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*Sche knelyd upon hir kneys, hir boke in hir hand:*  
Manuscript Travel, Devotional Pedagogy, and the  
Textual Communities of *The Book of Margery Kemp*

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*Sche knelyd upon hir kneys, hir boke in hir hand: Manuscript Travel, Devotional Pedagogy, and the Textual Communities of The Book of Margery Kemp*

**Abstract**

The simplest, and yet most knotty, place to start with *The Book of Margery Kempe* is to ask plainly: what is it? It has most frequently been proclaimed the first autobiography in English, seemingly more as a marketing ploy than as a result of careful analysis of genre. In reality, Kempe's book occupies an uncomfortable space between first person and third person, written (and even this is problematic) by a self who calls herself "this creature." Yet it is not hagiography either. The *Book* falls short of the criteria of hagiography for practical reasons – to name only a few, Margery Kempe has not been canonized and she has no proper "vita," the primary criterion for which is posthumous creation. Barry Windeatt and Sarah Salih, seemingly frustrated with the *Book's* apparent refusal to conform to a devotional genre, have facetiously called it "autohagiography" with palpable discomfort and skepticism. "Autohagiography" proves a concept with nearly insurmountable troubles, for a number of reasons which perhaps go beyond the scope of this paper. In short, scholars have found efforts to fit Kempe's book into some wider corpus of texts tremendously problematic.

**Comments**

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Textual Communities of The Book of Margery Kemp

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2006-2007 Penn Humanities Forum on Travel  
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The simplest, and yet most knotty, place to start with *The Book of Margery Kempe* is to ask plainly: what *is* it? It has most frequently been proclaimed the first autobiography in English, seemingly more as a marketing ploy than as a result of careful analysis of genre.<sup>1</sup> In reality, Kempe's book occupies an uncomfortable space between first person and third person, written (and even this is problematic) by a self who calls herself "this creature." Yet it is not hagiography either. The *Book* falls short of the criteria of hagiography for practical reasons – to name only a few, Margery Kempe has not been canonized and she has no proper "vita," the primary criterion for which is posthumous creation. Barry Windeatt and Sarah Salih, seemingly frustrated with the *Book's* apparent refusal to conform to a devotional genre, have facetiously called it "autohagiography" with palpable discomfort and skepticism.<sup>2</sup> "Autohagiography" proves a concept with nearly insurmountable troubles, for a number of reasons which perhaps go beyond the scope of this paper. In short, scholars have found efforts to fit Kempe's book into some wider corpus of texts tremendously problematic.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Sarah Beckwith's article, in which she makes the following claim without much explanation: "Critics are then absolutely right to locate an individualism in Margery Kempe, and to link that individualism to something autobiographical about her book." In "Problems of Authority in Late Medieval English Mysticism: Agency and Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*." *Exemplaria* 4 (1992), 197. See also the entry on Margery Kempe in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The English Tradition*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985), 21: "The same feisty energy that characterized Margery Kempe's life must have impelled her to write the first extant autobiography in the vernacular."

<sup>2</sup> Barry Windeatt, "Introduction," in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004); Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 174.

<sup>3</sup> A perfect example of this struggle may be found in Sarah Salih's book *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England*, in which she argues that "Insofar as the *Book* is hagiography it is also, necessarily, conventional, but where it is original is in its combination of apparently incompatible models. I will be arguing that Margery's performance draws on a number of disparate traditions, often reworking them in the process, to produce a probably unique performance of visible, visionary, preaching, remade virgin in the world" (187).

