepe hym for lofe of me.'<sup>435</sup>

Thus, Margery becomes handmaid to John, although her enactment is rather more worldly than spiritual. However, it is made abundantly clear that she will not suffer in Christ's favour, because he equates the task of care with an act of worship. This, of course, correlates with the presentation of Margery as handmaid to the Virgin, and rounds off this trio of chapters that is concerned to present her in the most holy of lights. Pointedly, she informs the reader that her burden is heavy. She:

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<sup>433</sup> *BMK*, p. 179.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit. Margery goes on to point out that when she initially gained sexual emancipation she continued to live in the same house as her husband, inciting slander from the people of Lynn who considered that she 'vsyd her lust & her liking as þei dedyn be-form'. This prompted her to obtain separate lodgings from John, which, when he fell, allowed the townsfolk to slander her for not taking care of him as she ought, because she did not live with him. One cannot help but admire Margery's spirit in highlighting the double-standard.

<sup>435</sup> *BMK*, p. 180.

had ful mech labowr wyth hym, for in hys last days he turnyd childisch a-zen & lakkyd reson þat he coud not don hys owyn esement to gon to a sege, er ellys he wolde not, but as a childe voydyd his natural digestion in hys lynyn clothys þer her sat be þe fyre er at þe tabil, wheþyr it wer, he wolde sparyn no place.<sup>436</sup>

Her aggrieved tone, once again, betrays her exact thoughts on the subject of nursing John: the parenthetical 'er ellys he wolde not' suggests that Margery considers his lack of bodily control to be due to sheer deficiency of will. Nevertheless, she tends him 'as sche wolde a don Crist hym-self',<sup>437</sup> receiving just punishment for the 'many delectabyl thowtys, fleschly lustys & inordinate louys to hys persone'<sup>438</sup> with which she pleased herself as a young woman.

These three chapters, therefore, do much to further Margery's case for sainthood. She performs the statutory miracle, helping to return an insane woman to her wits, and it can be no accident that the miracle performed was entirely relevant to Margery's own story. Her intercessions recall the manner in which certain saints were invoked to provide specific help in specific circumstances, and the fact that she is successful in her attempt is a signpost for the reader to think of Margery as a saint-in-waiting. Moreover, her behaviour in the chapters that are immediately before and after the miracle, paint Margery in a holy light. She follows in the footsteps of notable saints and holy women by kissing lepers, and she approaches the task of attending to her husband with Christ in mind. The expense and the relentlessness of the chore is a gesture of self-sacrifice, which is intensified when taken in conjunction with slander of her townspeople as they blame her for John's accident; it is Margery's imitation of Christ.

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid, p. 180-1.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

The language of chapter seventy-five is interesting as it is one of the few instances we have of clear scribal intervention. The tenor of Margery's language remains impressively articulate: alienyd (c.1384), chenys (c.1300), dalyin, (c. 1300), delyveryd (to give birth, c.1300), gaypyd (c.1220, Old Norse), parceyvying (c.1330), purifid (c.1350), recur (a.1382), recuryng (a.1382), restoryn (a.1325), suffryn (1250), and tediows (c.1425). Of these, 'tediows' is the stand-out offering, although 'alienyd' is an intriguing prospect. Only three examples are cited with this specific meaning, that is, to be 'irrational or deranged',<sup>439</sup> and it is not defined in this manner at all by the *OED*. It is mostly employed in a legal sense of surrendering one's property, or in a theological sense of being estranged from God. Interestingly, one of the two other citations for this particular meaning can found in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*,<sup>440</sup> which has a composition date of a.1475; her *Revelations* had their orthodoxy confirmed in 1436. Given the scant number of texts that have a citation for this specific definition, it is, perhaps, not too fanciful to suggest that on being read the *Revelations* Margery's ear might have plucked the word for her own use. Bridget's book, incidentally, also employs the word in its legal sense. Of the few words obviously belonging to the scribe, we are given governyn (1297), myrakyl (1160), rewlyn (c.1225), and sobyr (1338). If one were to attempt to construct an argument for the scribe having a more developed vocabulary than Margery, then this is clearly not going to help the cause; there is, of course, only a very small sample of words here, and it would be impossible to draw any significant conclusions.

We have seen that, in this trio of chapters, Margery has attempted to emulate both saints and holy women. Having debased Mary in the chapters concerning her visions of the Nativity and the Passion, Margery continues her attempt to illustrate that she is saintly, and to illustrate her

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<sup>439</sup> <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED1117&egs=all>, accessed 21/07/12.

<sup>440</sup> <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/hyp-idx?type=id&id=hyp.1204.19981211T105002>, accessed 21/07/12.

competitive relationship with women, by the kissing of lepers in imitation of Catherine of Siena and Angela of Foligno; the miraculous restoring of a woman's wits in which she emulates St Margaret; and her nursing of John, in which she appears as handmaiden. There is, however, a further example of a medieval religious woman with whom Margery converses that must, finally, be examined.

### **V: Julian of Norwich**

Julian of Norwich is another female figure with whom Margery is closely associated, although, of course, it is not merely for this association that Julian is famous. It is clear that Margery sought endorsement for her own spiritual views in seeking counsel from Julian, and in documenting her discussion with her, perhaps helps to cement her credentials as a true mystic – although the papacy did not instigate a canonization process for Julian, therefore throwing into doubt the efficacy of the inclusion for Margery. The *Revelations of Divine Love* detail the cycle of visions that Julian experienced after an illness, written during her time as an anchoress in Norwich. As Stone indicates, a number of similarities exist between the two women: both began writing their visions after twenty years; both experienced their visions after illness; both were illiterate (although the level of Julian's illiteracy is sometimes contested); both had an avowed goal of helping other achieve an understanding of God; both lay significant emphasis on the Passion.<sup>441</sup> However, there are also 'outstanding differences'.<sup>442</sup> There is, for example, a marked difference in terms of the women's characters; Julian is contemplative and reclusive, whilst Margery is energetic and outgoing. This difference of temperament perhaps explains, to

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<sup>441</sup> See: Robert Karl Stone, *Middle English Prose Style, Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich*.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

some degree, the dissimilarity of their visions: it would not be controversial to suggest that Julian's response to her visions is more reflective and more intellectual than Margery's, and Stone points out that during the latter's work 'the reader feels much more strongly the possible motive of self-glorification'.<sup>443</sup> Although Stone does not go so far as to suggest that Margery was composing her own vita, his acknowledgement of her self-glorification at least contributes to the notion. Upon reading Julian, however, one is arrested by the 'change from the self-occupied fervours of the devotee to the calm objectivity of the saint.'<sup>444</sup> That is not to say, however, that Stone dismisses Margery as an unappealing prospect, aided, perhaps by the fact that we are privy to Margery's autobiography, and not just her 'showings', as Julian writes.

Tantalisingly, Margery visits Julian in her cell at Norwich and their exchange is detailed in Chapter 18. The words that Margery employs by way of introducing Julian, and some of her reported speech, are replete with a high proportion of Latinate words: compassyon (1304), compunccyon (c.1340), contemplacyon (c.1225), contricyon (c.1303), cownseling (c.1330), dalyawns (c.1400), decete (pre-1300), devocyon (c.1225), meditacyon (c.1230), mervelyows (c.1330), obedient (c.1230), profyte (c.1330), revelacyons (c.1384), and visitacyon (in the sense of God exercising a power (c. 1340)). Of these, perhaps revelacyons and dalyawns are the most interesting. 'Dalyawns' in particular has a number of interesting definitions. Although Margery's intended meaning (of having a general sense of a discussion, of either a trivial or serious nature) is recorded c.1400, the earlier sense was more provocative. First recorded in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* c.1385, it was intended to connote 'Sport, play (with a companion or companions); esp. amorous toying or caressing, flirtation; often, in bad sense,

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid. op. cit.

wanton toying'.<sup>445</sup> With this in mind, when Margery employs it specifically to describe the nature of her conversations with Christ, it produces some interesting overtones. However, the relatively late development of the word to mean a general discussion, perhaps sets the tone for the exchange between the two women. The direct speech given to Julian gives her an elegant and Latinate register, but she is not given any stand-out words: charite (1154), chastnesse (c.1386), compassyon (c.1304), contrayows (twice, c.1340), contrisyon (a.1300), despyte (c.1290), devocyon (c.1225), meryte (1230), pacyens (?c.1225), perseverawns (1340), plentyvowsly (c.1350), receyven (1318), and turmentyn (c.1290). Considering the relative brevity of Julian's speech (twenty-seven lines in total in the EETS edition of the text), she is given an elevated register that is in keeping with the register that is displayed in *The Revelations of Divine Love*. It does not, however, eclipse Margery's own vocabulary, and thus both appear on an equal footing.

## VI: Conclusion

Margery's use of vocabulary when the Virgin Mary is present is undeniably interesting. Mary's words are of an almost resolutely Old English or naturalised French derivation, which, when compared with the words that Margery uses herself, appear to be rather unsophisticated. Although one could argue that this places Mary in the humblest of lights, a position that she ought to adopt as the role model for Christian women and Christ's mother, when viewed in conjunction with Margery's subsequent actions, there is certainly a case to be made for Margery usurping Mary's role. *The Mary Play*, however, presents Mary in a quite different

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<sup>445</sup> <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46978?redirectedFrom=dalliance#eid>, accessed 26/01/13.

manner, the author assigning her a register of Latinate terms, and indeed, even moments of Latin that are translated for the audience: the contrast to Margery's portrayal is marked. Moreover, Margery's grief and torment at the crucifixion are foregrounded, allowing the focus to remain on herself, whilst the actions of the biblical stories are carried out. Although Margery becomes Mary's handmaiden, she simultaneously positions herself as chief mourner. Mary's roles, therefore, are sublimated by Margery herself, who subtly and consistently undermines Mary's position through a linguistically elevated register. The result of such an act is that Margery's position in Christ's favour is cemented in the eyes of the reader, whilst Mary's position, of course not forgotten, is nevertheless marginalised.

Margery's *Book* goes on to emulate some of the vitae of religious women, and even the saints, in her kissing of lepers, her enacting of miracles, and her imitation of Christ. These events have the unmistakable air of a saint's life, and, when taken together with the portrayal of the Virgin Mary, present Margery's relationship with other women as a complicated one. Margery is clearly aware of the need to adhere to certain conventions in order to bolster her petition for sainthood, and it is rather striking that Margery borrows not just from the lay, married holy women of whom she had knowledge, but, in fact, seeks to emulate some of the holiest saints. Her intercession at the childbed of the deranged woman casts her in the light of none other than St Margaret herself. Her language during these moments is articulate and elevated, but not showy; she is aware that she is already being seen at an advantage during these episodes, and her language suits her purpose. Indeed, the interruption of the scribe provides the reader with secondary confirmation that a miracle took place. Nor does Margery eclipse Julian of Norwich, linguistically, but neither does she lurk in the shadows; they are equals, and perhaps intended to be read as such. She borrows from the lives of the religious women in whose footsteps she walks, but she also jostles for superiority; her presentation of Mary is a paradox of simultaneous

reverence and self-importance, possibly inspired by her burdensome lack of virginity. It is this subject that we turn in the following chapter, providing a more thorough examination of Margery's relationship with virginity, the virgin saints, and Christ's position on the matter.

## Chapter Five

### *'3et dowtyr I lofe þe as wel as any mayden in þe world': Margery Kempe's Virginity*

#### I: Introduction

Having discussed some general elements of hagiographical convention in the previous chapters, the argument will now focus on the Book's language about virginity. In this way, we are still tackling the issues surrounding Margery's autohagiography, but we are narrowing the scope to a particular question that causes Margery substantial disquiet. Virginity was not a prerequisite for sainthood, and we have already discussed the increasing number of lay saints as the medieval period wore on,<sup>446</sup> but it certainly did no harm to be a virgin; and the established mode was that virginity was the most desirable status for a woman. Because of this, it is perhaps not surprising that Margery aspired to the status of a virgin, despite her husband and fourteen births. Her apparent imitation of St Margaret, discussed in the previous chapter, interceding with the disturbed woman in Lynn, is one such example of the methods by which Margery attempts to reconstruct her identity as that of virgin, and, arguably, present herself as such to the world through her vita.

It must be acknowledged here that there are many different types of saints' life, and that there are a variety of different narrative patterns and generic conventions depending on the type of saint concerned. I will be discussing one of the sub-categories: that of the virgin martyr. The canonical saints (as distinct from lay pious women who became saints rather later) that may offer a possible model for Margery, and who will be discussed below include St Agatha, St

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<sup>446</sup> See chapter two.

Margaret, St Cecilia and, to a lesser extent, St Katherine of Alexandria.<sup>447</sup> Other saints that may offer inspiration for Margery belong to a group of reformed sinners, and include Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt and St Paul.

In Sarah Salih's *Versions of Virginit*y,<sup>448</sup> she examines the idea that Margery can reclaim her virginity, because virginity is, rather than being a 'natural quality of the person',<sup>449</sup> a social construct. Margery's contentious wearing of white clothes, her espousal to Christ, and her attempt to emulate the virgin martyrs all bespeak Margery's reconstructed virginity. Salih argues that 'physical loss of virginity is not insuperable, that individual efforts can remake the body.'<sup>450</sup> She suggests that virginity is an 'optional identity', due to the 'non-absolute nature' of the categories that existed for women.<sup>451</sup> The basis for this, Salih argues, exists in the 'Augustinian understanding of virginity, that it is not affected when the will does not consent to sex, and therefore that wives who would prefer continence can be counted as actually practising continence.'<sup>452</sup> In the same way, a raped virgin remains a virgin. Margery applies this understanding, that it is a matter of will and consent, to her own situation and, as Salih comments, Margery and Christ (who forgives Margery her past sexual pleasure) both fly in the face of Aquinas, who wrote: 'Non enim Deus potest facere u tea quae facta sunt non sint facta.'<sup>453</sup> Margery's Christ demurs on this point.

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<sup>447</sup> St Katherine of Alexandria will be considered in greater depth in the following chapter, analysing Margery's emulation of this saint during her episodes of persecution.

<sup>448</sup> Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginit*y (Cambridge, 2001). A wwhole chapter is dedicated to Margery's reclamation of virginity, pp. 166-241. This work offers an excellent overview of the theology of virginity. Susan Dickman states that 'Some modern readers find that Margery's concern for her lost virginity and her desire to dress in the white clothes of a virgin dedicated to God once she and John made a sacramental vow of chastity morbid and neurotic,' 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of Pious Women', *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Woodbridge, 1984), p. 159.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid, p. 241.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid, p. 181-2.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, p. 182.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid, pp. 182-3. [For not even God can make the past not to have been], quoted by Salih.

In chapter twenty-one, Christ addresses the vexed topic of virginity. Margery's loss of virginity is a constant source of anxiety to her, as she considers herself to be less worthy of divine attention or the level of salvation that is afforded to maidens, who dance merrily in heaven.<sup>454</sup> However, as Salih argues, Margery is, in some part, able to take control of the situation, and through the *Book* she sets about 'reclaiming' her virginity.<sup>455</sup> For this concept to be credible, one has to agree with Salih's point of view that 'virginity is always cited in the soul', yet Margery's 'willed virginity is too radical an idea for some of Margery's opponents in the *Book*, and for some of her critics since.'<sup>456</sup> Credible or not, it is clear that Margery attempts to reconstruct her status as virgin, partly for public benefit, partly for her private benefit, and partly to establish a connection with the virgin martyrs and their hagiography; by doing so, she constructs a narrative of her life that adheres to the pattern established by those who wrote the sacred biographies of the virgin saints. For Margery's attempt at a self-authored *vita* to be credible, the concept of virginity (reclaimed, in this case) constitutes a helpful addition to her endeavour. As we have seen, it was not necessary to be a virgin in the later middle ages to achieve sainthood; however, Margery keenly feels its loss, and clearly expresses her anxieties surrounding it. If she is able to mount a convincing argument to have reinstated virginity in her soul, then it will be a highly beneficial addition to her *vita*; not only will she emulate women such as Bridget of Sweden, but she will also imitate the virgin martyrs themselves. In seeking sainthood, Margery is leaving no avenue unexplored.

This chapter will examine how medieval society viewed the rather shifting concept of virginity and the reasons why Margery may have wished to reconnect herself with the identity of

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<sup>454</sup> *BMK*, p. 50.

<sup>455</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity in late Medieval England*, p. 180.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183. An interesting point that Salih raises is that the infamous Nun of Watton, who became pregnant by a lay brother reclaims her virginity because she was in holy orders. Margery, of course, was not; see p. 169.

'virgin'. I will then investigate the association between Margery and the virgin saints, by tracing similarities in their stories, and some differences – notably the inclusion of childhood background that is missing from Margery's *Book* – and judge to what extent the *Book* adheres to or rejects the structure of traditional hagiography. Having contextualised Margery's relationship with virginity, I will go on to analyse the vocabulary surrounding virginity, particularly in chapter twenty-one, and establish whether there are any consistencies of register or use of lexis. The chapter will end with a discussion of the use of the appellation 'damsel' in relation to Margery, and examine whether this rather surprising title for a burgess's wife aids Margery's case for reclaimed virginity.

## II: Reclaiming Virginity

Margery's controversial wearing of white clothes is read by the Archbishop of York as an assertion of virginity and the Mayor of Leicester reads it as a mimicking of St. Katherine.<sup>457</sup> The white clothes perhaps incite the most consternation amongst those whom Margery meets, particularly for the reasons outlined by Timea K. Szell in rather stark prose, describing Margery as:

A self-made and headstrong woman, a somewhat grotesque virgin martyr wearing white on her aging, sexually used body, fostering what today we would call a 'public relations' problem.<sup>458</sup>

On this basis, one can understand why Margery met with rather hostile reactions. A married mother of fourteen is hardly likely to present a convincing virgin; but it is nevertheless virginity

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<sup>457</sup> *BMK*, chapter 48.

<sup>458</sup> Timea K. Szell, 'From Weal to Woe and Weal to Woe: Notes on the Structure of the *Book of Margery Kempe*', Sandra McEntire ed., in *Margery Kempe, a Book of Essays*, pp 73-91, p. 85.

that Margery seeks to reclaim, partly, I would argue, because it may help to fulfil the requirements of sainthood. Szell mentions that Margery adheres to the conventions of a 'virgin martyr',<sup>459</sup> that is, she undergoes trial and suffering (though not death) at the hands of her detractors, having reclaimed her status as virgin via the chastity bargain that she achieves with her husband, her own will, and the proclamation of this through her white clothing (the wearing of which brings further suffering on her part). It is necessary, therefore, to discover why Margery apparently seeks to emulate the virgin martyrs. Before addressing this, however, it is important to gain an understanding of the medieval concept of virginity, and why it is possible for Margery to reclaim something that, to a modern reader at least, may appear to be irrevocably lost.

Salih, Bernau and Evans argue that:

... virginity is one of the great inventions of medieval Christian culture, theorized and practised from early Christianity. Virginity in this discourse is the image and practice of perfection the highest form of life, and imitation of the angels.<sup>460</sup>

Perfection is the salient point here. The virgin body is the standard to which women must aspire if they are to be considered truly flawless and attempt to escape the sin of Eve; one only has to reflect on something as inherently contradictory as the concept of a virgin birth to understand the impossible standards to which women were held. Although the religious culture of the later Middle Ages was becoming increasingly open to married women saints, the virgin martyrs from the age of the early church still remained the most prestigious witnesses of Christ.

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid, p. 83, although the point of Szell's article is to assert that Margery does not quite fulfil the requirements of any of the four types of medieval saint.

<sup>460</sup> *Medieval Virginites*, eds. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih (Cardiff, 2003), p.3.

Although the scope of the present study does not admit a full and thorough examination of the nuanced subject of virginity, it is important to recognise that virginity and chastity have more in common than perhaps one might imagine.<sup>461</sup> Although virginity by definition suggests chastity, chastity does not necessarily suggest virginity: marital fidelity is chaste, but it clearly is not virginal.<sup>462</sup> The medieval definition of virginity, therefore, is built on slightly shifting sands, and, theologically speaking, was more a question of will (as we have seen Salih argue, above) on the part of the person for whom virginity was particularly sacrosanct, than being irretrievably written off after a marriage had been consummated. Salih presents the permutations of virginity thus:

Women's virginity, then, can have both secular and religious referents. It can be conceptualised as a stage in the female life cycle of virgin, wife, widow; it can be a bodily state; it can be a social identity; a religious career; temporary or permanent, and overlaps and misidentifications are possible within this range of meaning.<sup>463</sup>

This is corroborated by Bernau, Evans and Salih, who assert that '[s]ecular virginity is not identical to religious virginity, nor male virginity to female virginity. Virginity as a permanent identity is not the same as virginity as a normally temporary stage in a life-cycle'.<sup>464</sup> That there are different classifications of religious and secular virginity is an intriguing notion, carrying with it the sense that one may be able to regain a type of spiritual virginity if one wishes it; that if one simply identifies as a virgin, then one is.<sup>465</sup> This consequently supports the third element of this range of possibilities: that virginity can be 'temporary or permanent'. It is this concept

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<sup>461</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 16.

<sup>462</sup> The first entry in the *OED* for chastity reads: 'purity from unlawful sexual intercourse; continence', before continuing in the second entry: 'Abstinence from all sexual intercourse'. Compare with St Paul's consideration that chastity in marriage meant sexual abstinence, rather than sexual fidelity. See *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, p. 107 for a more detailed account of the ideal marriage.

<sup>463</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 16.

<sup>464</sup> Salih, Bernau and Evans, *Medieval Virginites*, p. 2.

<sup>465</sup> Salih suggests that recovery of Margery's virginity would have more concrete, however, if she had become an anchoress or nun after her husband's death. See *Versions of Virginity* p. 166; see chapter four of *Versions of Virginity* for Salih's view on recovery of virginity through holy orders.

that perhaps held the most interest for Margery, and she is rather enterprising in the steps she actively takes to rehabilitate her virginity. Temporary in this sense is not the cut-off point between virgin and wife, which is the simple quitting of the former and the assumption of the latter; but the concept that 'virginity is always sited in the soul',<sup>466</sup> a view expounded by St Augustine:

For Augustine, whose formulation became theological orthodoxy, virginity is sited in the will, not the body; hence raped women can still be accounted virgins if their will to remain a virgin is unimpaired. It is thus acknowledged that virginity is constituted in the choices of individuals.<sup>467</sup>

If this is the case, virginity is not barred from wives, and it allows other married women (such as Bridget of Sweden and Marie d'Oignies) to overcome the impediment of their status as wife. Margery is in no position to claim virginity in terms of her body, but significantly, she can claim it for her soul. Add to this her hard-won marital celibacy, and Margery becomes *increasingly* virginal (she was, presumably, always chaste; the temptation she experiences to indulge in marital infidelity ends in humiliation for her).<sup>468</sup> Marie d'Oignies here, again, provides an interesting point of comparison. She too 'persuaded her husband to a vow of chastity relatively soon after their marriage', and 'although the *Life* labels her a 'mayden', it makes no serious attempt to suggest that the marriage was not consummated'.<sup>469</sup> The terms 'mayden' and 'virgyn', argues Salih, are not, therefore, interchangeable, with 'mayden' existing as a separate category for Marie, emphasising her spiritual virginity.

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<sup>466</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 183.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>468</sup> In St Margaret's Church, Margery is approached before evensong by a man known to her and held in some affection by her. He propositions her, and tells her that 'sche kuld not wythstond hym, fo, yf he mygth not haue hys wyl þat tyme, he seyde, he kuld ellys haue it a-noþer tyme, sche kuld not chese.' (*BMK*, p. 14). Having tussled with this major moral quandary, and convinced that God had forsaken her, Margery eventually consents to the adultery. The rebuff is unambiguous: 'And he seyde he ne wold for al þe good in þis world; he had leuar ben hewyn as small as flesch to þe pott.' (*BMK*, p. 15).

<sup>469</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 190.

Perhaps Salih overstates her position here in asserting that ‘the physical loss of virginity is not insuperable, that individual efforts can remake the body’,<sup>470</sup> but we see that Margery’s anxieties and energies are devoted to persuading as many people as possible, including Christ, that her loss of virginity is a major source of torment to her. The torment and repentance, together with her determination to become sexually inactive, is meant to be indicative of the cleanness of her soul. McEntire suggests that ‘spiritual virgin’ would be a justifiable appellation.<sup>471</sup> It would be a stretch to believe that physical virginity can be regained by sheer will alone, but there is credit to the concept that it is possible to reclaim (or even maintain) spiritual virginity. Christ himself, however, is not averse to Margery’s married state, as we have seen. The prevailing attitude that a lack of virginity was an impediment to sainthood was shifting by the fifteenth century, perhaps most obviously in terms of the Continental pious wives, but Margery is concerned enough about her married state to draw attention to it, and to seek reassurance from Christ that she is as valued as unmarried virgins. If Margery were attempting to write her own hagiography, the inclusion of this divine reassurance helps to remove any doubt about her suitability for sainthood which might have prevented a cult springing up after her death.

### III: Why be a Virgin?

Having discussed the various and subtle permutations of the medieval concept of virginity, and accepting the idea that virginity, at the least as a spiritual concept, can be reclaimed, it is now appropriate to turn the discussion towards why Margery might be at such pains to reinstate her virginity. The attraction that Margery feels towards reclaiming her virginity can be explained

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<sup>470</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>471</sup> Sandra J. McEntire, ‘The Journey into Selfhood: Margery Kempe and Feminine spirituality’, *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra McEntire (New York and London, 1992), pp.51-69, p. 61.

in a number of ways. Firstly, in reclaiming her virginity, Margery is re-entering a state that was deemed to be most satisfactory for women by the Church. Quoting *Hali Meidhad*, Anke Bernau explains the points system at work for women and their worth in heaven:

Marriage brings forth her fruit thirtyfold in heaven, widowhood sixtyfold, maidenhood with a hundredfold, outdoes them both.<sup>472</sup>

This simple pyramid structure indicates that there are phases to a woman's life, and although married, she may increase her value if she remains a widow after a husband's death; Salih goes further, suggesting that if Margery, at her husband's demise, 'retired to a nunnery or anchorhold, taken her vows and been veiled, her performance of virginity would have neither problematic nor unusual.'<sup>473</sup> Salih's claim is that virginity becomes a 'performance', an enactment, rather than a biological state of being. It is, nevertheless, the best state for a medieval woman, and Margery takes huge pains and suffers a great deal of public slander for the reassertion of her virgin state. It is not the reassertion that causes the wonder; it is that she is still in the world.

Secondly, there is a real connection between Margery and the virgin martyrs in the manner of their conduct; Margery enlists the example of the virgin saints in order to authorise herself and invest herself with spiritual weight. Like Margery, the virgin martyrs are frequently rather outspoken, subversive (in that they defy parental and societal expectations to marry), and if forced to, they defend their virginity stoutly; they are determined and untroubled when flouting social convention. It is not a surprise that Margery found them inspirational, nor that she might offer her readership parallels between them and herself. This is most frequently seen during

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<sup>472</sup> Anke Bernau, 'Gender and Sexuality' in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 104-21, p. 115-16.

<sup>473</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 185.

their trials, when the saints are tested by male authority figures. St Cecilia boldly replies to Almachius:

‘I am asking about your religion,’ Almachius said. ‘Then you have begun badly,’ Cecilia told him. ‘Your question is ambiguous.’ ‘What prompts you to give such a brazen answer?’ Almachius demanded.<sup>474</sup>

St Agatha is threatened by Quintianus, but her spirits are not dampened:

‘Make your choice. Either sacrifice to my gods or be put to torture’. Agatha replied: ‘May you live like the gods you worship! May your wife be a second Venus, and you another Jupiter!’ At this Quintianus had her struck in the face.<sup>475</sup>

St Margaret is summoned before a prefect:

‘You foolish girl, have pity on your beauty! Worship our gods and you have nothing to fear.’ Margaret replied: ‘I worship him before whom the earth trembles, the sea quakes in fear, and all creatures stand in awe!’ ‘If you do not obey me,’ the prefect told her, ‘I will have your body torn in pieces!’ Margaret said: ‘Christ gave himself up to death for me, so I want nothing more than to die for Christ!’<sup>476</sup>

The verbal boldness of the virgin martyrs is quite observable, therefore, in the face of male authority, and arguably, somewhat at odds with the perfection required to achieve sainthood: they are certainly not obedient. Bernau comments that this ‘topos of outspoken - even rude – speech is a common one in the legends of the female virgin martyrs’,<sup>477</sup> and it is possibly where Margery gained the inspiration and confidence to deal plainly with her own persecutors, as we shall see in the next chapter. The difference, however, is that Margery is not being persecuted by Roman prefects with a different set of religious beliefs from her; she is persecuted by those with the same set of beliefs. The virgin martyrs were considered heretical by the Romans for

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<sup>474</sup> *The Golden Legend*, p. 321.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid*, p. 162.