As a result, the *Book* has become either a work that can fit into a devotional “genre” prevalent in late medieval Europe only by emphasizing the role of male scribes, confessors and amanuenses; *or* Kempe and her book have been declared anomalies, things to be reckoned with only by removing them from their context.<sup>4</sup> In cases in which scholars have felt comfortable transcribing Kempe into her community, they have tended to neglect the devotional nature of the *Book* in favor of analyses of the text and Kempe herself as media through which to view a portrait of late medieval England.<sup>5</sup> More recent critical efforts have been made to integrate Kempe into a “devotional women’s writing” genre, most notably by including essays about her in anthologies of medieval women’s writing and by emphasizing her mention of various mystics and saints, such as Bridget of Sweden, Marie of Oignies, and Julian of Norwich.<sup>6</sup> But the results have been rather

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<sup>4</sup> An extreme example of the former is A.C. Spearing’s provocative essay “Margery Kempe” in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 83-97, in which he attempts to effectively remove all claims of authorship from Kempe and re-align the *Book* more definitively with male scribes and clerics. The interesting consequence of this discourse, however, is that only once Spearing has “freed” the text from the complex nexus of authors and claims to authorship by ascribing authorship only to male clerics can he in turn write about the *Book* as a legitimate devotional work with recourse to others in a devotional genre.

<sup>5</sup> A good instance of this is Anthony Goodman’s study *Margery Kempe and Her World* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), in which Goodman notes the seeming generic oddities of the *Book* (is it confessional, contemplative, autobiographical?) but moves away from these questions by exploring the historical realities of Kempe’s book and times instead. See also Lynn Staley’s study, promising in its dismissal of the simple generic characterization of Kempe’s book as “autobiography,” but which nonetheless argues that Margery Kempe is primarily “a major commentator upon the quality of life and of social relations in the late Middle Ages” (39). Finally, see remarks in the *Norton Anthology* that “Margery Kempe produced a lively, realistic narrative as well as an illuminating document of fifteenth-century society” (21).

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Elizabeth Spearing’s anthology *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 2002), in which she includes Margery Kempe among Hildegard of Bingen, Christina of Markyate, Hadwijch, Christina the Astonishing, Mary of Oignies, Elizabeth of Spaalbeek, Marguerite Porete, Bridget of Sweden, and Julian of Norwich. A similar example is Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff’s anthology, *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). See also Alexandra Barratt’s anthology, *Women’s Writing in Middle English* (London and New York: Longman Group, Ltd, 1992), in which the excerpt from *The Book of Margery Kempe* includes “Julian of Norwich Counsels Margery” to emphasize Kempe’s community of like-minded female mystics. Gubar and Gilbert predicate their treatment of Margery Kempe in the *Norton Anthology* on a comparison with Julian of Norwich, beginning the entry on Kempe thus: “When Margery Kempe visited Julian of

unsatisfactory – even when Kempe is placed alongside these other writers, there remains an implicit assumption that her voice and text are inaudible and illegible in the context of other mystical works. For example, in *The Norton Anthology of Writing by Women*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss Margery Kempe *only* in the context of the contemporary East Anglian anchoress Julian of Norwich. Yet in doing so, they do not afford Kempe a community of like-minded religious authoresses; instead, Kempe appears as a failed, aberrant form of the anchoress Julian, who in turn “warn[ed] the visitor” about her spirituality, characterized by its *departure* from Julian’s here canonical female sanctity.<sup>7</sup> Somehow, Kempe has come to occupy a solitary space, one that can only be heard and read *without* recourse to her contemporaries *or* by making comparisons only to harp on her irregularity. For instance, Clarissa Atkinson affords Kempe tremendous importance, but only after proposing that the “invaluable” nature of the *Book* rests precisely on Margery Kempe’s “eccentricity” and the failure of her book to fit into any “conventional categories.”<sup>8</sup>

*The Book of Margery Kempe* has remained a lone anomaly in contemporary scholarship: a characterization that may not be entirely warranted once the surviving manuscript itself is considered. The manuscript was annotated by four different monks at Mount Grace Priory, a Carthusian monastery in Yorkshire: a fifteenth-century annotator

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Norwich, the aging anchoress and author of *A Book of Showings*, she sought ‘good counsel’ about her own divine revelations” (20).

<sup>7</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, 21. Full quotation: “What Julian seemed to understand in her ‘holy dalliance’ with Margery Kempe was the vulnerability of a ‘sister’ whose spirituality took a quite different form from her own, for Margery Kempe dramatically enacted her religious enthusiasm in the world.” And see a similar comment: “Unlike Dame Julian, who meditated exclusively on the growth of her spiritual understanding, Margery Kempe produced a lively, realistic narrative as well as an illuminating document of fifteenth-century society.”

<sup>8</sup> Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 195.

writing in black ink (Annotator 1), a fifteenth-century annotator writing in brown ink (Annotator 2), a fifteenth-century annotator writing in faded brown ink (Annotator 3), and an annotator writing in red ink (Annotator 4 or the famous “Red Ink Annotator”) in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Kelly Parsons has written about the Red Ink Annotator, but her study remains focused on the possibility of a lay (perhaps female) readership, conjecturing that the Mount Grace annotations reflect a process of preparing the manuscript for lay readers. As Karma Lochrie notes, modern studies of *The Book of Margery Kempe* tend to fashion it as peculiarly isolated from “its readership and the culture which read it in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.” These studies make Kempe’s book into something that *was* influenced rather than something that had the capacity *to influence*.<sup>9</sup> No full study of the annotations, aside from Parsons’, exists, although many studies refer briefly to the fact that the surviving manuscript was annotated. These comments, however, seem surprisingly dismissive, usually characterizing the annotations as censorious or unsystematic responses to the text.<sup>10</sup> Yet Hope Emily Allen’s comments on the marginal annotations upon her initial re-discovery of the text in 1934 loom as a specter over subsequent Kempe scholarship, suggesting the

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<sup>9</sup> Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 204. Lochrie’s comments are promising, but they do not constitute her main concern in this study, and she ultimately decides that Kempe’s book is a form of “dialogue and narrative,” a test of sorts of her own spirituality, rather than “a guide to meditation or contemplation” (203). Lochrie’s passing comments are suggestive, but she remains more interested in feminist issues and in issues of the textualization of the “mystical” experience than in contextualizing the *Book* and its monastic readership.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Karma Lochrie’s comment that “In addition to demonstrating ways that late-medieval readers responded to texts, the annotations implicitly ‘authorize’ the *Book* by authorizing Margery’s life” (150). For an example of the latter, see Kelly Parsons’ comment that the red ink annotator’s glosses “appear to be his personal ecstatic response to the text,” in “The Red Ink Annotator of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and His Lay Audience,” in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 2001).

necessity of investigating these glosses with more rigor.<sup>11</sup> In contemplating the monastic Mount Grace use of the manuscript, Kelly Parsons notes in passing that more careful study of these marginal glosses in their Carthusian context is imperative.<sup>12</sup> Karma Lochrie has pointed to the need to study the Carthusian reception of Kempe's book, noting the "very serious acceptance of her book among the English Carthusian community at Mount Grace," and commenting that this fact of the monastic reception of the book "offers interesting possibilities for future study of Kempe and Carthusian spirituality...in an effort to read her in terms of the reading communities of her own culture and time."<sup>13</sup> Lochrie published this study in the early 1990s, but no one has yet elaborated on her preliminary examination of the relationship between Margery Kempe's book and its early monastic reception at Mount Grace. Why in the recent surge of scholarly interest in Margery Kempe this particular line of research has not been undertaken remains a mystery.