<sup>477</sup> Bernau, ‘Gender and Sexuality’ in a *Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, p. 117.

not worshipping their ancient gods, but Margery runs the risk of being considered heretical by those who worship the same God. One could argue that the latter could have produced the same result as the former: after all, heretics were put to death in fourteenth-century England – one needs only to remember the fate of William Sawtre. However, under examination, Margery's views are utterly orthodox, and she is never close to the type of gruesome end that is enacted on the martyrs. Indeed, Margery does not appear to desire a glorious death; a notable point of contrast between herself and the virgin martyrs. In the midst of her examination by the Archbishop of York, during which there are cries to put her in prison and to burn her, she asks for clemency and to be freed:

My Lord, I pray 3ow late me haue 3owr lettyr & yowr seyl in-to recorde þat I haue excusyd me a-geyn myn emys & no-tyng is attyd ageyns me, neþyr herowr ne heresy þat may ben preuyd vp-on me.<sup>478</sup>

This is, naturally, Margery's only possible course of action: one can become a saint if one dies upholding Christian beliefs against the beliefs of another religion; but to be put to death because one arouses suspicion and is investigated by those who have the same beliefs, is heresy: heretics do not become saints. This is why there can be no heroic death in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, why, in Salih's words, structurally the *Book* 'just stops': her death by fellow-Christians would have damned her entirely.<sup>479</sup> In this Salih quotes Fredell: 'The basic signifier of martyrdom – death at the hands of tormentors – drives much of Margery's narrative, but remains totally deferred'.<sup>480</sup> Although Salih argues that the lack of martyrdom means that Margery's reclaimed virginity is not confirmed, it does, however, allow Margery to construct a type of *vita* that could

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<sup>478</sup> *BMK*, p. 134.

<sup>479</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 206. The first Lollard to be burnt, William Sawtre, was obviously judged to be a heretic; Thomas More, on the other hand, killed for his refusal to consent to Henry VIII's claim to be the supreme head of the church of England, was canonised by the Catholic church in 1935.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, p.206.

serve to aid sainthood, especially in the religious climate of the fifteenth century that, as we have already seen, no longer required bold deaths from their women in order to qualify for sainthood, nor required them to be virgins.

Nevertheless, Margery cleverly uses the literature of the virgin martyrs to highlight the characteristics that she shares with them: she is outspoken, defiant, and articulate when under trial, facing her persecutors on equal terms. She is not in danger of death, but she does not need to be for her point to be made: the impression is the same. In this case, therefore, this is not so much a reclamation of her own virginity as a demonstration to those who doubt the holiness of her existence by gesturing towards her predecessors. Aspiring to their characteristics (virginity amongst them) helps to establish her credibility when she is alive, but also bolsters her autohagiography after her death.

Thirdly, and perhaps most simply, Margery seeks to reclaim her virginity because it was understood to represent the apotheosis of human holiness:

Virginity is a holy state and way of life, an imitation of Christ and/or the Virgin Mary, the life of the angels lived on earth. It is the new martyrdom, to be rewarded one hundred-fold in heaven, available to men and women alike. Through virginity, the mortal human flesh is transformed in the vessel of the divine.<sup>481</sup>

In these circumstances, if it were possible to reclaim virginity, therefore, via a sustained battle of presentation, one can appreciate the compulsion Margery felt as a demonstration for the purposes of her vita. Although Margery defies hagiographic convention by not desiring a glorious death, she nevertheless lulls her readership into accepting that she is a type of virgin martyr, by enlisting their examples.

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

#### IV: Saints' Lives: Setting the Scene

We have seen that Margery's presence of mind under fire and her responses to her persecutors emulate the style of the virgin martyrs, without having to undergo a brutal death. But Margery also offers us a serious point of divergence from the lives of the virgin saints (and even from the lives of Bridget of Sweden, Christina of Markyate and Marie d'Oignies). Unlike the virgin martyrs, Margery begins her narrative *in medias res*. No mention is made of her peerless and holy childhood; there is absolutely no evidence that Margery was born to become a saint – indeed, as she herself mentions, she was rather proud, vain and something of a social snob. When her *Book* commences, she is already twenty, married, and is about to be delivered of her first child. The narrative conventions of the lives of the virgin martyrs are very different, however. Portents and marvels from their childhoods are invariably narrated, illustrating that they are destined for holiness:

A maiden of extraordinary sanctity and beauty was once born to a noble family in the town of Huntingdon. Her father was called Auti, her mother Beatrix.<sup>482</sup>

So begins *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, maintaining convention by introducing the subject from birth, and immediately demonstrating her divine grace. In this case, a dove settles in the lap of the pregnant Beatrix, and remains with her for a week:

Such a sign was evidently meant to show that the child within her would be filled with that Holy Spirit who appeared above the Lord Jesus in the form of a dove... It showed also that she would be taught by the example and strengthened by the protection of the Blessed Mary, ever virgin, that she would be holy in mind and body, and that by

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<sup>482</sup> *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, trans. C.H Talbot (Oxford, 2008), p.3.

detaching herself from those things which are in the world she would find peace in the contemplation of things above.<sup>483</sup>

Immediately, the reader is apprised of the worthiness of Christina, even *in utero*. Her worthiness is continued when Beatrix gives birth, and the growing child discerns between right and wrong at an early age, mortifies herself when she does something she considers to be a transgression, and begins to have colloquies with Christ.<sup>484</sup>

Furthermore, if one consults *The Golden Legend*, Saint Margaret's hagiography begins:

Margaret was a citizen of Antioch and daughter of Theodosius, patriarch of the pagans. As a child she was entrusted to a nurse, and when she reached the age of reason she was baptized, and so incurred the bitter hatred of her father.<sup>485</sup>

Saint Cecilia's story commences with:

Cecilia, the celebrated virgin, was of noble Roman birth and raised in the faith of Christ from her cradle. Hidden in her heart she always carried the Gospel of Christ; night and day her converse with God and her prayers were unceasing, and her constant plea was that the Lord should preserve her virginity.<sup>486</sup>

Moreover, Saint Agatha is:

...a native of Catania, [who] was a girl of noble birth and exceptional beauty, and from her childhood she had always been devoutly religious.<sup>487</sup>

Indeed, St. Lucy, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Catherine, and even the story of the Eleven Thousand Virgins (though in this case, only Ursula's background is given) all begin with a

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>485</sup> *The Golden Legend*, p.162.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid, p. 317.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

brief explanatory note on family, education or early signs of holiness.<sup>488</sup> There is no prefatory comment on St. Juliana, but the relish with which her story is told and the events contained within it are in themselves somewhat different from the norm.<sup>489</sup> If we are to read the *Book* as a form of vita, then Margery is also unusual in not providing any information concerning her childhood or early inclination towards the spiritual life.

The unconventional nature of the *Book's* structure has been frequently documented,<sup>490</sup> and, when compared with the strictly chronological narratives of saints' lives, it does appear to be, as Salih comments, 'all middle'.<sup>491</sup> However, as the mayor's daughter, brought up in a bustling and prosperous commercial centre, one could argue that there was an expectation for Margery to marry; indeed, it appears that she herself wished to marry; and so there is no dramatic scene of desperation from a forced bride seeking to evade the advances of her husband. The obvious example of a forced marriage and subsequent evasion is the story of Christina of Markyate, who withstood consistent cajolery from a scorned bishop, her parents and her betrothed when she refused matrimony.<sup>492</sup> Margery, however, is a convert of sorts, in that she is turned towards Christ after a period of illness and a period of personal pride, and she was not averse to her marriage. She had, therefore, no desire to resist the wedding and mourn the subsequent loss of her virginity until her revelations brought about the extraordinary shift in her relationship with

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid, p. 22, p. 304, and p. 333 respectively.

<sup>489</sup> Juliana is tortured for refusing to marry a Roman prefect unless he converts, and she is instrumental in defeating a demon in the guise of an angel sent to tempt her. Having extracted the truth from him, she 'then tied his hands behind his back and gave him a sound thrashing with the chain she had round her, until the Devil cried out and pleaded with her: "Mistress, have pity!"' (p.83-4). The comic element to this story certainly renders it somewhat unusual. The demon ends by begging for pity ('Do not mock me anymore, or I shall never have the power to lead anyone astray again! Christians are supposed to be merciful, yet you show me no mercy at all!' p. 84), as Juliana drags him across the market place and flings him into a privy.

<sup>490</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p.206: 'It just stops' is part of Salih's commentary.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid, p. 201. It is also interesting to note that the chaotic structure of the *Book* actually detracts from the typical hagiography: it does not include a saintly death. The obvious pitfall of not having a third party telling your story is perhaps that the most significant aspect of a saint's life is the portrayal of their death – which is, of course, entirely absent from Margery's account.

<sup>492</sup> For the full account of Christina's flight from marriage, see *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, pp. 8-26.

God. Indeed, it is in this way that Szell suggests that Margery not only conforms to the virgin martyr model of saintliness, but also to the reformed prostitute.<sup>493</sup> Salih remarks that:

Chastity, however, is not what she always wanted: there is no suggestion that she had desired chastity from childhood, and clear indication that she had previously enjoyed the 'inordynat lofe & þ egræt delectacyon' of the early years of her married life.<sup>494</sup>

Whilst caring for John in his old age, Margery recalls her previous lust which has become a source of torment to her:

...sche bethowt hir how sche in hur 3ong age had ful many delectably thowtys, fleschly lustys, & inordinate louys to hys persone.<sup>495</sup>

It is, perhaps, somewhat unfair to compare the structure of Margery's *Book* with the tight construction of the lives of the virgin saints, but it is interesting to note that Bridget of Sweden, married with children, whom Margery looks upon as both example and rival, has a prefatory element in her own vita. She is, from the womb, destined for special divine favour and she bears the characteristics that one might associate with the virgin saints: she is a good, obedient child, she has visions of the Virgin Mary and Christ, and (particularly relevant for Margery) she cannot contemplate the passion without tears. The matter of her marriage is quickly explained:

Although she intended most fervently to live all her life as a virgin, yet both by God's providence and the counsel of her father, she was married when she was twelve years old to a noble young knight called Ulf, prince of Nericia—otherwise called Ulf

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<sup>493</sup> Szell argues that Margery belongs to all four of the major categories of medieval sainthood: the chaste married or widowed woman, the virgin martyr, reformed prostitute, and the transvestite. Perhaps typically of Margery, Szell concludes 'the fact that Kempe has some characteristics of all, but ultimately does not fit any, of the above categories points to her attraction to several images of holy womanhood, her wavering sense of self, and, most importantly, her intense aversion to her given social status and culturally constructed identity.' *Margery Kempe: a Book of Essays*, p. 84. For Szell's article, see pp. 73-91.

<sup>494</sup> Sarah Salih, 'Staging Conversion: the Digby Saint Plays and the *Book of Margery Kempe*' in *Gender and Holiness*, pp. 121-34.

<sup>495</sup> *BMK*, p. 181.

Gudmarson—who was eighteen years old and also a virgin. For two years after their marriage they lived together virginally, but afterwards they made devout prayers to almighty God that he would keep them without sin in the act of matrimony and that it would please him to send them issue.<sup>496</sup>

Despite wishing to remain a virgin, Bridget displays obedience in marrying as it complies with the wishes of both her father and God; she could hardly do otherwise. Further safeguards as to Bridget's virtue are put in place, however, for the benefit of an audience who are accustomed to the virgin saints: they do not consummate the marriage for two years, and when they do, they pray for a doubly propitious outcome that God will not only exempt them from sin but also that their sexual congress will be blessed with issue, mitigating the act.

Similarly, Marie d'Oignies was married and lay, but her marriage was chaste and she and her husband spent their lives as ascetics, ministering to the needs of the sick, undertaking strenuous manual labour, and contemplating God, rather than pursuing active, secular lives.<sup>497</sup> Her biographer, Jacques de Vitry, therefore, is able to avoid the inherent tension of sainthood and a loss of virginity, because, despite marriage, her purity is never in question. He is, however, forced to acknowledge that a normal married relationship ensued before a complete cessation in sexual relations, remarking that John 'previously had had Marie as a wife',<sup>498</sup> but that he was:

...visited by the Lord and he not only promised to live a celibate and truly angelic life in continence, but also promised to imitate his companion in her holy plan and her holy ascetic life by giving up everything to the poor for Christ.<sup>499</sup>

To drive the message home, de Vitry concludes that:

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<sup>496</sup> *The Life of St Birgitta*, accessed online: <http://www.umilta.net/thgascbirgitta.html>. Date accessed: 05/08/16.

<sup>497</sup> See de Vitry's *The Life of Marie d'Oignies*.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

They extinguished fire with fire and deserved triumphal crowns. The Lord gave them a place in his house, within his walls and a name better than sons and daughters while, like the blessed martyrs they pierced their flesh with the nails of the fear of the Lord. They did not burn in the fire, but immolated their self-will while near an abundance of sexual delights.<sup>500</sup>

The emphatic, almost hyperbolic quality of this passage is rather striking: the self-denial of Marie and John is presented as a victory for iron self-discipline over loose morality, and the reader is left in no doubt as to the spiritual purity of the pair. On this basis, it would be difficult to naysay the work of de Vitry, who is clearly devoted to Marie's cause.

In these examples, therefore, the tropes of the *vitae* of virgin saints are used to give the audience cues, relating the structure and content of almost proverbial hagiographical stories to these married women, and accepting them as saintly themselves. Margery, however, presents a problem, as she is manifestly not a virgin in any biological sense, she does not provide any background material that gestures towards her future as a holy woman (indeed, she has a road to Damascus moment, rather than a more typical consistency of faith from infancy), and she does not appear to be hesitant sexually when she is first married. So, whilst Margery offers us some parallels between herself and the virgin martyrs (who in turn, also seem to be emulated by Bridget and Marie), in important ways she does not adhere to the tight structure that an audience may have expected from a traditional virgin martyr hagiography. This, however, is not insuperable. Although the pattern of Margery's life does not unfold in accordance with the narrative conventions of the lives of the virgin martyrs, her holiness is nevertheless confirmed by no less an authority than Christ himself.

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

## V: Virginitie and Vocabulary

Having examined not only the medieval definitions of virginitie, but also why Margery works hard to restate this virginitie, we now turn our attention to the language that is used by Margery and Christ in discussing this concept. In doing so, we will be able to discern whether there is any particular register or lexis used, and if so, what conclusions may be drawn. In chapter twenty-one, Margery is offered some frank assurance from Christ that he has no objection to her having another child; indeed, he announces it himself:

In þe tyme þat þis creatur had reuelacyons, owyr Lord seyde to hir, ‘Dowtyr, þow art wyth childe.’<sup>501</sup>

There is the obvious parallel of having a divine presence herald the onset of a pregnancy,<sup>502</sup> but this can be seen as a type of variation on the theme of the Annunciation. Although Margery is keen to indicate that she is unworthy because of her sexually active state – Mary’s perpetual virginitie is, after all, a central tenet of Christian doctrine – nevertheless, her unborn child is announced by Christ. This not only mitigates the sin of her sexual congress, but also provides the kind of endorsement that other medieval wives could only dream of, whilst Margery herself maintains a position of absolute humility. Reading between the lines, however, Margery is not a virgin, her child is not divinely conceived, and she is concerned about her relationship with Christ as a result. She feels a deep sense of shame concerning her present state:

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<sup>501</sup> *BMK*, p. 48.

<sup>502</sup> Although one could argue that this is another example of the rivalry between Margery and the Virgin Mary, who achieves that most unattainable and unrealistic of female statuses, virgin and mother. Here, Margery reinforces her preeminence in the eyes of Christ by including the story of his heralding the news of her pregnancy. This immediately limits the potentially damaging implications; that is, she is sexually active.

Lord, I am not worthy to heryn þe spoken & þus to comown wyth myn husband. Ner-þe-lesse it is to me gret peyn & gret dysese.<sup>503</sup>

Christ assuages her:

þer-for it is no synne to þe, dowtyr, for it is to þe raþar mede & meryte, & xalt haue neuyr þe less grace, for I wyl þat þow bring me forth mor frwte.<sup>504</sup>

Christ could not support her further, as he offers her a triple assurance: he announces the news himself, he endorses her pregnancy by explicitly stating that it will be both credit and reward to her, and finally, it is his 'wyl'. Like Bridget of Sweden, whose marriage is willed by God, Margery can hardly question Christ's plan for her.

Christ has two lengthy speeches during the course of this chapter. The first continues to offer reassurance:

3a, dowtyr, trow þow rygth wel þat I lofe wyfes also, and a special þo wyfys which woldyn levyn chast, 3yf þei mygtyn haue her wyl, & don her besynes to plesyn me as þow dost, for, þow þe state of maydenhode be mor parfyte mor holy þan þe state of wedewhode þe state of wedewhode mor parfyte þan þe state of wedlake, zet dowtyr I lofe þe as wel as any mayden in þe world.<sup>505</sup>

Christ deconstructs the basic hierarchy of medieval female status by using unadorned language. With the exceptions of 'specyal', 'plesyn', 'state' and 'parfyte', his language is Old English in derivation. Moreover, the four examples of words that do not originate from Old English are once again old enough to be considered naturalised (c?1225, c1350, c?1225 and c1300 respectively). One might venture to suggest that the relative newness of 'please' affords it

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<sup>503</sup> *BMK*, p. 48.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.

greater superiority, but the general tenor of the passage is one of simplicity and clarity. This allows Margery's readership, whatever the level of their education, to comprehend the important three statuses of women, as well as deliver a clear message as to Margery's own significance to him. This speech concludes with a statement that love conquers all sin, and 'þerfor, dowtyr, þow mayst no bettyr plesyn God þan contynuly to thinkyn on hys lofe.'<sup>506</sup> The vocabulary once more provides four examples of words that are not Old English in origin: 'desyred/desyren' (c.1230), 'purchasyn' (pre-1300), and 'contynuly' (c.1303): one would, however, consider these to be normalised at the time of composition. Christ's weighty message concerning the redemptive power of love, therefore, continues to be communicated plainly. Margery's undoubted devotion to Christ, seen against the backdrop of these words, allows the reader to fully appreciate the favour that she receives: there is no doubt that Margery 'contynuly' contemplates the nature of divine love; the inclusion of such a word suggests a level of commitment required beyond that of the everyday worshipper, a commitment that Margery clearly possesses.

His second lengthy speech of the chapter follows Margery's concerns that she is 'þe most vnworþi creatur þat euyr þow schewedyst grace vn-to in erth'.<sup>507</sup>

A, dowtyr... fere þe nowt, I take non hede what a man hath ben, but I take hede what he wyl ben. Dowtyr, þow hast despysed þi-self, þerfor þow xalt neuyr be despysed of God. Haue mend, dowtyr, what Mary Mawdelyn was, Mary Eypcyan, Seynt Powyl, & many oþer seyntys þat arn now in Hevyn, for of vnworthy I make worthy to me, & of sinful I make ryful. & so haue I mad þe woþy to me, onys louyd & euyrmor loydyd wyth me.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

With the exception of ‘despyed’ (1297) and ‘seynt’ (c.1175) (‘unworthy’ is a.1240, but ‘worth’ is an Old English word; the prefix arrived some time later), there are no words in this section of the speech that owe their derivation to importations. Christ’s language, therefore, continues to reassure in familiar and easily comprehensible vocabulary. Margery’s own humility (‘þe most vnworþi creatur’) is consistent with the meekness required of a saint, and yet, arguably, she elevates her status amongst other wretched creatures by proclaiming herself to be the *most* unworthy. If she is the most unworthy, then, logically, she is also the most deserving of Christ’s attention (if one ignores the fact that there is a sort of self-aggrandizement even in proclaiming her extreme worthlessness). Christ does much to confirm her special status, by suggesting that self-loathing is, indeed, the way to Heaven. Margery’s previous vanities and her loss of virginity are the cause of her self-reproach, which is cemented by Christ’s allusions to Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt and Saint Paul. These three are reformed characters in some manner, and achieve sainthood after their conversions. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt were prostitutes,<sup>508</sup> and Paul’s conversion to Christ on the road to Damascus is paradigmatic:

þer is no seynt in Heuyn þat þow wylt speke wyth but he xal com to þe. Whom þat god louyth þei louyn. Whan þu plesyst God, þow plesyst hys Modyr & al þe seyhtys in Heuyn. Dowtyr, I take wytnesse of my Modyr, of alle þe awngelys in Heuyn, & of alle þe seyntys in Heuyn þat I loue þe wyth all myn hert & I may not forberyn þi lofe.<sup>509</sup>

The simplicity of Christ’s language continues: ‘plesyst’ is the sole example of an importation in this speech, maintaining the unadorned tone and emphasising the unambiguous message of

<sup>508</sup> ‘I was born in Egypt, and at the age of twelve I went to Alexandria. There, for seventeen years, I lived as a public prostitute, and never refused anyone who wanted me.’ Making her way on a ship to Jerusalem using her ‘body as payment’, Mary goes to worship at the church of the Holy Cross. ‘I got as far as the doors when suddenly, as if by an invisible force, I felt myself pushed back and was prevented from going inside.’ Realising that this is punishment for her previous sins, and bitterly repenting of them, Mary has a vision of the Virgin, and Mary is permitted to pass into the church. She crossed into the Jordanian desert, where she remained a hermit for forty-seven years. See: *The Golden Legend*, p. 113-15.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

his words. Particularly striking is the phrase: 'but he xal come to þe.' Margery's status within heaven is such that the saints will gather around her to engage in conversation, rather than Margery pursuing them, highlighting the level of divine approval that she enjoys. Once more, she is distanced from the potential difficulties of appearing boastful, as she is simply relaying the verbatim revelations of Christ.

It is also interesting to note that Margery has begun to receive her revelations by the time this child is conceived (and presumably a good many others, as her conversion process begins after the birth of the first), and it could be construed that whilst she is being obedient to the conjugal wishes of her husband, she seeks to reconstruct her virginity in her soul. If successful (and one supposes that success in this case must be left to the judgement of the reader), then Margery does achieve the unachievable: a type of virgin birth. Her status, therefore, is arguably almost equal to that of Mary, mother of Christ. This is a rather arresting notion, and is not only borne out by her reclaimed virginity and hence, 'virgin' births, but also by the heralding of the child by the annunciation by Christ, who wills it. The slight anachronism here, that it is *Christ* doing the announcing, does little to dispel the image. Indeed, just as Mary was favoured, Christ shows Margery exceptional favour here.

## **VI: What's in a name?**

Having examined the unadorned, simple language used by Christ to discuss Margery's virginity, and also to consider the notion that Margery could be presenting her readership with her, as it were, virgin births, I would now like to consider the appellation of 'damsel', which is frequently assigned to Margery. In the second section of this chapter, it was mentioned that in the vita of Marie d'Oignies she is referred to as 'mayden'. Salih considered that this was distinct

from the term 'virgin', affording Marie, as a wife, the status of *spiritual* virgin. There is a link between Marie and Margery in this point, as Salih notes that Margery is referred to a 'damsel.'<sup>510</sup> This, I feel, is particularly important when considering the vocabulary surrounding Margery and virginity. Damsel, as Salih writes, 'does mean virgin, but its use is limited to secular virgins.'<sup>511</sup> Margery is not a nun, but nor is she quite secular, so in this respect it is a rather clever choice: she has not taken holy orders, she cannot claim to use the term 'virgin' itself, yet practises active devotion in the world. 'Damsel', therefore, represents a good compromise between secular rationality and spiritual virginity. Salih goes on to state that:

...by adopting the term to refer to herself, [she] identifies with a state between fully formed sexual identities, a state which is open to modification and development.<sup>512</sup>

I would argue, however, that the inclusion of the word 'damsel' not only offers Margery the space for equivocation in labelling herself in the light of her reclaimed virginity, but it also provides much-needed public recognition of that state.

The word 'damsel' appears on fifteen occasions in the *Book*, and in every occurrence, it refers directly to Margery, in direct speech.<sup>513</sup> It is always employed by people other than herself: she never describes herself in such terms, and neither, interestingly, does Christ. Of the fifteen instances that it is used, eleven are resoundingly positive in context, two are neutral and two could be considered negative. We shall first concentrate on some of the positive examples.

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<sup>510</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 185.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit. The *OED* defines damsel as 'A young unmarried lady; originally one of noble or gentle birth, but gradually extended as a respectful appellation to those of lower rank', <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47100?redirectedFrom=damsel#eid>, accessed 11/08/15. Salih does not note, however, that a minor definition of 'nun' lingers in the *MED*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mcc/mcc-idx?size=First+100&type=orths&q1=damsel&rgxp=constrained>, accessed 11/08/15.

<sup>512</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 185.

<sup>513</sup> The fifteen occurrences are: p. 26, p. 29, p. 64, p. 76, p. 77, p. 104, p. 107, p. 111, p. 118, p. 120, p. 121, p. 123, p. 129, p. 130, p. 148.

Margery is approached as an oracle figure in chapter twelve by a monk wishing to find out about his soul: ‘Damsel, I her seyn God spekyth on-to þe’.<sup>514</sup> Although his prognosis is not good unless he ‘don aftyr þi [Margery’s] counsel’, it certainly sets up Margery in the light of an intercessor, a position generally reserved for the saints, and the appellation of ‘damsel’ helps to imprint the idea that she is virginal. Likewise, in chapter fifty-three, she is asked to be an intercessor by the Duke of Beverley’s man: ‘Damsel, yf euyr þu be seynt in Heuyn, prey for me.’<sup>515</sup> Although he is slightly equivocal, the message is nevertheless quite suggestive. She is, moreover rescued at various points in the *Book*. She is discovered by two ‘fayr men’<sup>516</sup> in chapter thirteen after she has been accused of being a Lollard and threatened with burning (the assembled crowd has a ‘cartful of thornys’ on standby)<sup>517</sup> in which their gentle ‘damsel’ helps to recall the legends of the virgin martyrs who suffered hideous persecution, as well as subtly reasserting her reclaimed virginity. This idea is repeated in the moments of abandonment that she endures during her sojourn to the Holy Land, rescued as she is by William Weaver and Richard the humpback, both of whom address her in this manner.<sup>518</sup> The ‘worshepful man’ in Norwich who buys Margery’s white clothes could hardly do anything else other than endorse her restated virginity.<sup>519</sup> Her greatest triumph, however, comes in chapter fifty-one, when a man previously hostile towards her is won round:

‘Damsel, I prey þe be not displesyd wyth me, thow I sat wyth þe doctowr a-geyns þe; he cryed so up-on me þat I durst non oþerwise don’. And sche seyde, ‘Ser, I am not displesyd wyth 3ow þerfor.’ Than seyde he, ‘I pray 3ow þan preyth for me.’ ‘Sir,’ sche seyde, ‘I wil al reddy.’<sup>520</sup>

<sup>514</sup> *BMK*, p. 26.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid*, p.130.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29. Despite her protestations of virginity, Margery generally appreciates a handsome face.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid*, p.28.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 64, 76-7. Her rescue by Richard is foretold by an anchorite.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123.

This episode brings to mind the virgin martyr legends in which the saints manage to convert formerly unsympathetic people to Christianity.<sup>521</sup> Margery cannot convert a priest, but she has managed to persuade him of her holiness, and by calling her 'damsel' he both affirms her status as virgin and recalls the example of the saints, and affirms her potential for sainthood by requesting intercession.

Damsel is, therefore, an interesting choice of appellation for Margery. Together with its connotations of virginal maidens, it immediately also has aristocratic overtones, and even the association of conventional romance literature; it sounds courtly and perhaps old-fashioned, even in Margery's day, and particularly in her social milieu of trade and commerce and financial transaction. It stretches credulity to believe that the high status 'damsel' would have been the typical form of address for a burgher's wife, and so its use is perhaps most indicative of people not quite knowing where to place her, yet choosing a word that is drawn from the register of the social elite. Margery was neither aristocratic nor a virgin, and yet 'damsel' both acknowledges her unconventional and arguably elevated status in society (it admits that she is not the norm, at the very least), and also that she identifies as a virgin. It is a highly positive endorsement of her from her supporters.

The negative instances (in which she is told to 'spynne and card' like women should do, and to stop crying over the death of Christ because he 'is ded long sithyn')<sup>522</sup> also help to build a picture of Margery as virginal. Despite the admonishment in the words, they are prefaced by the rather courtly title in which not only is respect conveyed, but also an implicit connotation

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<sup>521</sup> For example, St Cecilia converts her husband-to be, Valerian, and Katherine of Alexandria converts at least two hundred guards. See *The Golden Legend*, pp. 318 and 336.

<sup>522</sup> *BMK*, pp. 129 and 148.

of virginity. The most remarkable aspect of the use of 'damsel' to describe Margery is that people call her this in full knowledge of her married state: indeed, in chapter fifty-one, she is called 'damsel' twice, despite having been questioned about the 'lettyr of recorde' that her husband should have written by way of permission for his wife's appearances without him.<sup>523</sup> Meech's glossary to the *Book* dryly observes: 'damsel: a form of address to a burgess's wife probably unparalleled in printed ME. literature.'<sup>524</sup> Few burgess's wives, however, were Margery Kempe. More interesting still, if we look at the number of instances that Margery is referred to explicitly as 'wife', we can note only sixteen occasions; a mere one more than damsel.<sup>525</sup> Of these sixteen entries, seven are references by Christ to Margery as wife, four are by her husband John, three are by herself, and two are by others.<sup>526</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising that Christ refers to Margery in this manner, given the brautmystik tradition (see chapter three of this thesis) and the fact she undergoes a mystical marriage to the godhead; however, it is interesting to note when and how Margery refers to herself as wife. In chapter forty-seven, the Steward of Leicester acts in a sexually aggressive manner towards Margery:

Than þe Stywarde toke hir be þe hand & led hir in-to hys chawmbur & spak many fowyl rebawdy wordys vn-to hir, purposing & desyryng, as it semyd hir, to oppressyn hir & for-lyn hir.<sup>527</sup>

<sup>523</sup> *BMK*, p. 122.

<sup>524</sup> *BMK*, p. 393.

<sup>525</sup> The explicit references to Margery as wife occur three times in chapter 11; twice in chapter 14; once in chapter 16; once in chapters 35, 36, 47, 52, 54 and 63; and twice in chapters 76 and 86.

<sup>526</sup> As a matter of interest, the other words by which Margery is identified include the most prevalent, 'creatur', Margery's name for herself, numbering 444 occurrences; dowytyr, generally how Christ identifies her, numbering 303 occurrences; 'woman', to which she is referred directly thirty-six times (mostly pejoratively: 'I leue þer was neuyr woman in Ingland so ferd wyth-þal as sche is & hath ben', *BMK* p. 134.); 'dame' once; 'maytres' three times, in the strict context of being in charge of her maid, and the startling 'wolf' in chapter fifty, where it is used when a priest takes issue with the 'coler of þe gowne' (p. 120); it is essentially a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' jibe.

<sup>527</sup> *BMK*, p. 113.

She cannot plead her virginity as she is not in holy orders, so she pleads her chastity: 'sparyth me, for I am a mannys wife.'<sup>528</sup> Equally, in chapter fifty-four, she is concerned that she will be 'putte a-mongs men' when she is remanded by the archbishop. She once more says that she is a 'mannys wyfe'.<sup>529</sup> The irony is that Margery is having to admit to being a wife in order to save her chastity. The episodes themselves recall the virgin martyrs who were threatened with sexual violence.<sup>530</sup> Bernau comments that 'the retaliation of the rebuffed suitors is explicitly sexual: saints are either placed in brothels, or locked in rooms with brutal men whose mission it is to rape them (they never succeed).'<sup>531</sup> By playing on this trope, and fearing for her chastity, Margery is presenting herself as a shared part of that literary culture. Margery, too, is never sexually assaulted, as '[t]he raped virgin is a paradox, an oxymoron that would cause the whole system of stable, fixed signs to collapse'.<sup>532</sup> The language that personally identifies Margery, both damsel and wife, therefore substantially aids her attempts to reclaim her virginity. In particular, the striking manner in which people address her as 'damsel' suggests some uncertainty on their part about where to place Margery socially and theologically, but nevertheless concretely labels her as a secular virgin. This perhaps, is the most satisfying way in which to identify her.

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<sup>528</sup> *BMK*, p. 113.

<sup>529</sup> *BMK*, p. 132-3.

<sup>530</sup> For example, the enclosing of St Agatha in a brothel before the brutal removal of her breasts; St Katherine of Alexandria declares that her spouse is Christ when threatened with a forced marriage; St Cecilia fends off her husband's sexual advances by mentioning that an angel is watching; St Agnes is attempted to be dragged naked through the streets to a brothel. See *The Golden Legend*, p. 333, p. 317 and p. 55 respectively for the stories of these saints.

<sup>531</sup> Bernau, *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, p. 117.

<sup>532</sup> Kathleen Coyne Kelly, cited in Bernau, *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, p.118.

## VII: Conclusion

For Margery to reclaim her virginity, as well as convince a readership or public after her death that she is a worthy subject for sainthood, she will have to proclaim it publicly: 'essential to Margery's project, however, is the enactment of recovered virginity in the world'.<sup>533</sup> She dresses in white clothes,<sup>534</sup> she barter for physical chastity to complement the inner chastity that she cultivates, roundly refuses to be silenced when placed under pressure, and, most importantly, dictates her memoir, the language of which suggests her virginal identity. Margery has had enough of an education in hagiography to realise that a written account of her activities is a component part of sainthood, and what is more, she explicitly borrows from the legends of the virgin martyrs to aid in the structure and impression of her work. Unusually, however, this task is not left in the capable hands of her confessor after her death, but instead she sets about producing a *vita* during her life. It is also worth mentioning, however, that she does not fully adhere to the conventional narrative form of virgin martyr hagiography, in that she offers no contextualising information about her early life – a fact that is almost never missing from the 'canonical' saints, and which is also present in her rivals' *vitae*: Bridget of Sweden and Marie d'Oignies. However, one could argue that this unconventionality is a minor detail when compared to her greatest departure from the model of the virgin martyrs: the fact of martyrdom itself. This, however, could be argued to have been superseded by the endorsement that she receives of her status from Christ himself.

The language that Margery employs in these sections, moreover, recommends her status as virgin. The use of the word 'damsel' is particularly interesting, appearing only one time fewer

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<sup>533</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 178.

<sup>534</sup> An act which proves to be rather inflammatory, as the subtle distinction between physical and spiritual virginity does not seem to be appreciated by the members of the clergy who bring her to book on the matter.

in the text than the description of 'wife', suggesting that the people whom Margery meets require an appellation that acknowledges both her virginity (and thus her holiness), and also her married state; 'damsel' is an attempt to do this. Moreover, the words of Christ are rendered in their characteristically straightforward manner: there are few examples of very late importations into the language when Christ talks of Margery's virginity, or lack of it, conveying the message that she is just as valuable in an accessible and robust manner.

Her *Book* is as public a proclamation of her reconstructed virginity as it is possible to be, as 'virginity is a condition that requires a continuous enactment of characteristics which can then be said to manifest that person's virginal status.'<sup>535</sup> In highlighting this element, she is able to present the best argument for sainthood: firstly, Christ does not object to her child-bearing (associating her with St Bridget); indeed, he announces it to her himself, and secondly, she is a virgin in her soul (comparing her with the virgin saints). Margery, therefore, is attempting the impossible by being both virgin and mother, circumventing the rigid social structures of medieval England, and also, in fact, directly emulating the Virgin Mary.

In circumventing the rigid social structures of England, however, Margery provoked somewhat hostile reactions, and it is to her persecution by detractors that we now turn.

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<sup>535</sup> Bernau, *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, p. 118.

## Chapter Six

### *Bren þe fals heretic: the Persecution of Margery Kempe.*

#### I: Introduction

It is impossible to read the *Book of Margery Kempe* without gaining a vivid impression of Margery herself: her personality permeates every chapter, and her adventures indicate that she was, to put it mildly, a somewhat divisive figure. She made it her business to advise the clergy about matters of personal morality, her precious gift of tears caused her to howl during sermons (sometimes to the annoyance of the priest), and she refused to stay put in Lynn and lead the quiet life of a wife and mother. Her behaviour, although apparently divinely inspired, is met with hostility in many cases: as I have discussed before, the paradox of Margery's vocal proclamation of her humility perhaps naturally causes a degree of friction to arise; her travelling companions dislike the manner in which she comports herself, seemingly ruining the conviviality of a pilgrimage with admonitions and too much talk of God; she is vocal, unusual, and posed something of a threat to conventional authority by belonging to no definable category of religious person. As a result, she often received attention from the authorities and was required to undergo examinations as to the orthodoxy of her religious views.

In the previous chapter we saw that Margery arguably modelled herself on and identified with the virgin martyr saints, with the aim, perhaps, of asking her readership to consider her within this group. Her reclaimed virginal soul, the struggle for chastity within her marriage, her wearing of white clothes and her preoccupation with sexual attack all appear to assert the virginity of her soul, bringing with it social and even heavenly elevation. However, the widespread persecution that she suffers stems, in part, from this overt assertion of chastity, as

well as her vocal chastisement of the clergy and others that sometimes borders on preaching. It is also worth mentioning at this point, that the persecution that Margery suffers ranges in seriousness, from the innocuous to the genuinely threatening; mild embarrassment to accusations of heresy and aggressive interrogation. Margery consistently casts this diverse set of incidents in the mode of a persecuted saint tormented by the persecuting sinner

In this chapter I shall firstly examine why it might be that Margery excites such a level of hostility, together with a brief investigation into the context of heresy and Lollardy in fourteenth-century England which may help to explain the responses that she receives. I shall then analyse the language of the episodes of persecution, starting with those enacted by her fellow travellers when on pilgrimage, casting her companions in the light of oppressors. Margery, however, appears to be saintly, as she receives her gift of tears in chapter twenty-eight. I shall then analyse the persecution that Margery faces from the clergy, and their use of register, particularly in chapters thirteen (where she is accused of being a Lollard) and sixteen (where she upbraids a priest for swearing oaths, which swiftly escalates to a threat of burning). Finally, I will examine the more aggressive interrogations that Margery encounters, focusing on the lexis and vocabulary of her persecutors relative to her own, but also offering extensive commentary on the analogues that Margery appears to be drawing between herself, and St. Katherine of Alexandria. Although touched on briefly in the preceding chapter, I have delayed discussion of this saint until now, as Margery's imitation of her fits more neatly into a thorough examination of her persecution. For this, I will be drawing on the ideas proposed by Katherine Lewis;<sup>536</sup> that Margery, like St Katherine, faces up rather brilliantly to brutal cross-examination by her enemies, with particular emphasis on her intellectual abilities. Indeed, the trials provide

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<sup>536</sup> Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England*, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000).

a very exciting opportunity to investigate the language and register used by Margery when she faces opposition, and to discover how she uses language to allow her to appear at an advantage; perhaps even to appear like a medieval St Katherine. Moreover, both women are accused of attempting to lead wives from their husbands, and both receive help from other women during their incarcerations. It is for these reasons that Margery's parallels to St. Katherine, focusing on their maltreatment, deserve a more comprehensive analysis than the other virgin martyrs. Firstly, however, it will be necessary to provide a brief context of the religious mood of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in order to understand why Margery was treated with such suspicion.

## II: Lollards and Heretics

The Lollards, a movement that wished to reform various elements of what they considered to be corruption within the established church, had become a presence in England during the fourteenth century. They looked towards Scripture to provide guidance as to their religious ideas, and inspired by John Wycliffe's English translation of the New Testament, they built a movement which placed the Bible, rather than the institutional church, at the centre of religious teaching and observance.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> For an overview of Lollardy, Wyclif and what constituted acceptable spirituality in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, see: Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation, Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), Maurice Keen, *England in the Later Middle Ages, Second Edition* (London and New York, 2003), chapter 10; Fiona Somerset, Jill C. Havens and Derrick G. Pitard, *Lollards and Their Influence in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2003), Shannon McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities 1420-1530* (Philadelphia, 1995), Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London, 1984), Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World* (London, 2002) chapter 6, Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca, 1985) chapter 4, Margaret Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Late Medieval England*, (Norwich, 1995), chapter 9, John H. Arnold, 'Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent' in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.75-93.

In this subtly altering religious climate, John Wycliffe came to prominence as a figure within the Lollard cause. An Oxford don by profession, he questioned priestly powers to absolve, to impose penances and to excommunicate, and he did not believe that a human agent was required to intervene between man and God; God alone decided the manner in which souls were directed. He was condemned in 1380 by a committee appointed by the Chancellor. Wycliffe refused to retract his beliefs and withdrew to his rectory in Lutterworth, where he resided until his death in 1384.<sup>538</sup> He continued to write 'a stream of angry works'<sup>539</sup> during this period of his life, and maintained his position on the Bible alone providing sufficient moral guidance for both church and laity.

Inspired by the convictions of Wycliffe, Lollards became increasingly vocal. They disliked the swearing of oaths, the worship of statues or idols, the undertaking of pilgrimages, the authority of the Pope, the lack of a vernacular Bible, and did not believe in transubstantiation; in these beliefs they clearly anticipate Protestantism. In short, the 'movement represented a continuing protest against the greed, avarice, and wealth of the Church and its upper clergy.'<sup>540</sup> They considered that the laity was as qualified as the ordained in preaching; the church, however, mistrusted the Lollard proclivity for unauthorised preaching by the laity. One can appreciate, therefore, why Margery excites the Church's suspicions: she is noisy and chastises those who swear.<sup>541</sup> In every other point of faith, however, Margery is utterly conventional, as her

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<sup>538</sup> Although he died at Lutterworth, he was later exhumed in order to be burnt for his unorthodox beliefs. See: John H. Arnold, 'Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent' in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, 75-93.

<sup>539</sup> Keen, *England in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 187.

<sup>540</sup> Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p. 104.

<sup>541</sup> 'ther wer many of þe Erchebysshoppys clerkys & oper rekles men boþe swyers & zemen which sworwyn many gret opis & spokyn many rekles wordys, & þis creatur boldly vndryname hem & seyð þei schuld ben dampynd', *BMK*, p. 36.

subsequent examinations prove. As Arnold states, 'her several encounters with legal processes failed to convict her', although he also acknowledges that 'many people wanted her to be a heretic, and attempted to make that ascription stick.'<sup>542</sup>

In 1395, twelve conclusions for Lollardy were posted at Westminster, and these, according to Arnold, 'formed the first public sense of what 'Lollardy' stood for, and was long (if not always accurately) remembered.'<sup>543</sup> By 1401, Lollards were being prosecuted for heresy, and the punishment for heresy was execution. William Sawtrey, coincidentally of Lynn, was the first to perish. It would be difficult to suggest that Norfolk produced more Lollards than the average county, but thanks to the lively records of the Norwich Heresy Trials, we can see that Lollards certainly gained a foothold in the county.<sup>544</sup> It is interesting to note that William Sawtrey,<sup>545</sup> was a former priest at St. Margaret's in Lynn and Margery 'must have known [him]'.<sup>546</sup> He preached the rejection of Catholic saints and did not believe in transubstantiation, stating that despite the consecration of the host, the bread remained mere bread. Having been examined by Despenser, the Bishop of Norwich, he was placed in prison. Upon his release, he recanted his views. Moving to a London parish, Sawtrey began preaching Lollardy once more, resulting in an audience with Archbishop Thomas Arundel. After a legal process during which Sawtrey refused to return to Catholicism, he was sentenced to death on 26th February, 1401. In March, he was burnt at Smithfield.

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<sup>542</sup> Arnold, 'Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent' in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 76.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid*, p.78.

<sup>544</sup> The Lollard map in G.M Trevelyan's *England in the Age of Wycliffe* (Read, 2010), indicates that Lollardy spread to Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Lincoln during the fifteenth century, suggesting that it gained purchase in East Anglia in particular, and the east in general.

<sup>545</sup> See: Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p. 142, Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p. 103ff, and Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England*, p. 175ff.

<sup>546</sup> *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p. 103. Atkinson also suggests that the lack of Sawtrey's name in the *Book* could be an instance of 'scribal editing', p.104.

Moreover, the Norwich Heresy Trials (1428-31) amply demonstrate that Lollardy was a concern in this part of the country. Margery Baxter and Hawisia Moone were both tried for their heretical beliefs, though neither was burnt. William White, a priest who left holy orders because of his Wycliffite convictions, was burnt in Norwich in September 1424; Margery Baxter prayed to William White during her trial, although the idea that the dead may intercede on behalf of the living, is, ironically, an orthodox one. During the Trials, upwards of one hundred and twenty people were investigated, and enough were condemned to merit a designated burning area known as Lollards' Pit.<sup>547</sup> Perhaps Norfolk had gained something of a reputation for being a breeding-ground of heretics, and this may account for Margery's sometimes hostile receptions.

This, then, is the uncertain and heightened environment through which Margery Kempe treks during her various travels. It is no wonder that she drew the eye as she exhibits a number of Lollard-like characteristics: she is against the swearing of oaths, and her rebukes and sermonising come perilously close to preaching. She does not, however, remotely approach a Lollard outlook in her theology, and when she is stopped or arrested, it is because she has been deemed to be acting in a manner out of the ordinary. In 1417, she is arrested by two yeomen of the Duke of Bedford as she is about to board the ferry to Hull:

[P]u art holdyn þe grettest loller in al þis cuntre er a-bowte London eythyr. & we han sowt þe in many a cuntre, & we xal han an hundryd pownde for to bring þe be-forn owr Lord.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> See: Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, Royal Historical Society of Great Britain (1977).

<sup>548</sup> *BMK*, p. 129.

Her arrest is precipitated by friars telling the yeomen who she is. Such is the way with Margery - her reputation precedes her; the previous day, she is befriended by a man who is then turned against her by the malicious talk of the townsfolk who call her 'no good woman.'<sup>549</sup> The slur of 'loller' has become attached to Margery because she is not quite right in the way that she acts, that she is unconventional, rather than in anything that she overtly says theologically. When examined in this context, it is perhaps understandable that she was met with a certain degree of hostility. It is interesting that Margery, who at the very least would have known of William Sawtre if not actually known him, who was active in the early part of the fifteenth century, did not choose to moderate her behaviour in light of the events surrounding her. In a climate of suspicion, no matter how orthodox her views were, the very fact that Margery was out of the ordinary roused the anger of those who were perhaps unable or unwilling to distinguish between someone who was socially unconventional, and a heretic.

The topic of persecution and the topic of travel are inextricably linked in the *Book*, as Margery faces a significant amount of hostility during her widespread travels. Her outspokenness violated the norms of medieval female conduct: she admonishes bad behaviour when she encounters it, her preoccupation with God provokes adverse responses and scepticism in her powers as a mystic, and the extremity of her reactions aroused suspicion.<sup>550</sup> Socially, therefore, she is something of a liability, and the firmness of her belief that she is divinely favoured means that she can assume an attitude of moral superiority that does not necessarily aid acceptance into social groups. As a woman, moreover, she compounds her transgression. Her husband,

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<sup>549</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>550</sup> The preaching against Margery by a friar in chapter 62 is a notable example of obvious hostility: 'Thus sche was slawndereyd, etyn, & knawyn of þe pepil for þe grace þat God wrowt in hir' (p. 154). As a companion piece, in chapter 63 it is suggested that she ought to leave Lynn rather than to endure the great reproof of the community. Margery, however, determines to stick it out, imitating the suffering of Christ: 'For her... in þis town haue I synned. Þerfor it is worthy þat I suffyr sorwe in þis town þera-geyn.' p.154.

John, accompanies Margery on some of her English pilgrimages and travels, affording her a certain degree of security and social acceptability. When she discovers a yearning for religious excursions in order to enrich her theological understanding, she acknowledges that ‘sche mygth not wyth-owtyn consenting of hir husbond’<sup>551</sup> and he (mostly) remains by her side, and ‘suffred wyth gret peyn & was ful sory’ when she is rather tartly told by a woman that she ought to be in Smithfield.<sup>552</sup> However, when travelling alone, she circumvents accepted social norms. Together with the rebukes that she offers her fellow pilgrims and the white clothing that she assumes, she contravenes social boundaries and her outspokenness is misinterpreted as itself being theologically transgressive; we have already seen that it was a period that was generally apprehensive about any exhibition of spiritual transgression.

### III: Margery’s Travels: Persecution at Home and Abroad

Having contextualised the religious climate of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and with an understanding as to why Margery perhaps excited such disapproval and even accusations of heresy (Norfolk being, arguably, a county of some notoriety in this respect), we will turn our attention to the specific examples of persecution that Margery suffers. Throughout the *Book*, she recounts incidences of her persecution at the hands of various people, both lay and clergy. Their anger is roused by her tears, by her haranguing, by her eccentricity in roaming the highways and byways both of England and abroad, and by the disbelief that her visions had the weight of divine authority as she claimed; she is accused of Lollardy, she is imprisoned,

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<sup>551</sup> *BMK*, p. 22.

<sup>552</sup> *BMK*, p. 36. John is described as ‘euyr a good man & an esy man to hir’, p. 32, and Margery fondly recognises his loyalty: ‘and euyr hir husband was redy whan alle oþer fayled’, p.33. He is not, however, wholly saintly and abandons his wife to her fate when she encounters trouble in Canterbury. She weeps so loudly that the monks upbraid her, and John ‘went a-away fro hir as he had not a knowyn hir, and left hir a-loon a-mong hem,’ p. 27.

she is threatened with, but is never genuinely close to, being burnt for heresy; she is often simply led away from trouble, or she is rescued by someone with superior authority than the accusers. The wearing of white clothes causes consternation as she is certainly no maiden; it is simply one more instance of suspected hypocrisy on her part, just as her neighbours in Lynn do not believe that she can be chaste whilst continuing to sleep in the same bed as her husband (having won a hard-fought cessation of marital relations from John, who stipulates the above as one condition, and that she pay his debts as another), nor that she should suddenly recommence eating meat – despite claiming that it is at Christ’s behest - when she has made a virtue of refusing to in the past. The language employed both by Margery and her detractors during these scenes is of particular interest, as I will argue that Margery uses register and vocabulary as a means to present her detractors in a manner that invites her readership to sympathise with her, whilst simultaneously elevating her own position amongst them.

In late 1413, Margery made the journey from Lynn to Venice in order to begin her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This was a serious undertaking, requiring her to winter in Venice prior to embarking on the voyage. The Holy Land is a watershed moment for Margery, because it is here that she receives her tears, a spiritual gift also bestowed on Marie d’Oignies, and it is during the return journey in Rome that she undergoes the mystical marriage to the Godhead. Pilgrimage was an expensive and risky venture; although Norbert Ohler, using a twelfth-century pilgrim’s guide to Santiago de Compostela as evidence, suggests that ‘people no longer undertook pilgrimages... in order to die at the shrine, but that they expected to return home

again',<sup>553</sup> Goodman points out that 'to return home intact to northern Europe from the Jerusalem journey was a remarkable achievement.'<sup>554</sup> Quite apart from the possibility of dying from disease in a foreign country, there is the threat of thievery, privation, and one had to account for the extraordinary amount of time the whole endeavour took. When one reads Margery's account, bustlingly populated by a large number of other pilgrims, it is easy to forget that she would have been in a tiny minority of English people who attempted the journey: 'English folk who made the Jerusalem journey are likely to have been rare, and viewed with some awe. The survival of guides written by Englishmen, and Chaucer's fancy that his Wife of Bath went there three times, perhaps give a false impression that it was a common undertaking.'<sup>555</sup> The other pilgrims would have been drawn from every walk of life:

Educated and uneducated... rich and poor, old and young, men and women (the proportion of women is estimated to have been about a quarter to a third of the total number of pilgrims), individuals and groups... the healthy and above all the sick, who had consulted in vain the medical authorities of the day; men who wanted to ask for a special blessing or fulfil a vow... pardoned criminals; adventurers; worldlings...<sup>556</sup>

As a woman journeying alone Margery is already in the minority of a minority group, thus rendering the enterprise even more exceptional. As Ohler suggests in the above list, however, the motivations for going on pilgrimage need not be exclusively religious. Peter the Venerable of Cluny, a twelfth-century abbot, nursed 'doubts about the spiritual value of long pilgrimages', and 'the spiritual value of the pilgrimage was made conditional on the pilgrim fasting on the

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<sup>553</sup> Norbert Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller*, trans. Caroline Hillier (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 184. The pilgrim's guide, which Ohler describes as a 'forerunner of Baedeker', is 'one of a long line of guides to holy shrines', and helped individuals to understand what sort of thing to expect on the journey. It ran to the equivalent of fifty printed pages. Ohler's book provides a comprehensive overview of the subject of medieval travel; for an overview of medieval pilgrimage, see: Brett Edward Whalen, ed., *Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages: a Reader* (Toronto, 2011), Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London and New York, 2000), and also *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval World* (London and New York, 2001), Leigh Ann Craig, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons: Women as Pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston, 2009).

<sup>554</sup> *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 186. He goes on to list a number of 'distinguished Englishmen' who had died in previous decades whilst on pilgrimage.

<sup>555</sup> Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p. 187.

<sup>556</sup> Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller*, p. 187.

way, eating no meat, staying only one night in any one place, leaving hair and nails uncut, not having a warm bath, and not sleeping in a comfortable bed.<sup>557</sup> Peter the Venerable clearly felt the need to guard against the pilgrimage degenerating into a mere holiday or opportunity for socialising, as its spiritual efficacy would have been negated. This is a point of concern shared by Margery, who embarks on her own pilgrimage in a spirit that could only have been endorsed by Peter. On her journey to the Holy Land, Margery irritates her fellow pilgrims by crying and constantly harping on religious matters, spoiling the convivial aspect of undertaking a pilgrimage. In chapter twenty-six they ‘cuttyd hir gown so schort þat it come but lytil be-nethyn hir kne & dedyn hir don on a whyte canvas in maner of a sekkyn gelle.’<sup>558</sup> By dressing Margery thus she ‘ben holdyn a fool’, an action that directly recalls the attiring of Christ during his interview with Herod:

And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.<sup>559</sup>

This parallel places Margery in a holy light, as she suffers the ignominious behaviour of others without complaint (or ‘sche durst ful euyl spekyn a word’<sup>560</sup>, as she puts it). She is belittled, held to be a fool, and forced to sit at the humblest part of the table. The presentation of these circumstances is striking, as they conform to the common theme of calm forbearance in spite of one’s opponents that can be found both in Christ’s story and in the lives of saints – a theme that has been discussed at length elsewhere in this thesis. As Salih puts it: ‘Hagiography is full of conventional motifs, which can be openly transferred from one saint to another.’<sup>561</sup> She also goes on to point out that hagiography was the most popular literary genre of the medieval

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<sup>557</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>558</sup> *BMK*, p. 62.

<sup>559</sup> Luke, 23:11.

<sup>560</sup> *BMK*, p. 62.

<sup>561</sup> Salih, ‘Introduction’, *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, pp 1- 23, p. 14.

period (with multiple manuscripts devoted to a single saint), reaching the widest possible audience, both literate and illiterate, rich and poor. It is not possible that Margery unwittingly created these allusions in her *Book*, nor is it possible that they were lost on her audience.

In chapter twenty-seven, at Constance, en route to Venice, Margery tells her life story to an English friar, whom she describes as ‘a maystyr of diuinite & þe Popys legat’.<sup>562</sup> With his theological authority and impeccable credentials established, the reader is thus primed for him to take Margery’s side in the ensuing argument over her refusal to eat meat:

Whan þei had etyn, þe company mad gret compleynt vp-on þis creatur to þe legate & [seyd] vtterly sche xulde no lengar be in her company les þan he wolde comawndyn hir to etyn flesch as þei dedyn & levyn hir wepyng & þat sche xulde not speke so mech of holynes.<sup>563</sup>

The language of her detractors is unremarkable in its composition; it is a mixture of Old English and French, and it is reported to us. Indirect speech is, in fact, used throughout this chapter as Margery also reports going to the legate to seek his support. When the legate, however, steps forward to defend Margery he is given a lengthy passage of direct speech:

Nay, serys, I wyl not don hir etyn flesch whyl sche may absteyne hir & ben þe bettyr disposyd to louyn owyr Lord. Whech of 3ow alle þat mad avowe to gon to Rome barfote I wolde not dispense wyth hym of hys vow whyl he myth fulfillyn it, ne I wyl not byddyn hir etyn flesch whyl owyr Lord 3euyth hir strength to absteyne. As for hyr wepyng, it is not in my power to restreyn it, for it is þe 3yft of þe Holy Gost. As for hir spekyng, I wyl prey hir to sesyn tyl sche comyth þer men wyl her hit wyth bettyr wyl þan 3e wyl do.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>562</sup> *BMK*, p. 63.

<sup>563</sup> *BMK*, p. 65-6.

<sup>564</sup> *BMK*, p.64.