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<sup>11</sup> See Hope Emily Allen's comments in her introduction to the 1940 EETS edition of the *Book*. These comments indicate a critical interest in the marginalia: "It remains to analyse the annotations in red according to their kinds. There are two principal types: those which emphasize, summarize, or serve as comment upon, parts of the text, and those which attempt to emend it. The purpose which most of the annotations serve is that of calling attention to passages in the text which the man who probably made them all considered most note-worthy" (38-9). See also Lynn Staley's appraisal of the manuscript annotations. She seems to have the correct instincts to take the marginalia seriously, and she obviously feels compelled to treat them in some respect: "This reader, like the anonymous M.N., who carefully annotated his English translation of Margaret of Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, smoothing over parts that could be misinterpreted as heretical, offers a reading of Margery Kempe's *Book* that, in its obvious effort to characterize the Book generically, is designed to control any response to and, hence, understanding of the text. It is clear from the way in which this reader emended the style, corrected the spelling, glossed the plot, and noted some of the errors of the original scribe, that he read the manuscript closely, paying special attention to the credibility and clarity of the argument. He also signaled the empathic and participatory nature of his approach by underlining words relating to affective spirituality and by writing 'amen' or 'thanks' at the end of chapters describing Margery's devotional life. In addition, the bulk of his marginal notations suggest his sense that the Book is generically affiliated with other significant affective texts" (96-7).

<sup>12</sup> See Kelly Parsons' comment: "When further study is done on Carthusian marginalia we may be in a better position to know just how unusual these red ink annotations are" (151).

<sup>13</sup> Lochrie, 9.



Perhaps scholars have thought the marginal annotations too tangential to the text of the *Book* itself to be considered as a key to its genre. Yet Margery Kempe's text proper warrants the annotations that survive in the Mount Grace manuscript. Furthermore, these annotations bear ready comparison to marginalia in other contemporary manuscripts. The marginalia foster associations with other Carthusian and Mount Grace texts that suggest the use of the *Book* as a pedagogical tool. By devotional pedagogy, I mean that the monks used the text instructionally and communally for purposes of devotion. For example, many Carthusian monks made images of themselves in the company of the holy family and used these images as tools for affective devotion.<sup>14</sup> Kempe frequently figures herself in the company of the holy family, imagining her own presence at Christ's birth. In fact, visualizing oneself in dialogue with holy figures was somewhat commonplace in medieval devotion. This is apparent in women's books of hours, such as Mary of Burgundy's 1470 book, in which the female patron and owner is imaged as privy to the Annunciation (Figure 1).<sup>15</sup> It is very likely that visions such as this may have been used by Carthusian monks as devotional imagery.

The marginal annotations that survive indicate a monastic readership attempting to integrate Kempe's spiritual outpourings into a corpus of texts they owned and annotated. The problem with reading the marginalia into the text, however, is that it may insinuate a collective authorship that gives undue significance to male *auctors* and, in the process, silences the female voice. This obstacle proves endlessly troublesome in the

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<sup>14</sup> Jessica Brantley, "The Visual Environment of Carthusian Texts: Decoration and Illustration in Notre Dame 67," in *The Text in the Community: Essays on Medieval Works, Manuscripts, Authors, and Readers*, ed. Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 185.

<sup>15</sup> Sandra Penketh, "Women and Books of Hours," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (London and Toronto: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 1996), 272.

analysis of medieval texts authored by women. Once we have a text attributed to a woman with the involvement of male scribes and annotators, it becomes increasingly problematic to locate authorship in the woman. I do not propose that we read *The Book of Margery Kempe* as authored by a community of males. As Felicity Riddy notes, this text is notoriously uninterested in the subjective “I” author, even though it has often been called an autobiography.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, questions of authorship as we usually conceive of them are somewhat off the table in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, a text that occupies a very unusual space between speech and writing, ecclesiastical and lay expression, and even “female” and “male” textuality. The *Book* seems a thorough collaboration between Kempe and her scribes; it is never so reductive an issue as A.C. Spearing perhaps wishes to make it, arguing that the presence of “constructions that could belong only to prose, not speech” indicates a translation from speech to writing that must be “textualization and clericalization” rather than dictation.<sup>17</sup> Instead, a wealth of evidence indicates a rapport between Kempe and her scribes and clerics that allows her a claim to authorship.<sup>18</sup> In recognizing the difficulties of authorship in this text, I nonetheless wish to move away from questions of authorship and focus on questions of readership. Conjectures as to the

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<sup>16</sup> Felicity Riddy, “Text and Self in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 441: “This is, then, a curious textual world of first and third persons that merge into one another and in which ‘yow’ is absent. The first person ‘who speaks’ is barely a *person* at all: it cannot be identified with either Margery Kempe or the scribe, and does not engage in a relation with a second-person narratee. ‘I’ is emptied of personal reference.”