Words of note in this passage include *absteyne* (c.1380), *dispense* (c.1380, in Wycliffe; *MED* also cites Wycliffe, but gives a date of 1395. The above quotation is also used as the third citation),<sup>565</sup> *disposyd* (the fifth sense of the *OED*: to prepare oneself, 1375), *restreyn* (c.1384), and *sesyn* (1330). ‘Dispense’ especially establishes an appropriately ecclesiastical and authoritative tone which brooks no opposition to Margery’s practice of eating no meat. By also mentioning that her vegetarianism is no more eccentric than a desire to walk barefoot to Rome (which some of the other pilgrims have expressed a wish to do), he successfully parries their attempts to marginalise her, and he also legitimises her weeping as a gift from God. The impact of the direct speech here is striking, as it gives unequivocal backing to Margery and her practices, whilst the reported speech of her detractors side-lines their efforts. Giving an audible voice to her supporters is a tactic which Margery employs on a number of occasions, allowing the sympathetic authority figures in her *Book* to speak for her.<sup>566</sup>

Meanwhile, Margery’s fellow travellers foist her onto the legate who speaks up for her, and who, to his credit, treats her ‘as þow sche had ben hys modyr’.<sup>567</sup> After prayers, she is sent William Wever, who acts as her travelling companion. Her previous company, however, is afforded a fragment of direct speech when her arrival at Bologna before them causes a degree of consternation:

3yf 3e wyl gon in owyr felawshep, 3e schal not [speke] of þe Gospel wher we come,  
but 3e schal syttyn style & makyn mery, as we don, bopin at mete & at soper.<sup>568</sup>

<sup>565</sup> <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED12018&egs=all>, date accessed: 09/11/14.

<sup>566</sup> This is a clever narrative tool, as it positions Margery at a little distance from their compliments and support, as she attempts to navigate the issue of writing her own vita. A few examples of the supportive figures whose words are in direct speech are Julian of Norwich, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and of course, Christ himself.

<sup>567</sup> *BMK*, p. 64.

<sup>568</sup> *BMK*, p. 65.

However, after an uneasy truce where Margery receives her spiritual succour from a ‘gret hows of nunnys’, the terms of the agreement are broken:

Sche rehersyd a text of Gospel lych as ache had leryd be-for-tyme wyth oþer goode wordys. And a-non hir felawshep seyde sche had brokyn comenawnt. & sche seyde, ‘ȝa, serys, forsoþe I may no lengar hold ȝow comenawnt, for I must nedys speke of my Lord Ihesu Crist þow al þis world had forbodyn it me.’

Whilst the company was being irenic and attempting reconciliation, they are afforded direct speech: as soon as they become combative, their words are reported – at which point Margery’s soaring voice is heard. Moreover, the phrasing of her rebuttal is notable for positioning herself as an outsider, imitating the path trodden by the saints and by Christ. Being discouraged from discourse about Christ is a characteristic of the martyred saints, and although Margery cannot claim to be quite in their position in terms of her personal safety, she at least claims a similarity of spirit. She casts her former travelling companions in the role of the oppressors (normally portrayed by Romans or other heathen people), which allows her to occupy the position of martyr. The widespread use of saints’ lives as a teaching tool during the period means that, arguably, this allusion would not have been lost on her readership.

The group ostracises her from their company, but she scores a point when she is divinely instructed to charter a different ship from them:

Sithyn, as þis creatur was in contemplacyon, owyr Lord warnyd hir in hir mende þat sche xuld not seylyn in þat schip, & he assygned hir anoper schip, a galey, þat sche xuld seylyn in.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> *BMK*, p. 66.

Margery mentions, *en passant*, to 'summe of the cumpany'<sup>570</sup> that she no longer intends to sail on their ship, with the predictable and amusing result that 'þei durst not seyl in þe schip þei had ordeyned.'<sup>571</sup> Irritating or not, the rest of the party lend credence to Margery's powers of prophesy (a quality also shared by some saints<sup>572</sup>) when it comes to the perils of the sea, and join her ship. This temporary victory, however, does not lead to a thawing in the frostiness between Margery and the other pilgrims: they lock up her clothes and a priest steals a sheet from her, claiming that she is 'as fals as sche mygth be.'<sup>573</sup>

Margery finally reaches the Holy Land in safety in chapter twenty-eight, and it is here that she reaches the pinnacle of her mystical powers. She is afflicted by such weeping at Calvary (different from the minor weeping that she explains to the two Dutchmen who prevent her from falling off her donkey due to overwhelming bliss at being in Jerusalem) that it is violent and lasting in its nature:

Sche fel down þat sche mygth not stondyn ne knelyn but walwyd & creyed wyth a lowed voys as þow hir hert xulde a brostyn a-sundyr, for in the cite of hir sowle sche saw verily & freschly how owyr Lord was crucified. Before hir face sche herd and saw in hir gostly sygth þe morning of owyr Lady, of Sen Iohn & Mary Mawdelyn, and of many oper þat louyd owyr Lord. & sche had so gret compassyon & so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn þat sche myt not kepe hir-self fro kryng & roryng þow sche xuld a be ded þerfor. And þis was þe first cry þat euyr sche cryed in contemplacyon. And þis maner of crying enduryd many zerys aftyr þis tyme for owt þat any man myt do, & þerfor sufferyd sche mych despite & mech reprefe.<sup>574</sup>

With the exception of compassion, contemplacyon, despite, enduryd, reprefe and sufferyd, the vocabulary of this passage is broadly Anglo-Saxon in origin, and perhaps, therefore, conveys

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<sup>570</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>572</sup> St Francis of Assisi, St Bridget of Sweden, St Catherine of Siena (who prophesised that the Church would be split), and Hildegard of Bingen (beatified only) all made prophecies.

<sup>573</sup> *BMK*, p. 67.

<sup>574</sup> *BMK*, p. 68.

a sense of humility. The enormity of the gift of tears, a holy bestowal, is expressed starkly, in simple terms that are not open to a nuanced reading and which serve to portray Margery as particularly favoured: in her vision she bears witness to the mourning of Mary, St John, Mary Magdalene and others – although unspecified, one imagines that they are of a similar rank. The grief of these figures is observed by Margery, and she positions herself alongside them as a fellow mourner. However, the violence of her reaction and the fact that the manner of their grief is not commented upon perhaps attempts to show us that Margery's response is the more important one here. She is, therefore, not only part of the inner-circle of Christ's chief mourners, but actually exceeds them in terms of her anguish. With this concept lodged in the readers' minds, the final note of the speech is a reiteration of the suffering that she is dealt, throughout her life, via people's misunderstanding of her gift of tears. Thus, her standing amongst the most elite religious figures and her ability to suffer for her faith are reinforced in one. Margery's visions are such that she does not often stray too far from the images, texts and stories with which she was familiar; they have a homely quality to them that has been discussed before. The above instance, therefore, is a striking example of Margery venturing into the realms of the metaphorical, as she describes the scene in the 'cite of hir sowle'. The phrasing of this is both evocative and poetic, allowing the reader access to her thoughts on a level that is perhaps beyond that which we normally experience.

#### **IV: St Margery and the Clergy**

So far, Margery's persecution has been of a fairly innocuous kind: she suffers the mockery and unkind pranks of her fellow travellers, but she is not in serious danger. Nevertheless, Margery's depiction of these scenes is in the vein of the saintly persecuted and the sinning persecutor. We

will now, however, move towards the more serious examples of persecution that Margery suffers, and the interesting parallel that she seems to draw between herself and St. Katherine. Margery attracts a great deal of harassment, and this chapter will now seek to examine the language both of her detractors in relation to herself, and her language in relation to them, and whether she attempted to cultivate a persona that imitated the suffering of a virgin martyr. It must also be remembered that Margery is more than capable of delivering swift reprimands to any member of church or laity who fail to live up to her expectations: the language of condemnation is not only one way.

In chapter thirteen, Margery visits Canterbury and is 'gretly despysed and reprevyd'<sup>575</sup> by all the men assembled there because of her loud crying. John Kempe abandons Margery to her fate, as though 'he had not a knowyn hir',<sup>576</sup> after the day has passed in stern disapproval of her actions. Eventually, Margery is approached by an elderly monk who begins to reprove her directly. In recounting the experience, however, Margery is careful to present the monk in rather unflattering terms:

an eld monk, which had ben tresowrer wyth þe Qwen whyl he was in seculer clothyng, a riche man, & gretly dred of mech pepyl.<sup>577</sup>

Margery dismisses his previous occupation as merely 'secular', and there is an implication that he has found his vocation rather late in life; in fact, conveniently after he has amassed his own

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<sup>575</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid, op. cit.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid, op. cit. Barry Windeatt identifies the monk from the description as 'Probably John Kynton (d.1415), formerly chancellor to Queen Joanna, consort of Henry IV, before becoming a monk of Christ Church, Canterbury, in 1408.' *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Harlow, 2000).

fortune. There are numerous examples in Middle English literature of clerical figures whose social status and personal wealth seem to be at odds with their calling, and here, Margery contributes to a stereotype made familiar to us by Chaucer and Langland.<sup>578</sup> To compound the matter, Margery comments that he inspires fear in his congregation, a comment that has a two-fold effect: the monk appears a daunting prospect and Margery appears both brave and vulnerable.

With the reader suitably prejudiced, the monk focuses his attack on her unconventional ways: 'I wold þow wer closyd in an hows of ston, þat þer schuld no man speke wyth þe.'<sup>579</sup> This remark could be interpreted charitably, in the sense of him wishing that Margery were an anchoress, or he could be thinking of literal imprisonment because he sees her as a dangerous radical; either way, it is obvious that he wishes to contain her. Margery is certainly unusual in that she roams freely (sometimes accompanied by her husband, but a significant amount of the time she is not – and as evidenced by John's actions here, he absconds when the embarrassment becomes too acute), and, as a woman, her independence is of concern to the authorities.

This independence is illustrated most stridently when Margery begins to repeat stories of scripture to the assembled clergy. Although there are many instances of female mystics voicing the word of God which pass without comment from masculine quarters, Rosalynn Voaden expresses the problems of Margery's piety succinctly: she is an 'insistently physical presence' and 'though her voice is frequently raised, often it is perceived to be her own voice;

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<sup>578</sup> Chaucer's religious characters in the *General Prologue*, with the notable exception of the Parson, are presented in varying degrees, as corrupt, amoral and hypocritical. Langland is scathing of the church throughout *Piers Plowman*.

<sup>579</sup> *BMK*, p. 27.

consequently the words she speaks are doubted, derided or ignored.<sup>580</sup> The implications of a woman speaking at all are voiced by a young monk:

Eyþur þow hast þe Holy Gost or ellys þow hast a devil wyth-in þe, for þat þu spekest her to vs it is Holy Wrytte, and þat hast þu not of þiself.<sup>581</sup>

There are two issues here and both amount to heresy. The first is concerned with Margery's sex, and the second with Lollardy. Voaden posits that there are two main theological convictions regarding women: that they are naturally corporeal, sexual and carnal; and that they bear the taint of Eve. The first conception arises from the fleshy business of woman's reproductive function, and the second from Eve's easy duping by the serpent in the Garden of Eden.<sup>582</sup> Women are more susceptible to deception and are therefore incapable of telling the difference between the word of God and the word of the devil. Accusations of being possessed by the devil, therefore, plague Margery: she is held to be either wholly good or wholly wicked and this schizophrenic labelling reflects the manner of her reception by those whom she meets.<sup>583</sup> It is also interesting to note that her detractors can harry her whether they take her as pious or pernicious: the consequences for the latter are obvious, and the former could feasibly be interpreted as preaching, allowing the male priesthood to maintain absolute authority either way – leading us to the second, potentially heretical, trap.

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<sup>580</sup> Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, (York, 1999), p.108.

<sup>581</sup> *BMK*, p.28.

<sup>582</sup> For an overview of the perception of woman in the medieval period see chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>583</sup> The Steward of Leicester is just one of a number who offer their polarised opinion of Margery: 'Eyþur þu art a ryth good woman er ellys a ryth wikked woman'. *BMK*, p. 113.

Recounting scripture without the authority to do so might be construed as Lollardy, and, whilst Margery is unerringly orthodox in her views, she does make a habit of vocalising her beliefs, correcting others and reciting Biblical stories: all could be misconstrued as preaching and therefore heresy – preaching being the practice of an ordained priest only. Margery is also quick to put a halt to any swearing of oaths that she hears; in chapter sixteen she and her husband are visiting Archbishop Arundel at Lambeth Palace, when she harangues ‘many of the Erchebysshoppys clerkys & oþer rekles men... which sworyn many gret oþis & spokyn many rekles wordys.’<sup>584</sup> The result is that she is approached by a woman of the town who rebukes her:

I wold þu wer in Smythfeld, & I wold beryn a fagot to bren þe wyth; it is pety þat þu leuyst.<sup>585</sup>

Margery employs the same strategy in presenting this woman as she does the elderly monk in Canterbury: the woman is finely dressed in a fur surcoat, perhaps intimating that she is another rich person who has not yet come to a full understanding of God: that is, to accept that Margery is His special envoy. Margery’s mention of the ‘pylche’<sup>586</sup> recalls her own former preoccupation with personal appearance, noting especially her elaborate headdress constructed out of gold pipes.<sup>587</sup> Having left that behind her, however, Margery is at liberty to point out the faults of others, especially when it allows her to scorn her naysayers. The woman’s casual mention of Smithfield, moreover, conjures up the spirit of the executed Lollard, William

<sup>584</sup> *BMK* p. 36.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit.

<sup>586</sup> ‘An outer garment made of animal skin with the fur used as a lining’, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/143815?rskey=Kz2W2Y&result=1#eid> (accessed: 30/12/2016).

<sup>587</sup> ‘for sche weryd gold pypys on hir hevyd & hir hodys wyth þe typettys were daggyd. Hir klokys also wer daggyd & led wyth dyuers colours be-twen þe daggys þat it schuld be þe mor staryng to mennys sygth and hirself þe mor ben worshepd’. *BMK*, p.9.

Sawtre. It is, ironically, through being thought heretical that Margery can suffer most; she is tormented by her enemies because they believe her to be unorthodox. However, it is *their* misunderstanding and *her* orthodoxy that allows Margery to represent herself in the mode of a virgin martyr. The woman's threat to 'bren' Margery by bringing a faggot for the pyre herself echoes the 'cartful of thornys redy' in Canterbury for just such an eventuality.<sup>588</sup> (Although at Lambeth, John manages to stay by Margery's side, which she acknowledges: 'hir husband sufferyd wyth gret peyn & was ful sory to heryn hys wyfe so rebukyd'<sup>589</sup>) Thus, Margery is once again fully established as both victim and sufferer, actively presenting herself in a light that invites comparison with others who suffered for their religious convictions.

However, when one examines Margery's language during the persecution scenes, it becomes clear that she is not as vulnerable as the circumstances would suggest. When Margery begins to recount a moral story in Canterbury, the quality of her language contrasts with that of her persecutors:

'I wold þow wer closyd in an hows of ston þat þer schuld no man speke wyth þe.' 'A, ser,' sche seyde, 'ze schuld meyntheyn Goddys seruawntys, & ze arn þe first þat heldyn a-gens hem. Owyr Lord amend 3ow.'<sup>590</sup>

The monk's remark that communicates his desire to shut Margery in a house of stone is of a very low register; 'closyd' is the only word that is not Old English in origin, and as it was in use in the thirteenth century would probably be considered naturalised by the time Margery employs it. Admittedly, the monk is given little to say; however, her rejoinder here is also brief, and yet it contains stylistic features that give her the edge: the quasi-respectful 'ser', and the

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<sup>588</sup> *BMK* p. 28.

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27-8.

rebuke that shows him to be derelict in his duty, emphasised by the repetition of '3e' and the neat, enclosed order of '3e' and 'hem'.

Having delivered a moral tale, Margery leaves the cathedral with cries of 'Pow xalt be brent, fals lollare. Her is a cartful of thornys redy for þe & a tonne to bren þe wyth'<sup>591</sup> ringing in her ears. 'Lollar' is a later addition to the language, with the *MED* citing 1395 as the first recorded usage. As it is a technical term, however, it must be discounted from the general impression of the mob's vocabulary: there is nothing particularly sophisticated about either its content or their mode of expressing it. The grumblings of the clergy are something that Margery is clearly able to handle; she faces rather more exalted and serious authority figures in other instances of her persecution, and it is here that Margery draws a parallel with St Katherine.

### **V: St Margery and St Katherine**

One of the most serious of Margery's trials occurs when she is brought before the Mayor of Leicester. It is interesting that the Mayor of Leicester should invoke the name of St. Katherine when he starts his examination. He believes that he uses the virgin martyr as an example of all that Margery is not; however, Margery uses the virgin martyr to illustrate all that she aspires to be. When she explains her personal circumstances and family background, the Mayor responds:

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid, p.28.

Seynt Kateryn telde what kynred sche cam of, & zet ar ze not lyche, for þu art a fals strumpet, a fals lollar, & a fals deceyuer of þe pepyl, & þerfor I xal haue þe in preson.<sup>592</sup>

Of course, the Mayor's reference to St. Katherine automatically gestures the reader towards establishing a link between her and Margery, and Margery's recounting of the incident emphasises her desire to be considered in the same category as St. Katherine. Indeed, it is worth repeating the story of St. Katherine's martyrdom in order to illustrate other analogues to which our attention is drawn by Margery.

Katherine was born the daughter of a king, Costus, in Alexandria. She undergoes a conversion to Christianity that includes a mystical union with Christ. At the age of eighteen, and living alone surrounded by untold wealth in a palace, she is disturbed by the clamour of Emperor Maxentius demanding sacrifices to idols, and persecuting those Christians who refused. She takes Maxentius to task, and proves so adept at defeating his arguments against Christianity that he sends for fifty of the greatest thinkers and orators to come and help. She not only defeats them, but also converts them, causing a furious Maxentius to order their executions. He imprisons Katherine, and leaves her to starve for twelve days. During this time, she is sustained by a dove bearing celestial food. Maxentius's queen and his close friend Porphyrius, the captain of the guard, secretly visit Katherine under the cover of dark; she converts them as well. When the twelve days have elapsed, Maxentius orders Katherine's execution and invents a machine of spiked wheels to crush and tear her. An angel destroys the machine before it touches Katherine, and such is the violence of the action that it also kills four thousand pagans. The

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid, pp. 111-12. *The Golden Legend* describes St. Katherine's response to Maxentius as follows: 'I avow my parentage, not boastfully, but for love of humility. I am Catherine, only daughter of King Costus. Though born to the purple and quite well instructed in the liberal disciplines, I have turned my back on all that and taken refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ.' p. 335, *The Golden Legend, Readings on the Saints*, trans. Ryan (Princeton, 1993).

queen then reveals herself as Katherine's ally and convert, causing Maxentius to martyr her by decapitation and tearing off her breasts. Porphyrius buries her body, and is beheaded for his trouble. Finally, he beheads Katherine, who is called spouse by Christ as she ascends to heaven. Milk flows from her wounds to indicate her purity, and her remains are taken to Mount Sinai by angels, where they perform miracles of healing.

Katherine may have appealed to Margery because she undergoes mystical marriage to Christ, she debates with pagans and wins (the pagans in Margery's debates obviously being recast here as doubting clergy) and she is held up as being modest and continent, despite her privileges in life. However, Katherine J. Lewis adds a further argument as to why St. Katherine might have appealed to Margery: 'virgin martyrs in general, and St. Katherine in particular, were often considered to be of particular relevance and value to religious and lay women in later medieval England.'<sup>593</sup> Lewis argues that St. Katherine was a paragon of saintly, feminine goodness; an ideal standard to which lay women might aspire, in spite of their worldliness. Female saints naturally invite a female audience, and the hagiography of the virgin martyrs was much read and disseminated by lay women; indeed they commissioned works,<sup>594</sup> because of the didactic qualities that can be found therein (perhaps another method for the continuance of male dominance). The virgin martyrs were 'soberly dressed',<sup>595</sup> providing a helpful rule for wives to live their lives by. Although Margery is admittedly unusually independent, and has, it must be stated, an extraordinarily compliant husband, the qualities of virtue, sobriety and chastity are, nevertheless, qualities that she seeks to cultivate.

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<sup>593</sup> Lewis, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England*, p. 227.

<sup>594</sup> Lewis mentions an East Anglian author, Bokenham, who composed thirteen saints' lives, six of which were for female patrons. See also Goodman, 'The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter, of Lynn', in *Medieval Women*, p. 350.

<sup>595</sup> Lewis, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, p. 232.

Moreover, St. Katherine is married (albeit mystically, to the Godhead), and so belongs to the group of female saints that particularly fascinate Margery; perhaps most especially Bridget of Sweden, with whose posthumous presence Margery enters an intense competition for the favour of Christ. After her conversion, Margery's wedded state is of constant reproach to her and she goes to well-documented lengths to regain her chastity and seek assurances from Christ that her lack of virginity will not count against her in heaven; indeed, as we have seen, she even attempt to reconstruct her identity as a virgin. St. Katherine maintains her virginity, certainly, but Lewis asserts that 'virgin martyrs are used as exemplars of sexual abstinence rather than virginity *per se*'<sup>596</sup> and so lay women are exhorted to overcome temptations through their courage, thereby resisting advances. Although Margery's sexual temptations and battle to reinstate her virginity have been dealt with more thoroughly elsewhere in this thesis, in terms of her persecution, it is important to understand that Margery's construction of self during the examination scenes borrows from the lives of saints. As an exemplar, 'St Katherine is presented as an explicitly secular model'<sup>597</sup> which would no doubt have attracted Margery's interest, as well as St. Katherine's fiery independence and outspokenness when dealing with Pagans (and male authority figures). Indeed, there is something to be said here about viewing Margery in a feminist light. Margery's persecutors are mostly male authority figures who seek to control and overawe her, and deprive of her of her freedom and autonomy. The fact is that they fail in every attempt to do so, and Margery's independence remained remarkable. The model of St. Katherine may well have been experienced by Margery as a source of validation and vindication.

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid. p.236.

When the Mayor of Leicester accuses Margery of being a 'fals strumpet, a fals loller, & a fals deceyuer of þe pepyl' who ought to be in prison, Margery's response is 'I am as redy, ser, to gon to preson for Goddys lofeas ze am redy to gon to chirche.'<sup>598</sup> This echoes St. Katherine precisely, who goes to prison for the sake of Christ when Maxentius loses his temper; he cannot bear that she has proved so adept at beating him and his fifty scholars in an argument. The opportunity for gaol is therefore almost too perfect for Margery to ignore, and her language is both suitably inflammatory (to make certain that the mayor makes good his threat) yet utterly yielding. This is not the moment for high-flown rhetoric, and for once, the persecutor is given a more striking turn of phrase than herself: the effective triple structure, together with the use of the strident terms 'strumpet' and 'lollar', give the statement the requisite force, and portrays the mayor in a villainous light. Lewis also acknowledges that this moment affords Margery the 'chance to play St. Katherine to the hilt',<sup>599</sup> but there is a clever divergence from the saint's life. St. Katherine is thrown into prison for having already debated and won; Margery is thrown into prison without having done so. By drawing the reader's attention to the analogies with the St. Katherine legend, but not yet having faced cross-examination, Margery sets up the expectation that she *will* win in any future debate. Indeed, in subsequent chapters, she is questioned by the Steward and the Abbot of Leicester, a cleric in York Minster, and twice by the Archbishop of York. St. Katherine may have had fifty scholars to contend with, but at least she only had to do it once.

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<sup>598</sup> *BMK*, p.112.

<sup>599</sup> Lewis, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, p. 252.

During the examinations, Margery presents herself as well-informed, and in facing clerical authority, she, like St. Katherine, always manages to best her opponents: 'Margery's fear does not prevent her from acquitting herself in front of the Archbishop and his clerics with all the style that St. Katherine displays in her own confrontations.'<sup>600</sup> Lewis also disagrees with Voaden's argument that Margery appears to speak her own words, rather than the word of God, stating that she is clever enough not to claim her knowledge as her own. Margery carefully dissociates herself from any authority, claiming that her knowledge is divinely inspired: 'The *Book* is careful to stress the divine nature of Margery's wisdom',<sup>601</sup> and she credits 'þe Holy Gost' as the originator of her words. Margery's carefully managed presentation of saintliness is manifest. However, there is a further point of divergence: St. Katherine is tested by pagans, to whom she gives Christian answers; Margery is tested by Christians to whom she gives Christian answers. It is Margery's manner that arouses suspicion, not her views. St. Katherine has to defend points of Christian belief that enrage Maxentius:

The debate began, and when the orators said that it was impossible for God to become man or to suffer, Catherine showed that this had been predicted by even by pagans. Plato affirms a God beset and mutilated. The Sibyl, too, speaks as follows: "Happy that God who hangs from a high tree!" The virgin went on to contradict the orators with the utmost skill and refuted them with clear and cogent reasoning, to the point that they, dumbstruck, found nothing to respond and were reduced to silence.<sup>602</sup>

One admits that Jacobus becomes a little opaque as to the minutiae of St. Katherine's arguments, but the gravity of her situation is undeniable: she is facing pagan interrogators and is outspoken in defending her Christian principles. In chapter forty-eight, Margery asserts her orthodox beliefs to the Abbot and Mayor of Leicester. As they rigorously attest to her orthodox values, they are worth quoting extensively:

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<sup>600</sup> *Ibid*, p. 250.

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>602</sup> *The Golden Legend*, p. 336

Serys, I beleue in þe Sacrament of þe Awter on þis wyse, þat what man hath takyn þe ordyr of presthode, be he neuyr so vicyows a man in hys leuyng, 3yf he sey dewly þo wordys ouyr þe bred þat owr Lord Ihesu Criste seyde whan he mad hys Mawnde among hys disciplys þer he sat at þe soper, I be-leue þat it is hys very flesch & hys blood & no material bred ne neuyr may be vnseyd be it onys seyde.<sup>603</sup>

Margery utters a declaration of faith so conformist, that the assembled priests are bound to defend her when the Mayor, 'whch was hir dedly enmy',<sup>604</sup> tries to insinuate that she is dissembling. She pointedly distances herself from any notion of sympathising with Lollard views, by explicitly endorsing traditional beliefs which Lollards would question: she is duly reverential of the office of priesthood, 'expresses the orthodox belief... in the validity of the sacrament of the Eucharist irrespective of the virtue of the celebrant', and fully subscribes to transubstantiation.<sup>605</sup> Like St. Katherine, Margery is outspoken in her response, but where St. Katherine repudiates the then orthodox pagan practices and belief systems in favour of Christianity, Margery utterly repudiates the unorthodox, adhering closer to the Christianity that her detractors espouse. She is in the opposite situation to that of St. Katherine, yet Margery presents herself in a manner which suggests a shared saintliness and kinship, allowing herself to be placed in the same category by the reader.

The Mayor of Leicester proves to be tenacious in his disapproval of Margery, but in typical fashion, he is not given much opportunity to express this disapproval. Indeed, Margery's scribe appears to interfere, commenting that the Mayor's insults are so numerous that it is 'mor

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<sup>603</sup> *BMK*, p. 115.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid*, op. cit.

<sup>605</sup> Windeatt points out that in the Norwich heresy trials, Lollards expressed the belief 'that every good man and good woman is a prest' (the woman sentiment must have caused considerable dismay amongst the conventional authorities), that followers of Wycliffe would have preferred their priests to be pure of heart than vicious of character, nor were priests invested with the 'poar to make Cristis body in forme of bred in the sacrament of the auter, and that aftir the sacramental wordys said of a prest at messe ther remayneth pure material bred on the auter.' (*Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich*, Tanner, 1977: 57)

expedient to be concelyd þan expressyd'.<sup>606</sup> Previously, in chapter forty-six, we are told that the Mayor said many 'horybyl wordys' to Margery, but we are not told what they are. Throughout the episode in Leicester, he is not given much direct speech although it is clear that Margery recalls him to be verbose. Even after he has been persuaded that Margery poses no threat and they part on temperate terms, we are told that 'he 3af hir goodly wordys' but, again, the nature of the good words is not made explicit. A possible explanation might be due to the remainder of the sentence: '...þat sche wend al had ben wel & he had ben hir good frende, but aftyrward sche wist it was not so'.<sup>607</sup> Margery silences the Mayor at the last, when she discovers that his cordiality at their leave-taking does not endure.

When the Mayor does speak, it is in an almost exclusively homely register. For example: 'In fayth, sche menyth not wyth hir hert as sche seyth with hir mowthe',<sup>608</sup> and 'I wil wetyn why þow gost in white clothys, for I trowe þow art comyn hedyr to han a-wey owr wyuys fro us & ledyn hem wyth þe.'<sup>609</sup> Indeed, with the notable exceptions of 'jurisdiccyon' (not as exotic as one might have hoped: the word was recorded as far back as *a*1300 in *Cursor Mundi*) and 'dischargyd' (in the sense of ridding oneself of something, late fourteenth century)<sup>610</sup> and the aforementioned 'deceyuer' and 'preson' in chapter forty-six, the Mayor is given no words that are importations; and of the four words that are imports, two are extremely early: 'preson' so early that the *OED* lists it as late OE, despite being Anglo-French in derivation. The lack of a Latinate register places the Mayor in a very humble position linguistically, and affords Margery the opportunity to appear his superior. Although one has to acknowledge that Margery allocates

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<sup>606</sup> *BMK* p. 115.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.* p. 117.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.* p. 116.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.* op. cit.

herself the lion's share of direct speech, her register is more sophisticated. The following examples, found in her direct speech, are arresting: avyse, cawsyd, chargyd, confession, contrary, creaturs, despite, dewly, disciplys, material, matrimony, present, sacrament, veniawnce, vicyows. When reporting events her language is even more exalted: answeryn (twice), artyculys (twice), assessowrys, beleyued, charging, charite, concelyd, counsel, displeyd, enmy, exampyl, excusyd, expedient, expressyd, grace, obediens, plesawns, plesyd, profyth, rebukyd, rehersyd (twice), reprevows, revelacyon, and sacrament. Obviously, her narrative is likely to contain more Latinate words than her direct speech simply because there is more of it, but in conjunction with her direct speech, Margery's vocabulary, whilst not throwing up anything extraordinary here, is still rather articulate; certainly more so than that of the Mayor. The use of 'expedient' is interesting in that it is reasonably late (1398, in Trevisa) but it is difficult to assess whether this is Margery's choice of word, or whether this is an instance of scribal interference. On the other hand, it is equally possible that Margery herself simply wished her readers to gain an impression of the tirades against her, and chose to gloss over the detail. Either way, presumably the finished manuscript had Margery's approval, as it was read back to her by her amanuensis.<sup>611</sup> It is intriguing, however, that in the area of possible interference during this episode, the register noticeably shifts upwards. Moreover, the same word, 'expedient', is used in chapter fifty-four in another instance of condensing the narrative: 'it is not expedient to rehersyn hem'.<sup>612</sup> Nevertheless, the Mayor is utterly subordinated, denied a voice and is presented in a deeply unflattering light. Conversely, Margery is exalted and superior, despite having to humble herself before the abbot, and leaves Leicester in order to obtain a document releasing the Mayor from any lingering responsibility for her. She emerges ultimately triumphantly, but having suffered first.

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<sup>611</sup> '& so he read it ouyr be-forn þis creatur euery word, sche sum-tyme helping where any difficulte was'. *BMK*, p.5.

<sup>612</sup> *BMK*, p. 133.

There is a further example of the St. Katherine analogy being pressed into service during the Leicester episode. We have seen that the Mayor accuses Margery of conspiring to lead an uprising amongst their wives: 'pou art comyn hedyr to han a-wey owr wyuys fro us & ledyn hem wyth þe,'<sup>613</sup> St. Katherine famously converts the wife of Maxientius:

Then the queen, afire with love, hastened at nightfall to the virgin's cell... When the queen entered she saw the cell filled with indescribable brilliance, and angels ministering to the virgin's wounds. Catherine at once began to preach to her about the joys of heaven, converted her to her faith, and predicted a martyr's crown for her.<sup>614</sup>

The notion that Margery attempts to lure women away from their husbands is one that plagues her; she is accused of the same in a subsequent chapter by the suffragan of York:

þu counseledyst my Lady Greystokke to forsakyn hir husbonde, þat is a barownys wife & dowtyr to my Lady of Westmorlonde, & now hast seyð j-now to be brent for.<sup>615</sup>

Margery denies the charge, but it is clear that the authorities consider her to be a threat to conventional religion. Indeed, the Archbishop all but admits that they are somehow intimidated by her: 'I leue þer was neuyr woman in Ingland so ferd wyth-þal as sche is & hath ben'.<sup>616</sup> The suggested method of controlling this is, of course, prison (although on this occasion the Archbishop overrules his suffragan and she is not imprisoned), which allows Margery to ally herself more firmly with the St. Katherine legend, in addition to the association implied by apparently leading women astray. Again, however, the analogy does not quite fit. Lewis claims that 'Margery's unconventional, independent conduct has garnered her something of a

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<sup>613</sup> *BMK*, p. 116.

<sup>614</sup> *The Golden Legend*, p. 337

<sup>615</sup> *BMK*, p. 133.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid*, p.134.

reputation as a marriage wrecker',<sup>617</sup> but this is perhaps overstating the case. Margery's repeated pleas to her husband that they should live chastely perhaps bears out Lewis's thoughts, but Margery's own bargain with John is reached after consensus from both. Canny negotiation on the part of her husband is hardly suggestive of Margery luring women away. After many years of marriage and fourteen children, he finally enters into an agreement, on mutually beneficial terms, that allows Margery control over her own body. Margery's views on the matter of chaste marriages pertain to her own particular circumstances; she does not appear to endorse publicly any view that encourages women to rise up and forsake their husbands, because that would run counter to the doctrine of the church; indeed the church, after some initial caution, tacitly approves of their chaste arrangement:

& so hyr husband cam before þe Bysshop, and þe Bysshop askyd hym, 'Iohn, is it zowr wyl þat zowr wyf xal take þe mantyl & þe ryng & leyn chast, & ze boþen?' '3a, my Lord', he seyde, '& in tokyn þat we boþen vowyn to leue chast her I offryn myn handys in-to zowyr',<sup>618</sup>

The Bishop of Lincoln eventually gives Margery some money with which to buy clothes, and sends them on to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The very fact that their unusual request is not met with an outright refusal suggests that the church is not as inflexible as it might appear, and John Kempe is at pains to point out that this is a carefully considered joint undertaking, even though as husband, he has the authority to overrule Margery. In essence, therefore, it is John who sanctions the agreement, which does not paint a picture of female emancipation.

The charge, therefore, that Margery is apt to lead away men's wives in general and Lady Greystokke in particular, recalling St. Katherine, is not wholly convincing. Margery has St.

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<sup>617</sup> Lewis, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, p. 254.

<sup>618</sup> *BMK*, p. 34.

Katherine's independence and outspokenness, certainly; but she is no radical. She jointly negotiates chastity with her husband before and later gains some sort of recognition from the church. She is the first to protest her innocence over allegations regarding Lady Greystokke, urging the clergy to talk to Lady Greystokke to corroborate her story; St Katherine, however, does not distance herself from the accusation or protest her innocence, but admits her actions by assuring her newly-converted charges that they will find a place in heaven after their deaths. Despite the attraction of acting in a revolutionary manner because that is what saints do, Margery is rather conservative, obtaining her chastity by rather conventional methods (to a daughter of Lynn, at any rate) and then having it legitimized by the authorities. It does not hurt Margery's standing with her readers, however, that they are shepherded towards an association with St. Katherine.

The final possible instance of Margery using the legend of St. Katherine occurs in chapter fifty-three, during one of her spells in prison. She is arrested by the Duke of Bedford's men at Bridlington for being 'þe grettest loller in al þis cuntre',<sup>619</sup> and is met by the men of Beverley who bid her to 'go and spynne & carde as oþer women do'.<sup>620</sup> Having been locked up in the house of the arresting officer, Margery is tended by his wife. Margery spends her time recounting tales at the window to the assembled women below, who 'wept sor & seyde wyth gret heuynes of her hertys, "Alas, woman, why xalt þu be brent?"'<sup>621</sup> Margery complains of thirst, and the wife of the gaoler sets up a ladder to bring her drink. It is impossible to say whether Margery was intending the echo of Christ's final moments on the cross, or whether she is simply recounting the events as they actually occurred; either way, Margery has clearly

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid, p. 129.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid, op cit.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid, pp.130-31.

inspired the women of Beverley to gather at her window and to minister to her needs. Lewis is quick to point out the similarity to St. Katherine:

Margery receives help and support from women. We have already seen that the men of Beverley attempt to turn Margery away from her way of life and towards more acceptable womanly pursuits. The actions of the wives of Beverley here indicate that they had sympathy for Margery's suffering... This episode is redolent of the descriptions of St. Katherine in prison being visited secretly by the Empress, even though her husband has expressly forbidden anyone to enter her cell.<sup>622</sup>

There is certainly something in the argument that Margery subverts the female norm, and it is clear that the (male) clergy find her threatening. However, perhaps all Margery can genuinely lay claim to is independence, although, this itself is seen as transgressive. However, if she had had a less understanding husband, she might not have been able to lay claim even to that. Margery certainly shares some characteristics and circumstances with St. Katherine, and it is enough to persuade the reader that Margery views the saint as an exemplar and put it to use when writing her own experiences.

One of the most fascinating persecution scenes occurs during Margery's visit to York (chapters fifty to fifty-four), and it is an extended recollection of her treatment whilst there. It begins with her being accosted in the Minster by a priest who finds her white clothes troubling, saying: 'Pu wolf, what is þis cloth þat þu hast on?',<sup>623</sup> and ends with two examinations by the Archbishop of York. It is her noisy crying during communion that attracts the attention of a priest, who summons her to his presence in the chapterhouse. Margery evidently draws quite a crowd, but the examination itself is not retold in lingering detail. She repeats orthodox answers to questions concerning the articles of faith, but is nevertheless ordered to appear before the

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<sup>622</sup> Lewis, *The Cult of St. Katherine*, pp. 254-5.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid, p. 120. Windeatt offers an explanation of the term 'wolf': 'Matthew 7:15 ('Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves').

Archbishop of York at Cawood. Her first examination by him, however, is related in some depth, and Margery's language especially, rises to the occasion.

First, however, Margery chastises the Archbishop's men. As is often the case, the priests' words are not reported using direct speech, but by giving an impression of what they said: 'callyng hir "loller" & "heretyke", & sworyn many an horrybyl othe þat sche xulde be brent.'<sup>624</sup> During the persecution process, Margery continues to deny an equal voice to her detractors and appears to paint a vague picture as to what was said on their part. However, it could also be argued that this simply represents some judicious editing by the scribe: the 'many an horrybyl othe' is not expanded upon because, in the scribe's opinion, the sense is clear.

Chapter fifty-two exemplifies the heights to which Margery's language can rise. Firstly, she utters the famous: 'I preche not, ser; I come in no pulpytt. I use but comownycacyon and good wordys'.<sup>625</sup> This is immediately arresting, not least of all for the use of 'comownycacyon', which the MED gives as a first recorded usage. The *Book* is credited with the first record of this word in terms of conversing, or having a conversation. In fact, the *MED* gives four quotations under this headword, and all from this text. Added to this extraordinary usage is the force of the alliteration that accompanies Margery's vigorous denial of Lollardy: it is a powerful piece of writing. She is then examined by the Archbishop and regales him with a tale of a bear, a priest and a pear tree. It represents a considerable proportion of Margery's direct speech, lasting uninterrupted for thirty-nine lines, and within these lines there are forty-six examples of Latinate register. The following is an illustrative selection of words from chapter

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<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

fifty-two, in alphabetical order: abominacyon, absens, amending, comawndmentys, concevyd, contricyon, dampnacion, defowlyn, delectabyl, destroist, destytute, detraccyon, devocyon, devowryd, devowryn, devowryst, devoydyn, disposicyon, enqwiryd, excesse, exampyl, examynd, floresched, florishyng, fortunyd, ministeryng, mysgovernawns, pensife, presens, profite, reheryng, repentawns, reverens, reversyng, sacramentys, sufferawns, and voydyd. Of particular note is delectabyl. Although the *OED* and the *MED* do not agree as to appearance (c.1400 and c.1415 respectively) it is clear that it would have been quite modern. Moreover, absens, destitute, detraccyon, mysgovernawns, and pensife all date from the 1380s and 1390s. Devoyd is even more interesting, as, in this sense (that is, to void excrement) it is the first recorded usage. In the *MED* it is also the only recorded usage. Margery's vocabulary is highly articulate and sophisticated in this extended piece of direct speech, and it needs to be: she is being examined by the second highest church authority in England, and her language is tailored to fit. She places herself above the priests linguistically, who are generally not permitted to speak directly, and the Archbishop commends her story. The wisdom of her tale and the elegance of its telling conspire to elevate Margery's position – and perhaps, once again, recall the legend of St. Katherine.

## VI: Conclusion

Margery's persecutions demonstrate that she is nothing if not entirely conventional in her beliefs. The virgin martyrs, with whom she clearly identifies, found themselves in unorthodox situations with unorthodox (i.e: not Pagan) views; Margery, however, finds herself in unorthodox situations with orthodox views and as such she is never truly in danger and so her beliefs do not represent a threat to social cohesion. St Katherine, like the other virgin martyrs,

was distinguished by her ability to defend a faith that was considered heretical; when examined, Margery defends a faith in which all participants believe, and in which, as we have seen, she is often given the backing of sympathetic clergy. With such support, her position is rather easier to maintain than that of the first Christian martyrs who naturally (and perhaps necessarily) felt the lack of such assistance.

However, Margery did live during a time when the conventional Church was being challenged by the ideas of the Lollards, and the resulting climate of suspicion, together with Margery's sheer visibility, does mean that she faced frightening trials. The persecution that she suffers not only indicates her Christian forbearance but also echoes the suffering of Christ, both of which would have lent her a certain saintly authenticity. She is threatened with burning, is ridiculed by her fellow travellers, receives the gift of tears during her revelatory travels to the Holy Land, and is often vindicated by authority figures to whom she turns for support. Her brushes with the law end satisfactorily in that she is not executed; indeed, she emerges with credibility. She is, therefore, an appealing religious figure: she suffers, but not fatally; her trials are alarming, but she acquits herself with the conviction of St Katherine; she is unconventional enough to rouse suspicion, but has the ability to show her detractors to be less holy than her (they are not pagan, of course, but they are an acceptable substitute); and the derision meted out to her by other pilgrims is countered by a weighty combination of sympathetic authority figures, her own divinely ordained powers of prophesy, and the indisputable sanctity of her tears.

Her use of language, moreover, supports this view. It presents her and her supporters in a favourable manner, whilst the lack of direct speech afforded to her detractors conveys their arguments in rather vague terms. If they are given direct speech, they are quickly overcome by

Margery's own considerable rhetorical powers, which, as we have seen, rises to its greatest heights when placed under considerable pressure: she might not draw on the single, outstanding words that we have seen her utilise in different circumstances ('malefactowrs' and 'malendrynes' come to mind), but her register is one of fluency, articulacy and sophistication. Her smooth and consistent use of Latinate words lend her an almost legalistic air, and her answers are, of course, aided by her highly orthodox views. The imitation of St Katherine, whose intellectual prowess under pressure is one of her stand-out qualities, is surely most in evidence during Margery's trial scenes.

If Margery were setting out her stall for sainthood, the persecution that she experiences, ranging from annoyed travellers to official hearings, goes some way to establishing her as a deserving candidate. The combination of her suffering, divine approval, trials, and the imitation of St Katherine, all underpinned by some of Margery's most impressive and diverse language, surely leaves her readership in no doubt that she was worthy of the cult at St Margaret's Church promised her by Christ: 'and þerfore in þis chirche & in þis place I xal ben worschyped in þe'<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> *BMK*, p. 156.

## Conclusion: St Margery.

The purpose of this thesis has been to analyse the vocabulary and register employed in the *Book of Margery Kempe* and to attempt to discern whether Margery altered register to suit her purpose, which, I argue, ultimately was the formation of a cult as a precursor to sainthood. The argument is that the *Book* can be read as hagiography, albeit one written by the subject, and that the structure, vocabulary and generic conventions which appear in the work adhere to many themes that appear in hagiography.

The Introduction set out the basis for the research of this thesis; that words can be given a broad 'date' of entry into the language through the system of a word's first record used by both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Middle English Dictionary*, and from this one may reasonably deduce to what register a word belongs: later importations from Latin and French are more elevated than those deriving from Old English. The limitations of this system were also discussed, including the occasional fallibility of the *OED*, and the obvious fact that point of spoken entry and point of written entry will necessarily always be adrift from each other. By analysing the words used in speeches and passages in the *Book*, however, we would be able to gain a sense of whether Margery were attempting to manipulate register in order to present herself and her sympathisers in a more attractive light, together with examining the effects that such a manipulation might have on other individuals that appear in the *Book*, including Christ himself and the Virgin Mary. The ultimate aim is to deduce whether Margery was attempting a self-penned vita, a well-worn line of scholastic enquiry, but not one that has been tackled from so linguistic a viewpoint.

The first chapter situated Margery in her social and cultural setting of medieval King's Lynn, a centre of trade and commerce, and a place of remarkable economic prosperity. As daughter

of the five-times mayor, Margery became acculturated to a certain social standing within the town, and a certain standard of living. Norfolk was, moreover, a place of hugely diverse religious practices, and Lynn itself was well-provisioned; we are able to speculate as to what her relationships were like with these various religious orders. By situating Margery in the ecclesiastical context of the medieval world, including discussions on monasteries, convents, and the mendicant orders of Lynn, we not only gain an overall impression in microcosm of medieval religion and its practices and conventions, but we also understand the ways in which and the extent to which Margery both conformed to and deviated from these. This notion is continued in the second chapter, which sought to situate Margery in the context of female spirituality, focusing particularly on the Beguines, the tertiaries and rise of lay female spirituality. These opening two chapters which place Margery in a variety of contexts - social, cultural, ecclesiastical and theological – provide the necessary prelude to the more literary and linguistic focus of the remainder of the thesis.

The remainder of the thesis analysed the vocabulary of the *Book* and the literary conventions it deploys, focusing its discussion around four related and interconnected themes or ideas. In the vocabulary that she ascribes to Christ, we see a lexis that is highly localised, unpretentious and readily accessible; a perfect lexis for the ultimate everyman figure. In her dealings with the Virgin Mary we see a register that is markedly low, perhaps befitting her modesty and humility, but when viewed in conjunction with Margery's attention-seeking behaviour, suggests a subtle but sustained undermining on Margery's part. Margery's obsession with her lack of virginity sees her redefine her image as a reclaimed virgin, being addressed as the ambiguous 'damsel', and therefore equal to the virgin martyrs in their status in heaven. Finally, the persecution that Margery undergoes adheres to the *imitatio Christi*, and is suggestive of St Katherine of

Alexandria, and illustrates her abilities to defend herself with articulacy, assuredness, and orthodoxy.

The findings of these chapters suggest that Margery consciously altered her vocabulary when describing certain subjects or people, mostly to benefit herself; that she deliberately emulated the vitae of saints, and that she purposefully called to mind the numerous religious women, both lay and canonical saints, in whose footsteps she walked. In short, she has written a vita for herself, in which her carefully selected vocabulary and lexis play a vital part in persuading the reader of her credibility. It is my opinion that, had Margery lived a century earlier and been Italian, her chances of success may have increased.

There are, of course, limitations to undertaking a thesis. In this case, it became increasingly apparent that it was simply unfeasible to analyse every passage in the work with the same level of scrutiny and the same attention to detail. I have, therefore, had to be selective, and it must be acknowledged that there are numerous other sections in the *Book* that are worthy of this kind of linguistic examination that have not been included. There is, therefore, scope here for future academic study, particularly of an even more intensely linguistic nature; the sophistication of the vocabulary of the *Book* is at times startling, especially considering the fact that Margery lived in the later medieval period and the novelty of Latinate and French imports had somewhat worn off.

The limiting factor of first recorded usage was acknowledged from the start (first record is by no means first utterance), but I maintain that it provides a very sensible 'rule of thumb', especially on the occasions when the *OED* and *MED* differed; the earliest record was used. Finally, the perennial controversy over the extent of scribal interference means that it could be

very easy to ascribe the more elevated words to the educated priest who assisted Margery in her composition. I feel, however, that this would be a major injustice and even something of an insult to Margery, whose character and voice are the overriding presence in the *Book*, especially when priestly interruptions are clearly signposted. Although I do not believe that Margery was a great visionary mystic, a claim supported by the paucity of contemplative analysis that follows her visions, she had an education in religious writings and a knowledge of the saints, scripture and the holy women of the preceding centuries. She lived a life that, to an extent, imitated the lives of these women, and she wrote her *Book*, which she claimed was divinely instructed, as a means of drawing attention to her extraordinary life. It is entirely probable that she understood the shape and content of such works, and replicated these in her *Book*. The erratic organisation of her work, moreover, is highly suggestive of a recall of a lifetime of memories without intervention.

Margery Kempe continues to defy categorisation. She is too English to be elegantly grouped with the Continental females, but too Continental to be wholly accepted and tolerated in England. She is often unaccompanied, arousing suspicion, and she is not meek enough to allow transgressions on the part of others to go unchecked, precipitating accusations of Lollardy. She is courageous in the demonstration of her devotion in the face of persecution, but her devotions are somewhat fixated on herself: modesty is never her forte, despite identifying herself as a mere 'creatur'. She performs miracles, and is called upon to intercede for others. Her visions are homely, literal and simply rendered, quite unlike the complex visions of other medieval mystics with their accompanying exegeses; but she is nevertheless a hugely appealing and intensely human religious woman, who is adept at demonstrating that one does not need to be a saint to be considered saintly; all of this has been stated before, and far more elegantly than here.

It is, however, in the close analysis of the vocabulary that we discern something different. Her linguistic subtlety illustrates that she is unquestionably manipulating register in order to bolster her campaign for sainthood. Through language, she is able to undermine the Virgin Mary (but not so that one would notice), portray the closeness and intensity of her relationship with Christ (without rousing too much suspicion), present herself as a credible virgin despite being a married mother of fourteen, and provide herself with a martyrdom through slander, whilst avoiding the uncomfortable reality of martyrdom. Margery sets out her stall for a cult or sainthood, achieving and emulating the characteristics of the virgin martyrs, married lay women and even the Virgin Mary on an easily appreciable macro level; but the intricacy and artistry of her *persuasion* and her *plausibility* as a potential candidate for sainthood (as defined by the medieval church) is revealed on a micro level. It is only through a meticulous analysis of the language of the *Book of Margery Kempe* that we can begin to appreciate the depth of her understanding of hagiography as a genre and herself as a writer.

## Appendix

The comprehensive table contained within this appendix constitutes the original research undertaken for this thesis. For this reason, it would be helpful at this juncture to provide some explanatory notes on the methodology and approaches used. The etymology of the words of the *Book of Margery Kempe* have been looked up in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and where necessary, cross-referenced with the *Middle English Dictionary*.

As the vocabulary of Middle English expanded to accommodate loans from Latin and French it gave rise to growth and the opportunity to integrate these 'novelty' words into speech or writing, producing different effects. The latter is of particular relevance to this study, as it is the philosophy and practice of the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* to provide contextualising quotations for each definition of an individual word. It is possible, therefore, broadly to 'date' a word through its earliest recorded usage, and then ascribe a register to it; newer, Latinate words arguably provide a scholarly, authoritative tone. The weaknesses of this system have been explained above in the Introduction to this thesis, but the system remains a robust guide or rule of thumb when considering the length of time a particular word might have been in the language.

The rationale for using register as the basis for this inquiry is that, arguably, it provides firm linguistic evidence for lexical manipulation, rather than theoretical supposition. I have suggested that the choice of vocabulary can be used to determine the relative statuses of characters within the *Book*, and that a vocabulary that is mostly French and Latinate in terms of its origins, as well as containing relatively recent coinages, could be indicative of a character that Margery wishes to appear at some advantage. I work on the principle that words of Old

English origin or naturalised French importations (for instance words that entered the language in the twelfth century, and therefore had already enjoyed around three hundred years in English by c.1438) characterise a simple register that could communicate humility or lowly status. Later French importations and words derived from Latin would indicate a more sophisticated, broader vocabulary, and may therefore suggest a higher status; words from c.1400 I consider to be particularly sophisticated.

The three columns indicate the word, its language of origin and finally, its date of record and any interesting detail. Words have been highlighted in yellow if they hail from the 1400s; in purple if the word is a first recorded usage with no listing in the *MED*; in green if they are cited in the *MED* only with no citation in the *OED*; in pink if there is mismatch between dates of record between the *OED* and *MED*; in blue if the *OED* and *MED* agree as to a first recorded usage; in orange if neither dictionary lists them; in turquoise if the word already existed, but the *Book* has a first usage of a new definition; and in red if they are both incorrect. It is worth mentioning that a date given may not be the first date given by a dictionary, but the first date for that particular sense of a word. There are also many, many instances where the more 'straightforward' word (a noun, for example) has a later recorded entry than its associated adverb, which can be somewhat surprising. It is hoped, however, that the appendix may prove to be of some usefulness to future scholars of Margery Kempe's language.