<sup>17</sup> Spearing, 93.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Riddy’s essay, in which she argues effectively against Spearing’s stance by convincingly claiming that the presence of one conventional author in this text is nearly impossible to locate. The other extreme countering Spearing’s argument also exists – see, for instance, Jacqueline Jenkin’s study “Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in which she proposes that “not only is it probable that Margery Kempe was able to read English, but that her presentation of herself as the illiterate (non-reading) ‘Margery’ is a deliberate self-construction.” In *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 113.

authorship of this text, although at the moment hotly contested, are not my primary concern in this study. By considering marginalia and text together, I am not re-approaching the question of “who wrote *The Book of Margery Kempe*”; rather, I am suggesting that we make better use of an important clue to the *Book*’s genre.

In a text that seems impossible to categorize, a piece of reception history, which fortunately survives in the manuscript, may illuminate the question of the genre of Kempe’s book. The specific *types* of marginal annotations, in concert with marginal annotations in other contemporary manuscripts, indicate a readership that locates Kempe in a formalized tradition of “devotional pedagogy.” Rather than reading Kempe’s text with a post-Romantic mentality in which text and margins are two separate entities, I propose we read the text and the margins together as a devotional artifact. The Kempe persona may have been a solitary pilgrim, cast out by groups of travelers exasperated by her boisterous crying out and sometimes seemingly heretical *imitatio* of Christ; but her *text* is not an isolated figure.<sup>19</sup> Re-configuring Kempe’s text as devotional pedagogy has significant consequences. We tend to think that late medieval women’s piety was not meant instructively because women were not permitted to preach, after St. Paul’s

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<sup>19</sup> Kempe’s unusually solitary pilgrimages are somewhat troublesome, in light of the kind of communal pilgrimage narrative we are more accustomed to (most notably in *The Canterbury Tales*): “And sone aftyr, summe of the company on which sche trostyde best, and hir owyn mayden also, seyden sche schuld no lengar gon in her felaschep, and thei seyden thei woldyn han away hyr mayden fro hir, that sche schuld no strumpet be in hyr cumpany” (*The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt. Longman Annotated Texts. Edinburgh: Pearson Education, Ltd, 2000, 152). Compare this to the centrality of “cumpanye” in Chaucer’s pilgrimage tale: “Bifel that, in that seson on a day, / In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay / Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage / To Caunterbury with ful devout corage, / At night was come into that hostelrye / Wel nyne and twenty in a cumpanye / Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle / In felawshipe, and pilgrims were they alle, / That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde” (*The Canterbury Tales*, ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989, 19-27).

admonition against it in the first epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>20</sup> In an essay on late medieval saints, Richard Kieckhefer claims that “The simple fact that men’s piety expressed itself in preaching and in written counsel made it possible for men more than women to engage in piety as pedagogy, a fact so obvious that we need not belabor it.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, *is* it a fact “so obvious”? Kieckhefer clearly frames this view as indisputable, but Margery Kempe’s text certainly poses a problem for the absolute nature of this claim. *The Book of Margery Kempe* is a text authored by a woman that was *meant to* be received and *was* received and used as “pedagogy” in “piety.”

The methodology here is primarily to use paratextual evidence to uncover the meaning of the text. I will systematically discuss in turn the different species of marginal annotations in the Kempe manuscript (explicated in more detail below): textually gleaned marginal rubrics, paraphrased marginal rubrics, textual extrapolations, and “nota” symbols. Where possible, I will intersperse comparative analyses of the corresponding marginalia of other texts of a contemporary and similar devotional nature and finally of texts of Mount Grace provenance. In my discussions of Mount Grace and the Kempe manuscript, I will also treat the pictorial marginalia in the latter and compare it with illustrations in both Mount Grace and other English Carthusian manuscripts. By virtue of this explication, I propose a new reading of the Kempe manuscript as it survives, with marginalia, in light of its contemporary textual community.

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<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: “Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be subject, as also the law saith. But if they would learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church.”

<sup>21</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, “Holiness and the Culture of Devotion: Remarks on Some Late Medieval Male Saints,” in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 303.

Kempe's book, then, is a text working within the specific devotional environment of the Carthusian order and Mount Grace Priory. More specifically, the marginal commentary forms a narrative in the margin that, by arousing elements extant in the text proper, demarcates a path to prayer remarkably similar to that delineated by Walter Hilton's *scala* and other Carthusian devotional-pedagogical texts.<sup>22</sup> Textually gleaned marginal rubrics in effect represent a devotional table of contents dispersed throughout Kempe's book; paraphrased marginal rubrics unite Kempe's description of preparation for prayer; textual extrapolations situate the text as a whole within a devotional community, inhabited by other figures whose methods of prayer imitate Margery's, and offer performative gestures that lead to the highest degree of contemplation; and *nota* glosses amalgamate descriptions of Kempe's tears and cries to represent the final step in the Hiltonian/Carthusian *scala*, literal converse and communion with Christ and an ability to contemplate the Trinity.<sup>23</sup> This ascent to prayer appears in other Carthusian texts with which we might associate Kempe's book, including Adam de Dryburgh's *Quadripartite Exercise of the Cell*, which delineates eight phases of meditation in ascending order from solitary acquaintance with sacred literature to the eighth manner of meditation, a highly

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<sup>22</sup> See Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Denise Despres' study *Iconography and the Professional Reader: The Politics of Book Production in the Douce Piers Plowman* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 134, for a similar appraisal of the interrelations among marginal notations in a single manuscript: "Another important aspect of the way marginal motifs work is not by reference to the text, but by reference to one another—the reflexivity of imagery not just across single pages but in chains of linked motifs and signs that echo throughout a whole manuscript or book."

<sup>23</sup> See Walter Hilton: "Understand, then, that the love of God has three degrees, all of which are good, but each succeeding degree is better than the other. The first degree is reached by faith alone, when no knowledge of God is conveyed by grace through the imagination or understanding... The second degree of love is attained when the soul knows God by faith and Jesus in His manhood through the imagination. This love, where imagination is stimulated by grace, is better than the first, because the spiritual perceptions are awakened to contemplate our Lord's human nature. In the third degree the soul, so far as it may in this life, contemplates the Godhead united to manhood in Christ." In *The Ladder of Perfection*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Middlesex and Baltimore: Penguin Books Ltd, 1957), 235.

“intellectual” comprehension of the Trinity. The imagination of oneself in the presence of Christ and as personally implied in scenes from the New Testament becomes the ultimate goal of prayer to which this text, along with the marginalia, points its readers, an end not only of Carthusian devotional practice but also of many books of hours, especially popular in the later medieval period.

The construction of *The Book of Margery Kempe* even without the marginal annotations *suggests* a delineation of the ascent to prayer: in fact, the *Book* ends with several pages of prayer. The so-called mystical nature of the *Book* perhaps appears in the fact that the “guide” to prayer is buried and scattered across the text. It therefore remains the vocation of the monastic annotator to delineate systematically these scattered elements using glossing and pictorial techniques from the conventions of other manuscripts to guide a community of other readers in the practical, devotional use of this text.<sup>24</sup> Finally, we have evidence that the book was in fact used precisely in this manner, and through the marginal rubrics in the surviving manuscript, we may locate an organized expression of the guidance to prayer that the *Book* intrinsically voices in a less discernible manner. The entire *Book*, text proper and marginalia included, becomes an extensive gloss on devotional practice, one both performative, prescribing gesture and positioning