Word	Derivation	Date/Notes
<b>A</b>		
Abakke	OE	Pre 1200
Abaschyd	AF, from OF esbaiss	c.1303
Abauyd	OF abaubir	
Abedyn	OE abidan	
Abhominacyon	OF abomination	c. 1350
Abhomynabyl	OF abominable	1340
A-bouen	OE abufan	
Abowtyn	OE abutan	c.1000
Abrode	OE	
Absens	OF absence	c.1384
Absteyne	OF abstenir	c.1380
Abstinens	OF abstinence	1340
Abundawnt	OF Abundant	a.1382
Abydyn	OE	
Abyte (clothing)	OF habit	?c.1225
Acceptabyl	L acceptare; OF accepter. Parallel borrowing.	c.1380
Accessys (illness or disease)	OF access	c.1300
Accusyng	OE via L	
Accordyn	OF acorder	c.1275
Actual	OF actuel	Pre 1398
Addyd	L addere	a.1382
Adversyte	AN, MF adversite	?c.1225
Afeerd	OE	
Affectyd (disposed, inclined)	OF affecter; L affectare	a.1425
Affecyon	OF affection	?c.1225
Aforden	OE	
Afornoon	OE	
Afornseyd	OE	

Afortyme	OE	
Afrayd	AN	c.1350
Aftyр	OE	
Aftyрnone	OE	
Afterward	OE	
Age	AN aege	c.1275
Agyd	AN aege + ed suffix	1420
A-geyn	OE	
Aknowyn	OE	
Alas	AN allas; OF ha, las!	?c.1225
Alderman	OE	
Ale	OE	
Algatys	Probably Scandinavian, cf OI alla gotu	a.1325
Alienyd	AN aliener	c.1350
Alle	OE	
Almes	OE	
Almes-3euyng	OE	First recorded in <i>OED</i> ; not in <i>MED</i>
Almygthy	OE	
Aloone	OE	
Also	ME form of OE eal swa	
Altogedyr	OE	
Alwey	OE	
Alych	OE	
Alyon	OF alien	Pre-1338
Amende	OF amender	Pre-1200
Amerueylyd	AN amervailer	c.1330
Among	OE	
Amyable	OF amiable	c.1374
Amys	OE a + miss	c.1250
Anemst	OE	
Anethe (hardly)	OE	
Angrily	ON angr + suffix	1393

Angwish	OF anguisse	c.1220
Angyr	ON angr	a.1325
Ankrys	OE ancra + Fr ess	
Ankres	OE	
Annexid	OF annexer (join two things together)	1425
A-noon	OE	
Annoyed	OF anoier	a.1300
Anoyntyn	OF enoint	1303
Answer	ME andswere, dev. From OE onswere	
Any	OE	
Apayd	OF apayer	a.1250
Apertly	OF Apert + ly	1297
Aperyn	OF apareir. Here: to present oneself formally.	1330
Aport	OF apporter	a.1423
Apostelys	OE	
Apreuyd	OF aprover	c.1340
Apropyd	OF apropier	a.1325
Aqwityn	OF acquitter	?c.1225
Aray	OF arei	Pre-1338
Archawngyl	OF Archangel (replaced OE heah-engel)	Pre-1200
Archbysshops	OE	
Ardowr	OF ardour	c.1386
Arectyd	OF aretter	c.1350
Aresond	AF aresun	c.1300
Arestyd	OF areter (here: to arrest for crime)	1425
Arme	OE	
Armyd	OF arme	1297
Artyculys	AN article	?c.1225
Arwys	OE	
As	OE	
Asayd	OF assai	1330
Aschamyd	OE	
Aseeth	OF asset	1340
Askyn	OE	
Asoyled	OF assoille	1297
Aspyin	OF espier	1330

Asse	OE	
Assent	OF assenter	c.1300
Assessowrys	OF assesow	1387
As-swythe	OE (qualifies verb – greatly, very much)	
Assygnyd	OF assigner	c.1300
Astoyned	OF estoner	Pre 1300
Asundyr	OE	
Ateyn	OF ataign	Pre-1300
Athryste (thirst)	OE	c.1305
Attend	OF atendre	Pre-1325
Attyd (of a charge, admitted as evidence)	Of uncertain origin	Not in <i>OED</i> ; <i>MED</i> solely cites <i>BMK</i> .
Auctoryte	OF autorite	Pre-1200
Audience	OF audience	Pre -387
Auoket	OF from Latin advocatus	1340
Autorys	AN auctour	a.1382
Avayled	OF vail	c.1384
Avow	OF avoer	Pre-1300
A-vowte	OF avouterier	1366
Avoydyn	OF esuidier	Pre-1325
Avysement	OF aviser	1330
A-warde	OF ewart	1330
Awey	OE	
Awngel	OE engel and L angelus	
Awonderyd	OE	
Awter	OE from L	
<b>B</b>		
Babyl (metal tip of a lash)	OF bober?	c.1390 <i>MED</i> ; not cited <i>OED</i> .
Bachelor	OF bachelor	c.1300
Bad	OE	
Bak	OE	
Bakbytyng	OE compound	
Bakward	OE	
Baleys	OF balei	1259
Baly	OF bailiff	c.1242
Bannars (a swearer, curser)	From OE ban (verb)	<i>OED</i> c.1440; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first usage.
Bannyd	OE	a.1275

Bare	OE	
Bareyn	OF barain	In a sense of empty: a.1387
Bar-foot	OE	
Bar-legge	OE	
Baselaard-knyfe	AF baselard	1377
Bataylys	OF bataille	c.1250
Bathyd	OE	
Becawse	ME	c.1375
Becomyn	OE	
Beddyng	OE	
Beddys	OE	
Bedred	OE	
Bedys (prayers)	OE	
Befallen	OE	
Befor	OE	
Began	OE	
Begetyng	OE	
Bezonden	OE	
Beheldyn	OE	
Behestys	OE	
Beholdyn	OE	
Behyte	OE	
Belevyn	OE	
Belouyd	OE	
Belschyd	OF embelliss	c.1340
Belwys	OE	
Ben	OE	
Benchys	OE	
Benedicite	L	1377
Benefetys	OF bienfait	1376
Benefys	OF benefice	c.1340
Benefysyd (verb)	OF see above	c.1425
Beneuolens	OF benevolence	c.1400
Benyngly	OF benigne + OE ly	c.1380
Beqwethyn	OE	
Berd	OE	
Bere (bear)	OE	
Bere (beer)	OE	
Berm	OE	

Berne	OE	
Beryn	OE	
Besche	OE	
Best (beast)	OF	Pre-1200
Best	OE	
Besy	OE	
Besyly	OE	
Besynes	OE	
Betokenyth	OE	
Betyr	OE	
Betyn	OE	
Bewreyn	OE	
Bewte	OF biaute	Pre-1325
Birth	ON byrð	c.1200
Bittyр	OE	
Bityn	OE	
Blaberyd	ME; cf ON blabbra	1362
Blak	OE	
Blamyn	OF blameer	Pre-1200
Bledyng	OE	
Blissyn	OE	
Blo (lead coloured)	ON bla	
Bloberys (pustules/bubbles) noun.	Probably imitative, although similar words found in Swedish and Danish	<i>OED</i> cites 1481 and not for pustules at all; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> .
Blomys	ME blom; cf ON blóm	c.1200
Blood	OE	
Bloweth	OE	
Blynd	OE	
Blyndnes	OE	
Blysfyl	OE	
Blyssyd	OE	
Blyssyng	OE	
Bobyng	ME boben; uncertain; onomatopoeic?	1280
Bode	OE	
Body	OE	
Bodyly	OE	
Bodyn	OE	
Bofetyng	OF buffet	Pre-1200

Bold	OE	
Boldenes	OE	
Boldly	OE	
Bolendyns (a silver coin of Bologna)	Italian: bolognino	Not cited in <i>OED</i> ; <i>BMK</i> is earliest citation in <i>MED</i> .
Bolful	OE bolla	
Bond	OE	
Bone	OI	c.1350
Bonyr (obendient)	OF bonnaire	a.1400
Bood (abode)	OE	
Booke	OE	
Boorde	OE	
Boot (boat)	OE	
Born	OE	
Borwe	OE	
Bosom	OE	
Bost	AF bost	1265
Bot (bite)	OE	
Bote (remedy)		
Botel	OF bouteille	1346 (in this form)
Botery	OF boterie; L botaria	1389
Bothe	OE	
Bottumless	OE	
Bow	OE	
Bownde (bind)	OE	
Boystows	Uncertain	c.1300
Boystowsly	See boystows	
Boystowsnes	See boystows	
Brakys	Variant of braken; Sc. source	Pre-1325
Bred	OE	
Brekyn	OE	
Brennyng	OE	
Brest	OE	
Brestyn	OE	
Bresyd	AF and OE brysan	Pre-1200
Bretheryn	OE	
Brewers	OE	
Brewyn	OE	
Bropel (wretch, scoundrel)	OE	1393

Broþer	OE	
Browt	OE	
Bryd	OE brid. Uncertain origin.	
Brygth	OE	
Bryngyn	OE	
Burgeys	OF burgeis	c.1225
Buschel	OF boissel	c.1330
Buxom	OE	
Byddyng	OE	
Byen	OE	
Byrth	ME forms influenced by and perhaps borrowed from Scandinavian source (OI burther), that affected the OE gebyrd.	
Bysshops	OE	
Byttyr	See bitter	
<b>C</b>		
Cake	Scandinavian OI kaka	c.1200
Callyd	OE	
Calm	OF calme, Italian calma	1380
Cam	OE cuman	
Candel	OE	
Candel-lygth	OE (interestingly, an OE borrowing from Latin candela)	
Canon	OE; Late Latin canon.	
Canonysed	OF canoniisier	c.1384
Canwas	AF canevas	1354
Carde	MF carte	Pre-1425
Cardiakyl	Med L cardiaca	a.1398
Careful	OE	
Carrijd	AF carier	Pre-1338
cartful	On kartr +ful	1200
Caryage	AF carriage	Pre-1387
Cas	OF cas	Pre-1250
Cast	ON kasta	c.1200
Castyn	ON kasta	Pre-1200
Casualy	OF casuel; L casulais	c.1384
Catel	ONF catel; ME catel	c.1275
Cause	OF course	Pre-1200

Cawdel	ONF caudel	1297
Caytyf	ONF caitiff	c.1300
Certeyn	OF certain	Pre-1300
Certyfin	OF certifier	Pre-1338
Cesyn	ME cesse; F cesser	c.1320
Chalengyn	OF chalengier	c.1225
Chalys	AF chalice	Pre-1325
Chanel	OF chanel	Pre-1325
Chapel	OF chapel	c.1200
Chapetre	OF chapitre	Pre-1200
Chapmen	OE	
Chargyd	OF chargier	Pre.1250
Charyte	ONF caritedh	1154
Charytefully	ONF caritedh	Not listed in <i>OED</i> ; <i>MED</i> 1435
Chast	OF chaste	Pre-1200
Chastysyng	OF chastier	c.1303
Chastyte	OF chastete	Pre-1200
Chawmbyr	OF chamber	Pre-1200
Chawngyng	OF changer	c.1225
Cheden	OE (not known in other Teut. languages)	
Chefsyawns (chevisance)	OF chever	1393
Chekys	OE	
Chenys	OF chaeine	Pre-1300
Cherche	OE	
Cherch-3erd	OE	c.1137
Cher	OF chiere	Pre-1200
Chere (the face)	OF chiere	1225
Cherschyd	OF cheriss	Pre-1325
Chesely (pebbles)	OE	
Choppyng	OE	
Chyld	OE	
Chyldyng	OE + ing	
Chyst	OE	
Clad	OE	
Clef	OE	
Cler	OF cler	c.1280

Clerkys	In part developed from OE cleric; in part borrowed from OF clerc.	
Clemyd	OF claime	Pre-1325
Clene (entirely)	OE	
Clennesse	OE	
Clepyn	OE	
Clok	ONF cloque	1293
Closyd	OF clos	1275
Cloth	OE	
Clothyn	OE	
Clowtys (patches)	OE	
Clowde	OE	
Cloyster	OF cloister	Pre-1225
Colde	OE	
Collar	AF color	1300
Colowr	OF color, couleur	1398
Comawndyd	OF comander	c.1330
Comawndmentys	OF commander	c.1325
Comenawnt	OF covenant	c.1300
Comendyn	OF commander; L commandire	a.1340
Comfort	OF cunfort	c.1225
Comfortabyl (mental or spiritual delight)	An comfortable	a.1340
Comfortyn	OF comforter	c.1225
Commendacyon	OF commendation	c.1225
Communycacyon	AN+ MF comunicacioun	1382; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first under 1c.
Comownd	OF comuner	a.1393
Company	OF campaigner	c.1340
Comparison	OF comparaison	1340
Compassyon	OF compassion	1340
Compassyf (affectionate, compassionate)	Med L compass +ive	<i>OED</i> cites 1612; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first.
Compassyfly	Med L compassion + ly	Not in <i>OED</i> ; sole citation in <i>MED</i> .
Compellyd	OF compeller	c.1380
Compellyng	OF compeller	c.1350
Complexion	OF complexion	1386
Compleyned	OF complain	c.1370

Compleynt	OF complain	c.1384
Compunccyon	OF compunction	c.1340
Comyn	OE	
Conselyd	OF concele	1292
Conceyued	OF conceveir	1340
Concludyn	L concludere	c.1386
Concowrs	OF concours	1382
Condemnyd	OF condemner	c.1300
Condycyon	OF condicion	1315
Confermyn	OF conferme	c.1300
Confessyon	OF confession	c.1378
Confessor	OF confessor	c.1200
Confidens	L confidential	c.1430
Confowndyng	OF confound	c.1300
Confusyd	OF confondre	c.1330
Concyens	OF conscience	c.1225
Conseive	OF conceveir	c.1200
Conselyd	OF conseil	Pre-1200
Consentyn	OF consenter	c.1380
Consolacyon	OF consolation	c.1374
Constreyne	OF constreindre	c.1386
Consumyd	AN+OF consumer	c.1398
Consyderyng (taking into account)	OF considerer	c.1405
Contemplacyon	OF contemplation	?c.1225
Contemptibly (adv.)	L contemptibilis	<i>OED</i> 1586; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i>
Contenawns	OF countenance	c.1290
Conent	OF conent	c.1400
Continent	OF continent	1387
Continue	OF continuer	1340
Contarye	OF contrarie	1340
Contraryen	OF contrarie + ing	a.1340
Contrayows	OF contrarios	1340
Contres	OF contree	Pre-1250
Contriuyd	OF controver	c.1330
Contricyon	OF contricioun	a.1300
Contrite	OF contrite	1340
Contynuly	OF continuer	c.1303
Convent	AF covent	c.1300

Convenyens/convenient	L convenient	1374
Conversacyon	OF conversation	1340
Conversant	OF conversant	c.1390
Conversyon	OF conversion	a.1340
Conveyed	OF conveyer	1300
Coost (district)	OF coste	c.1330
Copyn	OF copie	Pre-1338
Corn	OE	
Corown	AF coroune	1325
Correccyon	AF correction	1340
Cors	OF cors	1300
Costage	OF coustage	1327
Cosyn	OF cusin	1300
Cotidianly	Partly OF; partly L	<i>OED</i> and <i>MED</i> : first recorded usage
Coueyt	OF coveiter	1325
Coueytise	OF coveitus	c.1300
Cowardyse	OF couardise	Pre-1300
Cowche (meaning hump)	OF couche	Not listed in <i>OED</i> ; <i>MED</i> sole citation of <i>BMK</i> .
Cowd	OE	
Cownsel	OF conseil	?c.1225
Cownsel	OF conseil	?c.1225
Cowrs	OF cors	1300
Craft (applied to boats)	OE	<i>OED</i> acknowledges usage before print; first citation 1671
Craske	OI karskr	<i>OED</i> c.1440; <i>MED</i> 1300
Creatur	OF creatur	c.1300
Credens	ML credential	c.1338
Cristal	OF cristal	c.1300
Crist	OE; Gr christos; L Christ	
Cristen	OE	
Cristmes	Late OE	
Cross	Late OE, from Latin. Replaced rood.	
Cross-staf	Cross + staff	<i>OED</i> a.1464; not cited in <i>MED</i> .
Crucified	OF crucifier	1300
Cruel	OF cruel	1297
Cruelly	OF cruel	1340

Crumme	OE	
Cryed	OF crier	Pre-1200
Crybbe	OE	
Crystendom	OE	
Cun (can)	OE	
Cunning	OE cunnan, but 'cunning' not found in OE.	c.1325.
Cuntreman	OE man + OF cuntre	c.1305
Cuppe	OE	
Curat	OF cure	c.1340
Cure	OF cure	c.1300
Cursyd	OE	
Cursydly	OE	c.1386
Cursydnes	OE	c.1303
Cursyng	OE	
Curtesy	OF cortesie	c.1225
Cuschyn	OF coissin	c.1340
Custom	OF custume	c.1200
Cyte	OF cite	c.1225
<b>D</b>		
Daggyd	Uncertain origin	1399
Daggys	Uncertain origin	1386
Dalyawns (as a conversation)	OF + AN, but not recorded	c.1400
Dalyid	OF dallier	c.1300
Dame	OF dame	Pre-1200
Dampnyd	OF	
Damsel	OF dameisele	c.1225
Dar	OE	
Dawnger	OF dangier	c.1290
Dawnsyn	OF dancier	Pre-1300
Dawtyr	OE	
Day	OE	
Daylyth	OE	
Deceytys	OF deceite	Pre-1300
Deceyuabyl	OF deceiveir	
Decyuyn	OF deceiver	c.1315
Declaryd	OF declarer	c.1330
Ded	OE	
Dede	OE	

Dedys	OE	
Dedicate	L dedicarus	c.1386
Deedly	OE	
Deel	OE	
Defamyn	OF defamer	c.1303
Defawt	OF defaute	a.1300
Defendyn	OF defendre	c.1250
Deferryd	OF differer	c.1382
Defiling	OF defouler	c.1280
Defowl	OF defouler	c.1290
Defrawdyd	OF defrauder	Pre-1376
Degree	OF degre	c.1230
Delayd	OF delayer	Pre-1300
Delectabyl		
Delectably	OF delectable	Pre-1396
Delectacyon	OF delectation	1382
Delicyows	OF delicious	Pre-1300
Delyuyr	OF deliverer	1300
Demawndys	OF demande	c.1280
Demendyd	OF demener	Pre-1300
Demyng	OE	
Denyin	OF deneier	c.1340
Departyn	OF departir	c.1250
Depe	OE	
Dere	OE	
Derkys	OE	
Derly	OE	
Derlyng	OE	
Derogation	L derogationem; OF dérogation	<i>OED</i> c.1450; <i>MED</i> 1422
Deryn (harm, injure)	OE	
Deworthy	OE	
Deseruyn	OF deserver	c.1225
Desir	OF desirer	c.1200
Despisyn	OF despis	Pre-1300
Despised	OF despise	Pre-1300
Despite	OF despit	Pre-1300
Destroist	OF destruiere	1297
Destitute	L destitutus	c.1384
Desyr	OF desirer	c.1230

Desyryng	OF desirer	c.1386
Deth	OE	
Detraccyon	OF detraction	1340
Detractorys	OF detracteur	c.1384
Devotion	OF devocion	c.1225
Devowryn	OF devorer	Pre-1333
Devowt	OF devot	c.1225
Deuel	OE	
Deuer	OF deveir (obs ME form of devoir)	c.1300
Dew	OF deu	c.1350
Dewly	OF deu	
Deyd	ON deyja	c.1300
Deyneth	OF degnier	
Deynte	OF deintié	a.1250
Difficulte	OF difficulte	1380
Digestion	OF digestion	c.1386
Diligence	OF diligence	1340
Disceyuen	See deceiven	
Dischargyf	OF deschargier	Pre-1338
Disciplys	OE (borrowed from L)	
Discre	OF decreis	c.1383
Discrete (judicious)	MF discrete; L discretus	1386-7
Discuryng (disclosing)	OF discover	c.1330
Disdeynyst	OF desdeignier	c.1380
Disease	See dysese	
Dispensacyon	OF dispensation	c.1380
Dispense	OF dispenser	c.1380
Dispeyrin	See dyspeyrin	
Displesawns	OF displaisance	c.1340
Displesyn	OF desplais	c.1350
Disposicyon	OF disposicion	c.1380
Disposyd	See dysposed	1375
Disprauyd	L depraverer	c.1362
Dispysed	See dyspysed	
Dissese	See dysese	
Dissolute	L dissolutus	Pre-1382
Distawnce	OF distance	c.1300
Distress	OF destresse	c.1280
Distrawt	Modification of L distractus	1393

Diswer	Dis + were. Uncertain, but possible variant of war.	Not listed in <i>OED</i> ; first citation in <i>MED</i> .
Diwers	OF divers	c.1275
Do	OE	
Doctowr	OF doctor	c.1303
Doers	OE + er	c.1380
Dogge	OE	
Dom	OE	
Doolful	OF doel	Pre-1300
Dore	OE	
Dowe	OE	
Down	OE	
Dowt	OF douter	Pre-1220
Dowtyr	OE	
Drank/Dranke	See drynken	
Drawyn	OE	
Drawt	OE	
Drede	OE	
Dredful	OE	
Dreue	See dryuyn	
Drewyn	See drawyn	
Drofe	See dryuyn	
Dronkyn	See drynkyn	
Dryen	OE	
Drynch	OE	
Drynke	OE	
Drynkyn	OE	
Dryuyn	OE	
Dubbyl	OF duble	Pre-1200
Duffehows	Dove + house	<i>OED</i> lists earliest as 14...; <i>MED</i> lists as 1299
Durst	OE	
Duryn	OF edurer	c.1386
During	OF dure	1398
Dwellyng	OE	
Dyfferryd	OF differer	c.1393
Dyne	OF disner	c.1297
Dyner	OF diner	c.1297
Dyocyse	OF diocese	c.1390
Dyppe	OE	

Dyrke	OE	
Dyrknes	OE	
Dys-ewsyd (be unaccustomed to)	OF desuser	<i>OED</i> cites 1530; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first.
Dyseve	See deceive	
Dyscrecyon	OF discrecion	c.1340
Dyscyples	See disciplys	
Dysese	OF desaise	Pre-1398
Dyspered	OF despair	c.1340
Dyspite	See despite	
Dyspleysed	See displesyn	
Dysposycionys	See disposicyon	
Dysposed	See disposyn	1375
Dysposyd	OF disposer	c.1373
Dyspysed	See despisyn	
Dysseyt	See deceit	
Dyuers	OF divers	
Dyuynyte	OF devin + ite	
<b>E</b>		
Ech	OE	
Eer	OE	
Eete	OE	
Effect	AN effecte	c.1391
Eftsonys	OE	
Eld	OE	
Eldmodyr		
Eelys	OE	
Enchewyn	OF eschivier	c.1375
Enclyne	OF encliner	c.1305
Encres	OF encreis	c.1380
Ende	OE	
Endless	OE	
Endlessly	OE	c.1400
Enduryn	OF endure	1382
Endyng	OE	
Enformyn	OF enformer	c.1330
Enioyin	OF enjoyer	c.1380
Enmys	OF enemie	c.1340
Enmyte	OF ememistie	c.1300

Enqwiryd	OF enquerer	c.1290
Enspyr	OF enspirer	c.1386
Entent	OF entent	Pre-1200
Ententyd (pay attention)	OF entender	Not cited in <i>OED</i> ; <i>MED</i> a.1425
Enterly	OF entire +ly	a.1340
Entren	OF entrer	c.1250
Entysyng	OF enticier	c.1340
Envye	OF envie	c.1280
Enuyows	OF envious	c.1300
Enyoyid	See enioyin	
Eqwal	OF equal	c.1393
Er	OE	
Eraend	OE	
Erbe	OF erbe	c.1290
Erber	OF erbier	c.1325
Erde	OE	
Erdene	OE	
Erdly	OE	
Erly	OE	
Ermyte	OF (h)ermite	c.1300
Ernest	OE	
Ernest-peny	OF + OE	First recorded usage in <i>OED</i> ; not cited in <i>MED</i> .
Erroneows	OF erroneous	c.1400
Errowr	OF error	c.1320
Erthe	OE	
Ese	OF eise	c.1225
Easement	OF aosement	c.1386
Esy	OF aiser	Pre-1200
Esyly	OF aiser	c.1300
Etyn	OE	
Etyng	OE	
Evenyng	OE	
Euery	OE	
Euery-deel	OE	
Euyl	OE	
Euyñ	OE	
Euynsong	OE	
Euyr	OE	

Euyr-lestyng	Ever+lasting	c.1340
Euerlestyngly	OE	<i>OED</i> cites c.1450; <i>MED</i> c.1390
Euyr-mor	OE	
Ex	OE	
Exaltyd	MF exulter; L exultare	<i>OED</i> cites 1570; <i>MED</i> c.1425
Exampyl	OF	1382
Examply	OF example	Pre-1250
Examyn	OF examiner	c.1303
Examynacyon	OF examination	c.1390
Excellent	OF excellent	Pre-1349
Excersyse	OF exercice	c.1340
Excesse	OF exces	Pre-1382
Excludyn	L excludere	c.1382
Escusyn	OF escuser	c.1225
Execucyon	OF execution	c.1385
Exhortacyons	OF exhortation	c.1384
Expedient	OF expedient	1398
Experiens	OF experience	c.1378
Expert	OF expert	c.1384
Expleyntyng	L explanare	<i>OED</i> cites a.1586; <i>MED</i> c.1425
Expressen	OF expres	1382
Expressyn	OF expres	1382
Eye	OE	
Eye-leds	OE	Pre-1325
Eyn	OE	
Eyr	OE	
Eyr (air)	OF air	c.1225
Eyr (heir)	OF hoir	c.1225
Eyþyr	OE	
<b>F</b>		
Face	OF	Pre-1300
Fadom	OE	
Fadyr	OE	
Fagot	OF fagot	c.1312
Fallyn	OE	
Fallyng	OE	
Fals	OE	

Falshede	ME	c.1300
Falsly	OE	
Famows	OF fameus	c.1380
Famynyng	OF afarmer	Pre-1400
Fantasijs	OF fantasie	c.1350
Faryn	OE	
Fast	OE	
Fastyn	OE	
Fastyngs	OE	
Faueryd	OF favour	Pre-1300
Fayorabyl	OF favourable	Pre-1376
Fauowr	OF favour	Pre-1300
Fawt	OF faulte	c.1280
Fawyn	OE	
Faylyn	OF faillir	Pre-1200
Fayn	OE	
Fayr	OE	
Faith	OF feit	c.1250 as noun; first recorded usage as a verb.
Febyl	OF fieble	
Fed	OE	
Fedir	OE	
Feer	OE	
Feerdnes	OE	
Feet	OE	
Feithyn	OF feit	c.1250
Feithyn	OF feit	c.1250
Fel	OE	
Felaw	OE	
Felawschep	OE	
Feld	OE	
Fellyn	OE	
Felyn	OE	
Felt	OE	
Felyng	OE	
Fer	OE	
Fer	OE	
Ferd	OE	
Ferthermore	OE	

Feruent	OF fervent	c.1340
Feruably	OF fervent	c.1340
Festenyd	OE	
Fet	OE	
Feteryd	OE	
Feterys	OE	
Fettyn	OE	
Feturyd	OF feture	c.1375
Fewe	OE	
Feyt	OF faint	Pre-1300
Feynyd	OF feign	c.1300
Fifth	OE	
Fille	OE	
Filth	OE	
Fisch-day	OE	a.1327
Fischys	OE	
Flakys	OE	
Flateryng	OF flater	Pre-1200
Flawme	OF flame	c.1303
Flayn	OE	
Fle	OE	
Flesch	OE	
Fleschly	OE	
Flood	OE	
Floreschyd	OF floriss	Pre-1300
Florischyng	OF floriss + ing	c.1303
Floweryng	OF flor	Pre-1200
Flowyn	OE	
Flowyr	OF flor	Pre-1200
Flying	OE	
Flyx	OF flux	c.1350
Fode	OE	
Folke	OE	
Folwyn	OE	
Folwyng	OE	
Foly	OF fol	Pre-1200
Fond	OE	
Foot	OE	
For	OE	

Forbedith	OE	
Forberyn	OE	
Forzefe	OE	
Forzetyn	OE	
Forzeuenes	OE	
Forzouyn	OE	
Forgetyn	OE	
Forme	OF forme	Pre-1200
For-none	OE	c.1425
Fornseyn	OE	
Forsake	OE	
Forsope	OE	
Forth	OE	
Forþer	OE	
Forthest	OE	
Forth-wyth	OE	
Fortified	Mfr fortifier	Pre-1425
Fortunyd	OF fortune	Pre-1325
Forward	OE	
Fotyng	OE	c.1296
Fowely	OE	
Fowle	OE	
Fownden	OE	
Fowrty	OE	
Fowtyn	OE	
Fowyl	OE	
Frayd	OE	
Fre	OE	
Freel	OF frele	c.1350
Frelte	OF failete	c.1340
Frely	OE	
Frendys	OE	
Frendchep	OE	
Frer	OF frere	c.1290
Fresche	OE	
Freschly	OE + ly	a.1375
Fro	OE	
Frute	OF	c.1175
Fruteful	OF fruit; L fructus + ful	c.1300

Fryke	OF frique	1230
Ful	OE	
Fulfillyng	OE	c.1340
Fulfyllen	OF	c.1250
Fully	OE	
Funte	OE (from Latin font)	
Funt-ston	OE	c.1175
Furryd	OF fore	c.1325
Fyle	OE	
Fyndyn	OE	
Finger	OE	
Fyr	OE	
Fyrmament	L firmamentum	c.1050
First	OE	
Fysches	OE	
Fyten	OE	
<b>G</b>		
Gaderyng	OE	c.1225
Galey	OF galie	c.1300
Gall	OE	
Game	OE	
Gan	OE	
Gapyd	ON gapa	c.1200
Gardener	OF gardinier	c.1300
Gardeyn	ONF gardin	c.1386
Gat	OE	
Gayler	ONF gayolierre	c.1290
General	OF general	c.1340
Gentyl	OF gentil	c.1225
Genteelly	OF gentil	c.1330
Gentyl-women	After OF getilfemme	c.1230
Gestur (deportment)	Med L gestura	c.1410
Gestys	OE	
Getyn	ON geta + OE zietan	
Geyn-seyd	OE	c.1300
Gilyty	OE	
Glad	OE	
Gladlych	OE	
Gladnesse	OE	

Gloryows	OF gloriuus	c.1382
Glotonye	OF glutunie	c.1225
Go	OE	
God	OE	
Godhead	OE	c.1225
Godmodyr	OE	
Gold	OE	
Gon	OE	
Good	OE	
Goodys	OE	c.1280
Goodly	OE	c.1205
Goodlynes	OE	c.1405
Goodnesse	OE	
Gospel	OE	
Gost	OE	
Gostly	OE	
Goth	OE	
Gotyn	OE	
Gouernawns	OF governance	c.1380
Gouerne	OF governner	1297
Gouernorys	OF gouverneur	c.1330
Gowne	OF goune	c.1375
Goyng	OE	c.1300
Grace	AN grase	c.1175
Gracyowsly	AN graciuis + ly	a.1382
Gracious	OF gracious	c.1300
Gracyowsly	OF + ly	c.1300
Gramercy	OF grant merci	c.1330
Graue	OE	
Gravel	OF gravele	c.1300
Gravyn	OE	
Grawntyn	OF graanter	c.1300
Grawntyng	OF granter	c.1300
Gredily	OE	
Gredy	OE	
Gresely	OE	
Gresys	OE	
Grett	OE	
Gret	OE	

Gretly	OE	
Gretnesse	OE	
Greuawns	OF grievance	c.1300
Greuows	OF grievous	c.1290
Greuowsly	OF grievous + ly	c.1303
Greuyd	OF grever	c.1340
Gronyng	OE	
Grote	M Dutch groot	c.1387
Grouys	OE	
Grownde	OE	
Growyn	OE	
Grutchyn	OF	c.1230
Gryndyn	OE	
Gyde	OF guie	c.1362
Gylty	OE	
Gynnyng	OE	
<b>H</b>		
Had	OE	
Hakkyd	OE	c.1420
Haldyn	OE	
Half	OE	
Halfpeny	Comm. Teut	c.1330
Halle	OE	
Halpe, halpyn	OE	
Halwyd	OE	
Halyng	OF haler	<i>OED</i> states .c1440, <i>MED</i> states c.1275
Hamper	OF hanapier	c.1392
Han	OE	
Hand	OE	
Handelyn	OE	
Handmaydyn	OE	
Handwerke	OE	
Hangyn	OE	
Happyd	ON happ	c.1205
Hard	OE	
Hardy	OF hardir	c.1225
Hardyd	OE	
Harm	OE	

Harmyn	OE	
Haste	OF haste	c.1300
Hastye	OF haste	c.1280
Hat	OE	
Hatered	OE	
Hatyn	OE	
Haue	OE	
Hauyn	OE	
Hauyng	OE	
Hedows	OF hidos	c.1300
Hedowslyche	OF hidos	c.1300
Hedyr	OE	
Heed	OE	
Heele	OE	
Heldyn	OE	
Helle	OE	
Help	OE	
Helpyn	OE	
Helpyng	OE	
Helth	OE	
Helys	OE	
Heng	OE	
Hens	OE	
Hep	OE	
Her	OE	
Her	OE	
Herars	OE	
Herberwyd	OE	
Heresy	OF eresie	c.1225
Heretyk	OF heretique	c.1330
Hermyte	OF (h)ermite	c.1205
Hert-blood	OE	
Hert	OE	
Heryn	OE	
Heryng	OE	
Hete	OE	
Hethyn	OE	
Heuy	OE	
Heuyn	OE	

Heuynesse	OE	
Heuenly	OE	
Hevyd	OE	
Hewyn	OE	
Hey	OE	
Heyar	OE	
Heyl	OE/ON	
Hily	OE	
Hirte, hirtyd	OF hurter	Very early
Hite	OE	
Hodys	OE	
Hogely	ON	c.1250
Hol	OE	
Hol	OE	
Hold	OE	
Hole	OE	
Holily	OE	
Holpyn	OE	
Holy	OE	
Holy (wholly)	OE	
Holynes	OE	
Holyng	OE	
Hom	OE	
Homly	OE	
Homlynes	OE	c.1340
Homward	OE	
Homwardys	OE	
Honest	OF honeste	c.1325
Honesty	OF honeste	c.1330
Honowr	OF onor	c.1375
Honorwryd	AN honourer; L honorare + ed	c.1400
Hoo	OE	
Hood	OE	
Hool	OE	
Hoot	OE	
Hope	OE	
Horrowr	OF orror	c.1382
Horrybely	Horror + ly	c.1340
Horrybyl	OF (h)orrible	c.1303

Hors	OE	
Horse-mille	OE hors+mill	
Hospital	OF hospital	c.1300
Hoste	OF (h)oste	c.1303
Hostel	OF ostel	c.1250
Hostellyd	OF hostel	c.1330
How	OE	
Howge	OF ahuge, ahoge	c.1275
Howlyd	ME hulen; MDutch hulen	c.1390
Howse	OE	
Howselyn	OE	
Hoyl	OE	
Humbely	OF umble	c.1374
Hundryd	OE	
Hungry	OE	
Hungryd	OE	
Hungyr	OE	
Hurtyn	OF hurter	c.1200
Husbond	OE	
Hy	OE	
Hyd	OE	
Hyde	OE	
Hydows	OF hidos	c.1300
Hyer	OE	
Hyst	OE	
Hygth	OE	
Hyid	OE	
Hyly	OE	
Hynderawns	OE hindrian + F -ance suffix	c.1436
Hyndryn	OE	
Hyndryng	OE	
Hyrdil	OE	
Hyte	OE	
<b>I</b>		
If	OE	
Ille	ON illr	c.1200
Illumynyn	OF illumine	c.1340
Illusyons	OF illusion	c.1350
Impossibyl	OF impossible	c.1300

Inclined	OF encliner	c.1305
Incomprehensibyl	L incomprensibil –is	c.1340
Incontinens	OF incontinence	c.1382
Incresyd	AN encess	c.1315
Inded	OE	c.1330
Indigacyon	L indignationem	c.1374
Indued	OF enduire	c.1430
Infirmyte	L infirmus	c.1382
Inflaumyd	OF enflammer	1382
Informacyon	OF enformacion	Pre.1387
Informyd	OF enformer	c.1330
Infortunyte	OF infortune	First citation in both <i>OED</i> and <i>MED</i> .
Injoyne	OF enjoign	c.1382
Inne	OE	
Innocencye	OF innocence	c.1340
Inordynat	L inordinatus	c.1398
Inpacyens	OF impacience	c.1230
Inqwietyng (disturbing)	OF inquieter + ing	First citation in <i>OED</i> 1527; <i>BMK</i> is first citation in <i>MED</i> .
Inqwiryng	OF enquerer	c.1290
Inqwiryng	OF inquire+ing	c.1386
Inspire	OF enspirer	c.1386
Inspiration	OF enspirer	c.1340
Instawns	OF instance	c.1340
In-stede	OE (rarely written as one word pre-1640)	
Instruccyon	OF instruction	1412
Instrumentys	OF instrument	1325
Intent	See entent	
Interpretowr	OF interpreteur	1384
Invndirstondabyll	From understand	Not recorded in <i>OED</i> ; sole recording in <i>MED</i> .
Irke	ME northern +nth midland; poss cognate with ON yrka	c.1300
Irkyn	See irke	
Irregularite	OF irregularite	c.1300
<b>J</b>		
Jangelyd	OF jangler	c.1300
Jangerlyng	OF jangle	c.1300

Jape	Obscure: poss. OF japer	c.1360s
Japyd	See jape	
Jailer	OF jaioleur	c.1290
Jentyl-woman	See gentyl-woman	
j-now	OE	
Joly	OF jolif	c.1310
Joye	OF joie	c.1225
Joyen	OF joie	c.1225
Joyntys	OF jointe	c.1290
Joynyd	OF joign	c.1297
Joynyng	Join+ing	c.1398
Juge	OF juge	c.1303
Juridiccyon	OF jurie-juri-jurisdiction	c.1300
Jurney	OF journee	c.1225
<b>K</b>		
Kallyd	See callyd	
Kan, kanst	See cun	
Kende	OE	
Kendly	OE	
Kendeness	OE	c.1350
Kenred	OE	
Kepar	OE	
Kepars	OE	
Kepyn	OE	
Kept	OE	
Kepyng	OE	c.1300
Kerche	OF courveches	c.1430
Kest	ON kasta	a.1300
Keys	OE	
Kissyd	OE	
Klene	OE	
Knawyth	OE	
Kne	OE	
Knelyn	OE	
Knew	OE	
Knockkyng	OE	c.1340
Knowar	OE	c.1382
Knowlach	OE	
Knowyn	OE	

Knowing	OE	
Knyuys	OE	
Komown	Variant of 'common'; OF comuner	a.1393
Komyn	See comyn	
Kryng	See crying	
Kylne	OE	
Kynde	OE	
Kyndelyd	ON kynd-a	c.1200
Kynred	OE	
Kyrnellys	OE	
Kyrtyl	OE	
Kyssyn	OE	
Kytt	Not recorded in OE, Scand. Kutte	c.1275
<b>L</b>		
Labowr	OF labor	c.1300; however, first recorded usage of 7th definition of <i>OED</i> .
Labowrd	OF labourer	c.1390
Lady	OE	
Lazer	Med Latin lazarus	c.1340
Lak	ME lac cf. MLG lak, MDu Lak	c.1200
Lakkyd		c.1175
Lakkyng	Lack+ing	1377
Lamentabyl	OF lamentable	1422 <i>MED</i>
Languryn	OF langorer	c.1300
Languryng (n.)	See languryn	First recorded usage <i>OED</i> and <i>MED</i> .
Langwage	AN langage	c.1300
Lantern	OF lantern	
Lappe	OE	
Last	OE	
Latee	OE	
Latyn	OE	
Lawdacyon	L laudation	<i>OED</i> a.1500; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first recorded usage.
Lawghe	OE	
Lawhyng	OE	c.1300
Lay	OE	
Lech	OE	

Lecherows	OF lecheros	c.1303
Ledar	OE	
Leddyr	OE	
Ledyn	OE	
Leed	OE	
Leef	OE	
Leef	OE	
Leet	See latyn	
Leeuyn	OE	
Left	See leeuyn	
Leful	ME leave+ful	c.1205
Legat	OF legat	1154
Likely	ON liklig	c.1380
Lekeness	OE	
Lendyn	OE	
Lengar	OE	
Lenyd	OE	
Lepyr	OF leper	c.1250
Lernyd	OE	c.1340
Leryn	OE	
Lesse	OE	
Lest	OE	
Lesyn	OE	
Lesyng	OE	
Let	OE	
Letchery	OF lecherie	c.1230
Lett	OE	
Lettryd	OF letter	1303
Lettyd	OE	
Lettyng	OE	
Lettyr	OF lettre	1225
Leuar	OE	
Leuar	OE	
Leue	OE	
Leue	OE	
Leuyn	OE	
Levyd	OE	
Levyn (lightning)	OE	
Levyng	OE	

Lewyd	OE	
Lewydnes	OE + ness	1362
Leyd	OE	
Leyn	OE	
Leyser	OF leiser	1303
Leyth	OE	
Lich	OE	
Life	OE	
Likyd	OE	
Likyng	OE	
Likyth	OE	
Litil	OE	
Lodgyng	OF logier	1362
Lofe	OE	
Lofe	OE	
Lokkyng	ONloka	1300
Lokyn	OE	
Lokyng	OE	
Loolare	MDu lollaerd, 'mumbler'	1390 implied
Lombe	OE	
Lond	OE	
Londyd	OE	
Long (e)	OE	
Longyng	OE	
Longyng (belonging)	OE	
Lord	OE	
Lordschip	OE	
Los	OE	
Lost	OE	
Losyn (loose)	ON lous or OE leas	1300
Lothful	OE loath+ful	<i>OED</i> 1450; <i>MED</i> ?a.1425
Lothly	OE	
Loue	OE	
Louere	OE	
Louyn	OE	
Lovys (loaves)	OE	
Lowde	OE	
Lowe	OI lagr	c.1200
Lowle	ON lag-r; low + ly	c.1330

Lownes	ON lagr	
Lowys (flames)	ON and OI loge	a.1200
Luggen	Scandinavian; cf Sw lugga	a.1375
Lust	OE	
Lusty	OE	c.1225
Lyars	OE	
Lych	OE	
Lye	OE	
Lyfe	See life	
Lyfe-tyme	OE	
Lyftyng	ON lypta	1300
Lyght	OE	
Lyk	OE	
Lyknesse	OE	
Lymyt	OF limiter	1380s
Lyn	OE	
Lynyn	OE	
Lyst	OE	
Lysted	OE	
Lyster	ON lita	c.1374
Lystere (a reader)	OF listre	1377
Lytely	OE	
Lytyl	OE	
Lyue	See life	
Lyuary	AN levere	?1325
Lyues	See: life	
Lyue-tyme	See: lyfe-tyme	
Lyuys	See: life	
<b>M</b>		
Mad	OE	
Mad (made)	OE	
Madame	OF madame	c.1300
Maddyn	OE	
Made	OE	
Madwoman	OE	First recorded usage <i>OED</i> ; not recorded <i>MED</i> .
Mageste	OF mageste	c.1300
Magnifyed	MF magnifier	1382
Magnifyng	MF +ing	1384

Maker	OE	
Makyn	OE	
Malefactowr	OF malfaitor	<i>OED</i> : 1438 first recorded use; <i>MED</i> agrees.
Malendrynes	It malendrino	Not recorded in <i>OED</i> ; first recorded usage in <i>MED</i> .
Malicyows	OF malicious	1250
Malt	OE	
Malice	OF malice	1325
Man	OE	
Manchylde	Man+child	<i>OED</i> : 1438 first recorded usage; not recorded in <i>MED</i> .
Maner	OF manere	a.1225
Manfully	Maful+ly	c.1425
Manhode	OE	
Mankynde	OE	
Mantyl	OE from L	
Many	OE	
Many-fold	OE	
Manykyld	AN manacle	1325
Marbil-stone	OF+OE	c.1150
Marchawndyse	OF merchandise	1300
Marchawnt	OF marchant	c.1225
Marke	OE	
Martirys	L via OE	
Maryd	OF marier	c.1300
Massage	OF message	c.1300
Mater	OF	c.1225
Material	L materialis	1390
Matrimony	OF matermoine	c.1300
Mawgre	OF maugré	c.1300
Mayde	OE	
Mayde-childe	OE	c.1275
Maydens	OE	
Maydenhed	OE	
Maydenhode	OE	
Mayntenowrys	OF mainteneor	c.1395
Maystres	AN maistresse	c.1330
Mayster	OF maistre (fused with OE mægester)	c.1225

Maystyrschep	Master + ship	a.1425
Me	OE	
Mech	OE	
Mede	OE	
Medelyn	ONF meddler	c.1300
Medytacyon	AN + OF meditacion	c.1225
Mees	AN mes	c.1300
Meke	OI	c.1200
Mekely	OI +ly	c.1200
Meknes	OI +ness	c.1200
Mekyl	OE	
Meloyde	AN Melodie	c.1300
Meltyn	OE	
Melodious	OF melodieus	c.1385
Member	OF member	c.1280
Membrys	OF member	c.1300
Men	OE	
Mencyon	OF mension	c.1300
Mend	OF amender	Pre-1200
Mende	OE	
Mene	OE	
Mene-tyme	Mean+time	c.1340
Mennys	OE	
Mentyl (v)	OF manteler	c.1225
Meny (household)	OF mesnie; AN maigné	c.1300
Mercy	AN merci; OF merci	c.1225
Merciful	OF +OE ful	1340
Mercyfully	OF _OE	c.1390
Merowr	AN mireor; OF mireor	c.1300
Meruelyows	AN merveillous	c.1330
Merueyle	OF merveille; AN merveille	c.1300
Merueylowslyche	OF merveille + ly	c.1382?
Merueylyn	AN merveiller	c.1380
Mery	OE	
Meryly	OE	
Meryte	AN merit	c.1230
Mesur	AN mesure; OF mesure	a.1225
Mersurably	Measure+ ly	c.1390
Metē	OE	

Mett	OE	
Metyn	OE	
Meuyng	AN mover	c.1275
Meved	AN mover; OF movoir	c.1275
Meuynggys	AN mover	a.1382
Meuyth	AN mover	c.1275
Meyr	AN mair; OF maire	c.1260
Mict	See mown	
Ministryn	AN minister	c.1340
Ministryng	Minister+ing	c.1400
Mo	OE	
Modirly	OE Mother+ly	
Modyr	OE	
Modyr-nakyd	Mother+naked	1390
Monastery	OF monastere	c.1400
Monday	OE	
Mone	Uncertain origin	c.1225
Monk	OE	
Mony	An monai; OF monoie	c.1325
Monycyon	AN monicion	c.1400
Monyschyng	OF monester	1382
Monyth	OE	
Mor	OE	
Morkyn	OE	
Mornyn	OE	
Mornyng	OE	
Morteys	An mortais; OF mortaise	c.1390?
Morwenyng	OE	
Morwyn	OE	
Moryn	OE	
Moryng	OE	
Most	OE	
Mot	OE	
Motys	OE	
Mown	OE	
Mowt	OE	
Mowth	OE	
Mowthys	OE	
Mukke	OI	1268

Multiplied	An multiplier; OF multiplier	1275
Multitude	AN multitude	1350
Munke	OE	
Murmowr	An murmerer	c.1390
Must	OE	
Musyk	AN music; musique	1325
Mych/much	OE	
Myddenyght	OE	
Myddys	OE	
Myghtilier	OE	
Myghtys	OE	
Myghtyst	OE	
Mygty	OE	
Mygtyn	OE	
Myle	OE	
Mylle	OE	
Mynd	OE	
Mynystyr	See: ministering	
Miracle	AN miracle; OF miracle	?1160
Myraculosly	OF miraculeux +ly	1425
Myrth	OE	
Myryar	OE	
Mys-beleuarys	Mis + be + OE geliefan + er	First recorded usage <i>OED</i> and <i>MED</i> .
Mychef	AN mischief; OF mischief	c.1375
Myscheuows	AN meschevous	? 1390; 3rd definition is first recorded usage in <i>OED</i> .
Mysedys	OE	
Mysgouernawns	Mis + AN governaunce	c.1375
Mys-gouernyd	Mis + AN governaunce	c.1400
Mysse	OE	
Myssyd	OE	
Mystrostyn	Mis + OE trust	1382
Myt	OE	
Myth	OE	
Mythtyly	OE	
Mythtyst	OE	
Mythy	OE	
Mythyn	OE	
N		

Nacyon	AN nacion	c.1300
Nakyd	OE	
Name	OE	
Namely	Name + ly	c.1225
Namyd	OE	
Natural	An natural; OF natural	1275
Natyf	OF natif	1386
Nay	OI nei	c.1325
Nayles	OE	
Nayld	OE	
Necessary	AN necessarie	1376
Necessarys	AN necessarie	c.1376
Need	OE	
Nedful	Need + ful OE	
Nedyd	OE	
Nedys	OE	
Neiþyr	OE	
Nekke	OE	
Ner	OE	
Neuyr	OE	
Neuyr-þe-les	OE	Pre-1325
Newe	OE	
Newly	OE	
Next	OE	
Neybowrys	OE	
No	OE	
Nobeley	AN + OF noble + ly	c.1300
No-body	No + OE bodig	a.1400
Nobly	OF noble	Pre-1200
Noon	OE from L nona hora	
Noon (none)	OE	
Noon-tyme	OE	
Norych (nurse)	OF nurice	1382
Nose	OE	
Not	OE	
Notabyl	OF notable	c.1340
No-thyng	OE	
Notifyd	OF notifier	c.1385
Not-wythstondyng	OE	

Now	OE	
Nowmeryd	OF nombrer	c.1300
Nowt	OE	
Noyse	OF noise	c.1200
Noysen (make noise)	OF noisier	c.1380
Nunnys	OE	
Ny	OE	
Nyghth	OE	
<b>O</b>		
Obedyens	OF obedience	Pre-1200
Obedyent/Obedient	OF obedient	c.1200
Obeyn	OF obeir	c.1300
Obeyd	OF obeir; AN Obeir	a.1325
Obeiccyon	OF objection	c.1387
Obloquie	MF oblique; L obloquium	<i>OED</i> first recorded usage; <i>MED</i> first recorded usage.
Obseruawnce	OF observance	c.1250
Obstakyl	OF obstacle	c.1340
Obstynat	L obstinatus	c.1387
Obteyn	MF optenir	c.1412
Occasion	OF occasion	c.1382
Ocupacyon	OF ocupacion; AN ocupacion	1382
Ocuppyn	OF ocupacion	c.1325
Odde	ON odde	1325
Odowrys	OF odor	c.1300
Offendyn	OF ofendre	c.1350
Offens	OF offense	c.1350
Offeryn	OE	
Office	OF office	c.1250
Offycerys	OF officier	c.1388
Oftyn	OE	
Oftyn-tymes	OE	
Only	OE	
Onyd (join)	OF joindre	1297
Onys	OE	
Onyment	AN oinement	c.1300
Oon	OE	
Oostys (wafer)	OF oiste; L hostia	c.1303
Opressyn	OF oppresser	c.1380

Opteyn	See: obteyn	
Opyn	OE	
Openly	OE	
Opynyon	OF opinion	c.1325
Ordeyn	OF ordener	c.1250
Ordyr	OF ordre	Pre-1200
Ornamentys	OF ornament; AN urnement	c.1200
Original	OF original	c.1325
Oryson	AF oreison	c.1200
Ostage (hostel)	OF hostel	c.1250
Othe	OE	
Oþer	OE	
Ouyr	OE	
Ouyr-takyn	OE	
Ower	OE	
Owt (ought)	OE	
Owt	OE	
Outward	OE	
Owyr	OE	
Own	OE	
<b>P</b>		
Pacient	AN pacient; MF pacient	c.1350
Pacyens	AN pacience; OF pacience	1230
Pacyently	Patient + ly	c.1384
Paleys	OF palais	c.1300
Palmer	AN palmer	c.1300
Paradyse	Post-classical L paradisus	c.1150
Parcel	AN parcele	1382
Parceyve	AN perceive	c.1330
Pardon	OF pardoun; OF pardun	c.1300
Parformyn	OF parformir	c.1300
Parfyth	AN parfit	c.1300
Parfythly	AN parfit; OF parfit +ly	1340
Part	AN part	1382
Partith	AN part	?c.1225
Partabyll (having part)	Part + able	c.1400
Party	AN partie	c.1300
Partyn	AN partir	c.1230
Partyng	Part + ing	c.1300

Partynyr	Probabale alteration of AN 'parcener',	c.1300
Parychenys	AN + OF paroissien; collectively parisher	c.1225
Pase	AN pas	c.1300
Passyn	AN passer	c.1225
Passing (exceedingly)	Pass + ing	c.1387
Payd (pleased)	AN paier; OF paier	c.1225
Payment	AN paiement	1370
Payn	AN paier; OF paier	c.1230
Payn	See: peyne	
Pece (wine cup)	ML pecia	c.1383
Pees	AN pes; OF pais	c.1160
Peler (pillar)	AN piler; OF piler	c.1150
Penawns	AN penaunce	c.1300
Penne	OF penne	c.1280
Pensife	AN pensif	c.1393
Peny	OE	
Pepyl	AN pople	c.1300
Perauentur	AN par aventure	c.1300
Pere (peer)	AN per	c.1300
Perel	OF peril	c.1225
Perfeccyon	AN perfeccion	c.1225
Peril	See: perel	
Perischyn	AN periss	c.1275
Perlyows	AN perillus	c.1300
Perseuerawns	AN perseverance	c.1340
Perseuerawnt	AN perseverant	c.1340
Persoone	AN parsone	c.1225; defined as a physical presence, first record in <i>OED</i> .
Pertre (pear tree)	Pear (L) + tree (OE)	c.1230
Peruertyn	AN purvertir	c.1382
Pes	See: pees	
Pestylens	AN pestilence	1382
Petows	AN pitus	c.1300
Petowsly	Petows + ly	c.1300
Pety	AN pite	1250
Peyne	AN peine	c.1300
Peynful	AN peine + ful	1395

Peyr	OF paire	c.1250; in the definition of 'pair of bellows', <i>OED</i> first recorded usage.
Peys	See: pees	
Pike	OE	
Pilgrimage	AN pilgrimage	c.1275
Pilgryme	AN pilegrin	1225
Pite	See: pety	
Places	OF place	Pre. 1200
Planetys	AN planete	c.1300
Ple	AN plaid	c.1300
Plenowr	AN plenteous	a.1325
Plenty	AN plenté	c.1250
Plentyows	AN plenteuous	c.1325
Plentyuously	Plenteous + ly	1340
Plenyr (plenary)	AN plenar	c.1300
Plesawns	AN pleasance	c.1350
Plesyd	OF plesir	c.1303
Plesyng	Please + ing	1398
Pleyn	AN playn	c.1330
Pleynly	Plain + ly	1382
Plyte	OE	
Polexis (pole-axe)	MD pol + OE æx	1355
Pompe	AN pompe	c.1300
Pompows	OF pompeux	c.1375
Ponysch	AN puniss; OF puniss	1340
Ponyschyng	Punish + ing	c.1375
Pope	OE from L papa	
Port	OE from L portus	
Portose (portable breviary)	AN porteose	1390
Possybyl	AN possible	1384
Potel (two quarts)	AN potel	1382
Pott	OE	
Pouerte	OF poverté	Pre-1200
Powndys	OE	
Powyr	AN poer	c.1300
Powyr (poor)	AN pover	c.1225
Poynt	OF point or pointe	c.1225
Poyntyd (appointed)	OF apointer	c.1374

Poynted (devised)	OF apointer	c.1428
Praerys	AN praere	c.1300
Pray	AN	a.1250
Prayer	AN praere	c.1300
Praying	Pray + ing	a.1382
Prayng	See: preyin	
Prechowr	AN precheor	c.1230
Prechyn	AN preacher; OF prechier	c.1230
Prechyng	Preach + ing	c.1300
Precyows	AN precious; OF presieu	a.1325
Preferryng	MF preferer	a.1393
Pregnowntly	MF pregnant	First recorded usage <i>OED</i> and <i>MED</i> .
Presens	OF presence	a.1330
Present	AN present	c.1340
Preseruyn	MF preserver	1393
Preseruyng	Preserve + ing	c.1425
Preson	AN prisoun	1160
Presonerys	Prison + er	1325
Presonyd	Prison + ed	1400
Presonyng	Preson + ing	1344
Prest	OE	
Presthode	OE	
Prestly	OE	
Presumpcyon	AN presuncion	1250
Pretendyd	AN pretender	1395
Preuy	OF privé	Pre-1200
Preuyly	Privy + ly	1250
Preuyn	AN prover; OF prover	1225
Preuyte	AN priveté; OF priveté	1225
Preyers	OF preiere	c.1300
Preyng	AN preier; OF preier	c.1300
Preyst	See: prest	
Preysyn	AN preiser; OF preisier	1230
Pride	OE	
Prince	AN prince	c.1225
Principal	AN princepal	Applied to humans: 1425
Priowr	OE via L prior	
Prise	AN prise	c.1225

Procedyng	AN proceder	c.1380
Processe	AN procès	a.1325
Procession	AN procession	?1160
Procuryn	AN procurer; MF procurer	c.1325
Proferyd	OF preferer	a.1393
Professe (receive the profession of)	AN professor	c.1325
Profityn	AN profiter	c.1330
Profownde	AN profound	c.1300
Profyr	See: proferyd	
Profyte	AN profit	1330
Prolongyn	MF prolonguer	c.1425
Promittyn	AN promettre	1422
Promys	AN promese	1422
Promysyd	AN promese	1430
Prone	L pronus	1408
Prophecyed	MF prophecier	1350
Propirteys	AN propriété	1382
Propyr	AN proper	c.1225
Prosperyte	AN prosperitee	1225
Prouerbe	AN proverb	1375
Prouydyn	L providere	c.1423
Prouynce	AN province	c.1382
Prouyson	AN provisione	c.1398
Proym	MF proheme	c.1410
Pryde	See: pride	
Prys	AN price	c.1225
Pullyng	OE	
Pulpyt	AN pulpit	1387
Punched	See: ponysch	
Punschyng	See: ponyschyng	
Pur	AN puer; OF pur	1300
Purchase (begging)	AN purchacere	1340
Purchasyn	AF purchaser; OF porchacier	Pre-1300
Purgatorie	AN purgtore	?c.1225
Purgyn	AN purgir; OF purgier	1300
Purificacyons	AN purificaciun	1384
Purifyid	Purify + ed	<i>OED 1475; MED 1398</i>
Purpose	AN purpos	c.1300

Purpyl	OE via L purpura	
Purse	OE via L busa	
Purs-stryng	Purse + stryng	<i>OED</i> first recorded use; not cited in <i>MED</i> .
Pursute	AN pursuer	1300
Pursuyng	AN pursuer	1300
Purueyun	AN purveer; OF pourveoir	1300
Puttyng	OE	Definition of 'before a judge' is <i>OED</i> first record.
Pyke	OE	
Pykyd (pick)	OE	
Pylche	OE	
Pygrimage	See: pilgrimage	
Pyment	AN piment; OF piment	c.1230
Pynte	OF pinte	1354
Pypys	OE	
Pyte	See: pety	
<b>Q</b>		
Quemfulnes	Queem + ful	Not listed in <i>OED</i> ; <i>BMK</i> is sole citation in <i>MED</i>
Quetly	Quiet + ly; AN quiet; OF quiet	1382
Qwayr (quire)	AN quair	1230
Qwenchyn	OE	
Qwer (choir)	OF cuer	1300
Qwestyon	AN question	1225
Qwietyng	L quietare + ing	<i>OED</i> states c.1460; <i>MED</i> agrees.
Qwite	AN quiter; OF quiter	1250
Qwyete	See: quetly	
Qwyk	OE	
Qwykly	OE	
Qwyte (to repay)	Variant of quit	1230
<b>R</b>		
Ramping	AN rampant	c.1300
Ran	See: renne	
Raton	AN ratoun	c.1325
Rape	OE	
Rauysched	AN raviss; OF raviss	c.1330
Rawe	OE	

Rebawdry (adj.)	OF ribout	<i>OED</i> and <i>MED</i> first recorded use.
Rebellion	AN rebellion	1382
Rebukyd	AN rebuker; OF rebuker	1330
Receyuyn	AN receiver	c.1318
Reclusys	AN reclus; OF reclus	1225
Record	AN record	1330
Recreacyon	AN recreaciun	1393
Recur (recover)	AN recoverer	a.1398
Redemyd	AN redeemer	<i>OED</i> cites BMK as first recorded usage; <i>MED</i> a.1430
Redemptor	OF redemptor	<i>OED</i> and <i>MED</i> first recorded usage.
Redy	OE	
Redy (readily)	OE + ily	1330
Redily	OE	1330
Redyn	OE	
Redyn (ride)	See: rydan	
Redyng	OE	
Reed (red)	OE	
Reed (advice)	OE	
Reed-spyr	OE Reed + OE spear	
Reedbrest	Red + breast; OE	1425
Refreschyd	AN refrescher	1382
Refusyd	AN refuser; OF refuser	1350
Regarde	AN reguard	1348
Reguler	AN regular	1387
Rehersyn	AN reherser	1300
Reisyd	OI reisa	1200
Rekles	OE	
Relacyon	AN relacioun	1390
Relesyng	AN releaser	1325
Releuyd	AN reliever	1382
Releuyng	AN reliever	1382
Religyows	AN relegius; OF religious	1225
Relygyon	AN religioun; OF religion	1225
Relykys	AN relike; OF relique	1225
Reme	AN realm	1300
Remedy	AN remedy	1225

Rememorawns (alteration of remembrance)	OF rememorance	First recorded usage <i>OED</i> ; <i>MED</i> agrees.
Remownyd (remove)	AN remover	1380
Remownyng	See: remowynd	
Remowr	See: rumowr	
Remyssyon	AN remissiun	?1225
Rendyn	OE	
Renewyd	Re + new	1382
Renne	OE	
Repentawns	AN repentaunce	c.1300
Repentyd	AN repenter	c.1300
Replyng	AN replier	1393
Reportyd	AN reporter	1402
Repref	AN repreove; OF reprove	c.1300
Representyng (depict an image of)	AN representir	<i>OED</i> first recorded usage; <i>MED</i> states c.1400.
Repreuows	AN reprover	c.1330
Repreuyn	AN reprover	c.1330
Repreuyng	Reprove + ing	c.1330
Reputacyon	AN reputacion; MF reputation	1390
Request	OF requeste	Pre-1383
Reqwired	AN requer; L requirere	1380
Resoluyd	L resolverer	a.1398; 5th definition, first recorded use in <i>OED</i> .
Reson	OF reisun	1225
Reasonably	OF reisun + ably	1325
Resortyn	AN resorter	a.1325; 2nd definition, first recorded usage in <i>OED</i> .
Reste	OE	
Restoryd	OF restorer	c.1300
Restreyne	AN restreindre	1384
Restyd (arrested)	OF areste	1375
Resun	See: risith	
Resurrexyon	AN resurreciun	c.1300
Resydens	AN + MF residence	1398
Resyn	See: risith	
Retornyn	AN returner	1325
Reuelacyons	OF revelation; L revelationem	c.1384
Reuelyd	AN + MF reveler	1409

Reuerende	AF reverend; MF reverend	1389
Reuerens	AN reverence	1300
Reuerensyd	AN reverence	c.1300
Reuerently	Reverent + ly	1382
Reuerys	OF rivere	c.1297
Reuolyng	MF revolver + ing	1425
Reward	AN reward	1340
Rewardyn	AN rewarder	1350
Rewelys	OF riule, reule	1225
Rewful	OE	
Rewlyn	OF riuler	1225
Rewth	eME, unclear: possible Scan 'hyggð'	1175
Reyn	OE	
Reysed	See: reisyd	
Richar	See: ryche	
Richare, riche	See: ryche	
Riches	See: ryche	
Risith	OE	
Rithful	OE	
Robbyn (verb)	OF robber	1225
Rokkys (distaffs)	MDu rocke	a.1325
Ronnyn	See: renne	
Roof	OE	
Roos	See: risith	
Ropis	OE	
Roryn	OE	
Roryng	OE	
Ros	See: risith	
Row (rough)	OE	
Rowelys	OR roel	1400
Rowyd (streaked)	Origin uncertain	c.1400
Rumowr	OF rumur	1374
Rusty	OE	
Ryche	OE	
Rychely	OE	
Rydyn	OE	
Right	OE	
Ryng	OE	
<b>S</b>		

Sacrament	OF sacrament; L sacramentum	c.1175
Sacryd	OF sacre	1225
Sad	OE	
Sadly	OE	
Sadness	OE	
Saf	OF sauf	c.1300
Safe	OF sauf	c.1300
Safte	OF sauveté	c.1380
Saf-warde	Safe + ward	1298
Sake	OE	
Salt	OE	
Saluacyon	OF sauvacion	1225
Salutyd	L salutare	1380
Same	ON same	c.1200
Sarazyn	OE from L saraceni	
Satt	See: syttyn	
Sattelyn	OE	
Satyrday	OE	
Saue	See: saf	
Sauowryng	OF savourer	1386
Sauowrys	See: savowr	
Sauyd	Save + ed	c.1225
Sauyn	OF salver	1250
Sauyowr	OF sauveour	1300
Save	See: saf	
Savowr	OF savourer	1300
Saw	See: sen	
Sawcyd (sauced)	OF saucer	<i>OED</i> cites 1592; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first recorded usage.
Sawter (psalter)	OE through L psalterium	
Say	OE	
Sayd	OE	
Scapyd	See: skape	
Schakyng	OE	
Schal	OE	
Schamis	OE	
Schamfully	Shameful + ly	1300
Schamyn	OE	
Schapyn	OE	

Scharp	OE	
Scharply	OE	
Scharpnes	OE	
Sche	OE	
Schedyng	OE	
Schelyngys	OE	
Schenschep	OE	1303
Schepyd	OE	
Schepyng	Ship + ing	c.1300
Schepys	OE	
Schete	OE	
Schetyng (shutting)	OE	
Schewed	OE	
Schille	OE	
Schip	OE	
Schipgyng	OE	a.1300
Schip-maistrys	Ship + master	1375
Schippys	OE	
Schirtys	OE	
Schorderyd	ME shod(d)re, cognate with MLG schôderen	c.1325
Schok	OE	
Schort	OE	
Schortly	OE	
Schowerys	OE	
Schreuyn	OE	
Schrewe	OE	
Schrewyd	OE	
Schrewydly	OE	1380
Schuld	OE	
Schrynkyd	OE	
Schrykyngys	ON skrækja	1398
Schryuyng	OE	
Schulder	OE	
Schynyn	OE	
Schynyng	OE	
Schyp	OE	
Scole	OE	
Scor	OE	
Scorge	AF escurge	1225

Scorgyd	OF escorgier	1297
Scorgyngys	See: scourgyd	
Scorne	OF escorn	1200
Scornyn	OF escarnir	1200
Scriptur	L scriptura	a.1300
Scryppe	OF escreppe	1300
Sculd	OE	
Se	OE	
Secret	OF secret; L secretus	c.1378
Secretarijs (entrusted with secrets of God)	ML secretaries	1387
Secretys	OF secré	1399
Seculer	OF seculer	1290
Seculerys	See seculer	
Secunde	OF second	1297
See (sea)	OE	
See (seat)	OF sé	c.1374
Seed	OE	
Seekenes	See: sekenesse	
Seel (seal)	OE	
Seelyng	Seal + ing	1338
Seen	OE	
Seest	OE	
See-syde	Sea + side	1205
Seeyn	See: sesyn	
Seeth	OE	
Sege (stool for easement of bowels)	OF sege	a.1400
Seilyd	See: seylyn	
Seist	OE	
Seke	OE	
Sekenesse	OE	
Sekkyn (made of sack-cloth)	OE	
Sekyn	OE	
Sekyng	OE	
Sekyr	OE	
Sekyrd	OE	
Seldom	OE	
Self	OE	

Sellyng	OE	
Semly	ON <i>sømiliga</i>	1250
Semyth	OE	
Sen	OE	
Sendyn	OE	
Sengyl	OF <i>single</i>	c.1340
Sent	OE	
Sentens (meaning)	OF <i>sentence</i>	c.1340
Senwys (sinews)	OE	
Sepulchre	OF <i>sepulchre</i>	1200
Sere	OF <i>sire</i>	1297
Sergyth	OF <i>cerchier</i>	c.1330
Sermown	AF <i>sermon</i> ; OF <i>sermon</i>	a.1200
Seruawnt	OF <i>servant</i>	1225
Seruen	OF <i>server</i> ; L <i>servire</i>	c.1175
Seruyse	OF <i>servise</i>	1320
Seryowslech (seriously)	OF <i>serieux +ly</i>	c.1425
Sesyn (cease)	OF <i>cesse</i>	1330
Sesyng	Cease + <i>ing</i>	1340
Sette (seat)	ON <i>sæti</i>	c.1200
Settyng	OE	
Setyn	See: <i>syttyn</i>	
Seuenyth (sennight)	OE	
Seuenyth	OE	
Sevyn	OE	
Sex (six)	OE	
Sextene	OE	
Sey	OE	
Seyd	OE	
Seyin	OE	
Seyl	See: <i>seel</i>	
Seylyn	OE	
Seyn	OE	
Seynt	OF <i>saint</i>	1175
Seyntys	OF <i>saint</i>	1175
Seyst	OE	
Seyyng	OE	
Shewed	OE	
Silens	See: <i>sylens</i>	

Sithyn	OE	
Sithys	OE	
Sitte	OE	
Skape	OF eschap	1300
Skornw	See: scorne	
Skornyd	See: scornyn	
Skowrges	See scorge	
Skryppe	See: scryppe	
Skyll	ON skil	1200
Skyn	OE	
Slakyn	OE	
Slannderows	AF esclandrus	1402
Slawndred (to scandalise)	OF esclandrer	1382
Slederyd	OE	
Slen	OE	
Slep	OE	
Slepyn	OE	
Sleue	OE	
Slomberyng	ME slūmeren/sloom + ing	c.1374
Slory (slurry)	Obs. MDu slore	<i>OED</i> cites.1440; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first recorded usage.
Slugge (sludge)	Variant of 'slutch'; of uncertain origin.	<i>OED</i> cites 1649; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first recorded usage.
Smal	OE	
Smale	OE	
Smellyd	'no doubt of OE origin, but not recorded and not represented in any of the cognate language'.	
Smellys	OE; see above	1175
Smert	OE	
Smok	OE	
Smylyng	OHG smilan; ME smilen	1300
Smyth	OE	
Smytyn	OE	
Snar	ONsnara	1100
Snow	OE	
So	OE	
Sobbyn	Imitative	Pre.1200
Sobyr	OF sobre	1338

Socowr	OF sucurs	1225
Socowryn	OF socorre	c.1250
Socowryng	Succour + ing	c.1330
Sodeynly	AF sodein	c.1290
Softe	OE	
Softly	OE	1225
Soget (subject)	OF suget; L subietus	c.1330
Soiowryd	OF sujurner	c.1290
Sokyn	See: sowkyn	
Solas	OF solas	c.1290
Solempne	OF solempne	1340
Solempnyte	OF solempneté	1290
Somownd	OF sumun	1205
Sondys	OE	
Sone	OE	
Song	OE	
Soone	OE	
Soper	OF soper	c.1275
Sor	OE	
Sorhed (soreness)	OE sor	Not cited in <i>OED</i> ; first recorded usage in <i>MED</i> .
Sorwe	OE	
Sorweful	OE	
Sorwyn	OE	
Sorwyng	OE	
Sory	OE	
Soth	OE	
Sothfast	OE	
Sothfastnes	OE	
Sothyn	OE	
Sotyl	OF soutil	c.1300
Sotyllych	OF soutil + ly	c.1350
Soveryn	OF soverain	c.1290
Sowkyn	OE	
Sowle	OE	
Sownd	AF soun; OF son	1300
Sowndyng	AF soun; OF son	c.1325
Sowr	OE	
Sowt	OE	

Sowtyn	OE	
Sowyd	OE	
Sowyn	OE	
Speak	OE	
Sparkys	OE	
Sparre (rafter)	MDu sparre	c.1340
Sparyn	OE	
Speche	OE	
Spechys	OE	
Spectacles	OF spectacle	1415 – plural form
Specyal	OF especial; L specialis	Pre.1200
Specialy	OF especial	1297
Spede	OE	
Spekyn	OE	
Spekyng	OE	
Spellyng	OE	
Spendyn	OE	
Speryng (asking)	OE	
Spetowsly	AF despitous; OF despitous	Not listed in <i>OED</i> ; a.1387 in <i>MED</i>
Spicys	OF spicier	1377
Spirit	AF spirit; OF esprit	1250
Spititual-ite	OF spirit	1377
Spittyn	OE	
Spitys	OF despiter	1400
Spoke	OE	
Spon	OE	
Spor	OE	
Sportyn	AF desporter	c.1425; in sense 1b, first recorded usage <i>OED</i> .
Spowse	OF spus	c.1200
Spoyl	OF espoillier	c.1330
Spredyn	OE	
Spryngyng	OE	
Spycys	OF espice	1225
Spyin (espy)	OF espier	1250
Spynne	OE	
Spyryt	AF spirit	1250

Spyteful	OF depite	<i>OED</i> cites 1440; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first recorded usage.
Stabely	OF stable	1297
Stabelyd (made stable)	Stable + ed	1400
Stabyl	OF stable	1300
Stabyl (n.)	OF estable	1250
Stabylnes	Stable + ness	1300
Staf	OE	
Stande	OE	
Staryng	OE	
State	OE estat	1225
Stedfast	OE	
Stedfastly	Steadfast + ly	1300
Stelyng	OE	
Stepelys	OE	
Steppys	OE	
Sterrys	OE	
Sterte (Continental term of abuse for Englishman/woman)	Perhaps Dutch start (tail)	<i>OED</i> cites 1673; <i>MED</i> cites a.1300.
Steryd	OE	
Steryn	OE	
Steryng	OE	
Stey	OE	
Steyn	OE	
Stille	OE	
Stilly	OE	
Stod	OE	
Stody (devotion, affection)	L studium	1374
Stodyst	OF studier	c.1300
Stockfysche	MDu stokvisch; MHG stocvisch	1290
Stokke	OE	
Stolys	OE	
Stomak	OF estomac	1340
Ston	OE	
Stondyn	OE	
Stongyn	OE	
Stormys	OE	
Story	AF astoire; OF estorie	1225

Stawe	OE	
Strawnge	OF estrange	1297
Strawngerys	OF estrangier	1375
Stengest	OE	
Strength	OE	
Strengthen	OE	
Strete	OE	
Streyt	OF estreit	1387
Streytly	OF estreit	1338
Strogelyd	ON strugr	c.1386
Strokys	OE (unrecorded)	
Strong	OE	
Strongly	OE	
Strumpet	Obscure	1327
Stykkys	OE	
Stylle	OE	
Styrt	OE	
Suasyons	Partly L; partly aphaeresis of persuade	c.1374
Substawns	OF substance	1300
Sufferawns	OF suffrance	1300
Sufferyd	AF suffir	1225
Sufferyn	AF suffir	1225
Suuferyng	Suffer + ing	1340
Sufficient	OF sufficient	1380
Sufficiently	Sufficient + ly	1375
Suggestion	AF suggestioun; OF suggestioun	1340
Sum	OE	
Sumdele	OE	
Summe	OF summe	c.1290
Sum-tyme	Sum + tyme	1297
Sumwhat	OE	
Sunne	OE	
Supportacyon	OF supportation	c.1386; 4th definition, <i>OEDf</i> first recorded usage.
Support (v)	OF supporter	1382
Suppose	OF supposer	1340
Supposyng	OF supposer	c.1303
Suppriowr	OF subprieur	1340
Suspicyon	AF suspecioun	1303

Suyd	AF suer	c.1200
Suyrte	OF surte	c.1374
Swalwyd	OE	
Swathyn	OE	
Swech	OE	
Swem	ON svimi	1250
<b>Swemful</b>	<b>ON</b>	<b>1400</b>
Swerers	OE swerian	
Swerd (sword)	OE	
Sweryn	OE	
Sweryng	OE	1200
Swete (sweat)	OE	
Swete (sweet)	OE	
Sweetly	OE	
Swetnesse	OE	
Swor	OE	
Swownyn	OE	
Swyers	OF esquire	1290
Syde	OE	
Syghte	OE	
Sygnys	OF signe; L signum	1225
Syhyng	OE	
Sylens	OF silence	1225
Sylke	OE	
Syluer	OE	
Sympyl	OF simple	1220
Symulacyon	OF simulacion	1340
Syn	OE	
Sinful	OE	
Synguler	OF singular	1340
Syngyn	OE	
Synne	OE	
Syr	See: sere	
Syster	OE	
Syth	OE	
Sythen	OE	
Syttyn	OE	
Syttyng	OE	
<b>T</b>		

Tabbarde	OF tabart	c.1300
Tabernakyl	OF tabernacle; L tabernaculum	1382
Tabyl	OE; L tabula	
Takyn	OE from ON	
Tal (stalwart)	Probably OE	
Tale	OE	
Tastyn	OF taster	c.1290
Tavern	OF tavern	1286
Tawt	OE	
Tayl-end	Tail + end	1377
Teche	OE	
Techyng	OE	
Tediows	Late L taedios; poss OF tedious	1412
Teerys	OE	
Telle	OE	
Tellyn	OE	
Tellyng	OE	
Teme (theme)	OF teme	1300
Temperal	L temporal; tempus	1382
Tempest	OF tempeste	c.1250
Temptacyon	OF temptaciun	1225
Temptyd	AF tempter; OF tempter	c.1300
Tendirly	OF tender +ly	c.1385
Tendyn	L tendere; F tendre	a.1375
Tendyr	OF tendre	c.1225
Tendyrnes	OF tendre	1382
Term	OF terme	c.1225
Teryin	Obscure	1320
Tetys	OE	
Text	OF texte	c.1369
Teyntys	OF tente	1297
Teynyd	OF ataign	1330
Than	OE	
þan	OE	
Thank	OE	
Thank (v.)	OE	
Thankyng	OE	
þankyngly	OE	
Thar (need)	OE	

That	OE	
þat	OE	
þe	OE	
þe (thee)	OE	
Thedyr	OE	
þedyr-ward	OE	
Thef	OE	
þei	OE	
þen	OE	
Thens (thence)	ME þannes; OE	c.1290
Ther	OE	
þerabowtyn	OE	
þeraftyr	OE	
Therea-geyn	OE	
þerageyns	OE	
þerby	OE	
þerfor	OE	
þerfro	OE	
þerin	OE	
þerof	OE	
þeron	OE	
Therten (thirteen)	OE	
þerto	OE	
þerupon	OE	
þerwyth	OE	
These	OE	
They	OE	
þin	OE	
Thorn	OE	
Throw	OE	
Thowsand	OE	
Thowt	OE	
Thre	OE	
Thretyngys	OE	
Throwyn	OE	
Thrydde	OE	
Thryftyare (more prosperous)	Thrive + t; ON þrifa-sk	<i>OED</i> cites 1440 for this definition; <i>MED</i> has 1384.
Thryes	OE	

Thrust	OE	
Thundir	OE	
Thundirkrakkys	OE + probable OE	<i>OED</i> cites 1450; <i>MED</i> does not list this word.
Thus	OE	
Thukke	OE	
Thyngs	OE	
Thynkyn	OE	
Titharys (tithers)	OE	
Tokyn	Late OE tacan, from ON taka	c.1100
Tokyn (token)	OE	
Tolde	OE	
Tonne	OE	
Toos	OE	
Torchys	OF torche	c.1290
Toryn	OE	
Towched	OF tochie	1297
Town	OE	
Trad	OE; ON troð	
Translatyd	L translatus	c.1300
Tre (tree)	OE	
Tremelyng	OF trembler	c.1303
Tresor	OF tresor	1154
Trespas	OF trespas	c.1290
Trespasyd	OF trespasser	1303
Tretowrys	OF traitre	1225
Tretyn	OF tretier	1297
Tretys	AF tretiz	a.1373
Trewe	OE	
Trewly	OE	
Trewth	OE	
Tribulacyons	OF tribulacion	Pre-1200
Trost	ON treysta; OI traust	Pre-1200
Trostyd	ON treysta; OI traust	Pre-1200
Trostyn	ON treysta; OI traust	Pre-1200
Trowyn	OE	
Trubfyl	See: turbyl	
Tryfelys	OF truffe	1225
Tunge	OE	

Turbelyd	OF trubler	1340
Turbyl	OF truble	1230
Turmentrijs (torments)	OF tourment	1382
Turmentyst	OF tormenter	1290
Turnyd	OE	
Twelmonyth	OE	
Twelue	OE	
Tweyn	OE	
Twyis	OE	
Twynkelyng	OE twinclian + ing	a.1300
Twyx	OE	
Tydyngs	OE	
Tyl	OE	
Tyme	OE	
Typettys (tippets)	Uncertain: OE tæpped?	c.1300
<b>U</b>		
Unable	AN abil + un	c.1380
Undernemyn	OE under + OF mine	1382
Understondyn	OE	
Unreasonably	OF raison + ly	c.1340
Unspecabyl	OE	a.1400
Unworthy	OE	
Upon	OE	
Use	OF user	Pre-1200
<b>V</b>		
Valeys	OF valee	1297
Vanyte	OF vaite	c.1230
Velany	AN vileinie	c.1225
Veluet	Med L velvetum	c.1320
Vengyn	OF avengier	1377
Veniawns	AF veniaunce	1300
Venymowslych	AF venimus; OF venimeux	a.1425
Verifijd	OF verifier	1325
Vermyn	AF vermin	c.1340
Versys	OE	
Vertu	AF vertu; OF vertu	c.1225
Vertuows	AF virtuous; OF virtuous	1330
Very	AF verrai	1250
Veryly	AF verrai	1250

Vessel	AF vessel; OF vessel	1300
Vestment	AF vestement; OF vestement	1300
Vestur	AF vesture; OF vesture	1384
Vexacyon	OF vexation	1400
Vexid	OF vexer	1426
Veyn	OF vein	1300
Veynglory	Med L vana gloria	1300
Veyn (veins)	OF veine	c.1290
Victory	AF victoire; OF victoire	1330
Vicyows	AF vicious; OF vicious	1340
Village	OF village	1386
Violens	AF violence	c.1290
Visage	AF visage; OF visage	1303
Visitacyon	AF visitacioun	1303
Visityn	OF visiter	1225
Visyon	AF visiun; OF vision	c.1290
Vn-able	Un + able	1380
Vnbeleue	Un + OE	c.1160
Vn-botenyd	Un + OF boton	c.1325
vncertyn	OF incertain	1300
Vn-clebe	OE	
Vn-clenly	OE	
Vnclennesse	OE	
Vndeuwoly (undevoutly)	Un + OF devot	1377
Vndirstondyng	OE	
Vndirtakyn (be surety)	OE	c.1300
Vndrawyn (not called to God)	Un+ OE	Not cited in <i>OED</i> ; <i>MED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first recorded usage in this sense.
Vndyr	OE	
Vndyrnemy (reprove)	OE	Not listed in <i>OED</i> ; <i>MED</i> suggests a.1382 for this definition.
Vndyrstondyn	OE	
Vngodly	OE	<i>OED</i> cites 1526; <i>MED</i> cites 1414.
Vnholy	OE	
Vnkende	OE	
Vnkendnes	OE	
Vnknowyn	OE	

Vnlykely	OE; cf ON unlikgr	1375
Vnmesurably	Un + AN mesurable + ly	1390
Vnmythy	OE	
Vnpossybyl	Un + possible	1362
Vnqwenchabyl	OE	1382
Vnresonably	OF raison	1380
Vnseyd	OE	
Vnspekabyl	OE	1400
Vnsperd (unfastened)	OE	
Vnstabyl	MHG unstabel	1225
Vnstabylnes	MHG unstabel	1340
Vnstedfast	OE	
Vn-to	OE	a.1300
Vn-trewe	OE	
Vnwetyng	OE	
Vnworthy	OE	
Voiding	AF voider; OF voider	1400
Vow	AF vu	1297
Vowchesafe	AN voucher + AN self	1303
Vowterys (adulterers)	OF Avouter	1386
Vowtre	OF avoutrie	1366
Vowyn	OF vouer	1300
Voided (to eavde)	OF voider	c.1380
Voys	AN voice	1300; followed by 'that' or 'how' clause, <i>OED</i> first recorded use.
Voysyd	AN voice	1429
Vp	OE	
Vp-reson	Up + rise	c.1300
Vp-so-down	OE	1340
Vpward	OE	
Vre (experience)	OF uevre	1420
Vse (custom)	AF us; OF uus	1225
Vsyd	OF us	1225
Vsyn	OF us	1225
Vtter	MDu uterer; partly OE out	
Vtter (adj.)	OE	
Vttyrly	Utter + ly	1225
Vyolens	AF violence	1290
Violently	AF violence	1340

Vysitacyon	AF visitacioun	1303
Vysytyd	OF vaster	1225
<b>W</b>		
Wakyn	OE	
Walke	OE	
Walwyd	OE	
Wandrid	OE	
War	OE	
Warijd (cursed)	OE	
Warnyd	OE	
Waryn (spend)	ON verja	1417
Was	OE	
Waschyn	OE	
Waschyng	OE	
Wast	OE	
Wastyng	AF waster; OF waster	a.1230
Watyr	OE	
Watyr-dropys (tears)	OE Water + OE drops	<i>OED</i> cites <i>BMK</i> as first recorded usage; not listed in <i>MED</i> .
Wauyr	MHG waberen; ON vafra	1375
Wawe	OE	
Wax	OE	
Waxin	OE	
Way	OE	
Wayn	OE	
We	OE	
Wech	OE	
Weddyd	OE	
Wede	OE	
Wederyng	OE	
Wedewhode	OE	
Wedlak	OE	
Widow	OE	
Wedyr	OE	
Wel	OE	
Well-laboured	OE +AN	Not listed as a word in <i>BMK</i> glossary, but <i>OED</i> lists it as first recorded use.
Weke	OE	

Wekys	OE	
Wel	OE	
Welcome	OE	
Welding	OE	
Welfaryng (comely)	OE + OE	c.1330
Wel-stool	OE wel + OE stol	Not cited in either <i>OED</i> or <i>MED</i>
Welth	ME weal + th	
Welyn	OE	
Wend	OE	
Wengys	OI vængr	c.1175
Went	OE	
Wenyst (weenest)	OE	
Wepen	OE	
Wepn	OE	
Wepyn	OE	
Wepyng	OE	
Wer	OE	
Werdly	OE	
Werdlys	OE	
Were	OE	
Werk	OE	
Werkys	OE	
Werkyn	OE	
Werr	OE	
Wers	OE	
Wery (weary)	OE	
Weryn	OE	
Weryn	OE	
Wett	OE	
Wetyn	OE	
Wetyng (knowing)	OE	
Wetyngly	OE	1340
Wey	PE	
Weyk	OE	
Weyng	OE	
Whakyng (quaking)	OE	
Whan	OE	
What	OE	
What-euyr	OE	

Whech	OE	
Whedyr	OE	
Whelys (wheal)	OE	<i>OED and MED both cite 1440.</i>
Wherfor	OE	
Whippe	MLG	1325
whyl	OE	
Whytte	OE	
Wikke	OE	
Wikkyd	OE	1275
Wisdom	OE	
Wished	OE	
Wiste	OE	
Wistly (certainly)	OE	
Withowten	OE	
Withstande	OE	
Witnesse	OE	
Witnessyn	OE	
Witte	OE	
Witty	OE	
Wittyryly (certainly)	Of Scandinavian origin	c.1200
Wode (wood)	OE	
Woke	OE	
Wolcome	OE	
Wold	OE	
Wolf	OE	
Woman	OE	
Wombe	OE	
Won	OE	
Wonderful	OE	
Wonderly	OE	
Wonderyn	OE	
Wondryng	OE	
Wondyr	OE	
Wondyrful	OE	
Wonyn	OE	
Woo	OE	
Word	OE	
World	OE	
Worschep	OE	

Worschepd	OE	
Worthy	OE	
Wose (ooze)	OE	
Wostly	OE	
Wo-stool	OE + OE	Not cited in either <i>OED</i> or <i>MED</i> .
Wownde	OE	
Wrecchys	OE	
Wrekyn (avenge)	OE	
Wreth	OE	
Wretyn	OE	
Wristys	OE	
Writer	OE	
Wrong	OE	
Wrongfully	Wrong + fully	1340
Wrowht	OE	
Wryngyng	OE	
Wryten	OE	
Wulle	OE	
Wyf	OE	
Wylle	OE	
Wynd	OE	
Wysly	OE	
Wyst	OE	
Wyttes	OE	
Wytnesse	OE	
<b>X</b>		
Xal	OE	
Xuld	OE	
<b>Y</b>		
Ych	See: ech	
Yf	OE	
Ylle	ON illr	a.1200
Ymage	OF image	c.1225
Ymagyned	OF imagener	c.1380
Ympne (hymn)	OE via L hymnus	
Ypocrisy	OF ypocrisie	1225
Ypocryte	OF ypocrite	1225
Yrke	Of uncertain origin; not found outside English	1303

Yrkyn	Of uncertain origin; not found outside English	1303
Yron	OE	

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