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<sup>24</sup> This is not a technique unique to the Kempe manuscript. As Vincent Gillespie notes, the list of *tituli* in the Vernon manuscript, to take just one example, transforms what seems like a scattered group of texts into a “working anthology,” gathering the “rubrics found within the texts in the manuscript, grouping them together under a numbered heading for each work. It not only facilitates reference to complete works but also allows access to sections of work containing matter of particular interest to a particular reader at a particular time, permitting the manuscript to be read thematically.” In “Vernacular Books of Religion,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 328.

for prayer, and meditative, encouraging the reader to dwell on the words and images of Biblical scenes and religious figures while praying.<sup>25</sup>

### **Categorizing Marginalia**

The relationship between the marginalia and the text in this and other medieval manuscripts proves extremely complex – and this, according to Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, constitutes the reason for the lack of research in this area.<sup>26</sup> Part of the problem is that we do not yet have a vocabulary with which to discuss marginalia; to date, the majority of commentary on marginalia remains rather unsystematic addenda to “literary” studies of texts. Carl James Grindley has made strides in remedying this by providing an ambitious taxonomy of marginalia in texts from the British Isles between 1300 and 1641. Tellingly, Grindley discusses marginalia in the language of genre, insisting that we need a “standard theory, or even a terminology, for describing marginal texts.”<sup>27</sup> He does not even call them notes or annotations but, significantly, “texts.” He has effectively defined them as constituting their own genre *but* a genre necessarily in contact with source texts.

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<sup>25</sup> I am striking the words “mystic” and “mystical” from my discussion of Margery Kempe and her book. I think these terms are misleading and imply a religious/literary tradition without the authority of commentary on the liturgy or other theological texts. I prefer not to use these terms for writers such as Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle surrounding Margery Kempe. Instead, the terms “devotional” and “pedagogical guide” will be used. For a similar argument about the use of the terms “mystic” and “mystical,” see Nicholas Watson’s article “The Middle English Mystics” (*The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), in which he argues that “both the canon of ‘Middle English mystics’ and the term ‘mysticism’ itself have largely outlived their usefulness to scholars. The study of English ‘mystics’ has for long been a thing unto itself, little influenced by and scarcely influencing work on other writers” (539).

<sup>26</sup> Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, “Introduction: The Medieval Professional Reader and Reception History, 1292-1641,” in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2001), 7.

<sup>27</sup> Carl James Grindley, “Reading *Piers Plowman* C-Text Annotations: Notes toward the Classification of Printed and Written Marginalia in Texts from the British Isles 1300-1641,” in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2001), 73.

In the case of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, this latter point could not be clearer. While Grindley identifies a number of sub-categories of “tangential,” unrelated marginalia (including, for example, what he plainly calls “doodles”<sup>28</sup>), most if not all of the marginal annotations in the Kempe manuscript fall under his category “Type III” marginalia – those annotations that have the most direct relationship with the content of the text. They comprise the most sophisticated type of marginalia, requiring an involved readership, an ability to analyze and synthesize the content of the text, and a vocation to *share* the text with other readers. Among the categories that Grindley places under the Type III heading, the category of marginalia that serve the purpose of “summation” appears most frequently in the Kempe manuscript. Some of the sub-categories of “summation” also appear in the Kempe manuscript: textually-gleaned marginal rubrics, paraphrased marginal rubrics, and textual extrapolations. These are, respectively, marginal notes that transcribe exact words from text to margins, marginal notes that paraphrase words or lines from within text, and annotations that paraphrase and condense entire topics from within the text. Scholars have often been content to imagine that Kempe’s four annotators meant to emend her text or write in rather spontaneous rapturous outbursts in the margin with little or no regard for conventions of marginal annotation. Yet if we truly examine the marginalia, neither of these hypotheses holds very well. Instead, as Grindley notes, “summation” marginalia, the most frequent kind in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, indicate an annotator chiefly concerned with “creating a narrative navigation of the text,”<sup>29</sup> that is, a legend to guide other readers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Grindley, 78.

<sup>29</sup> Grindley, 86.



In her article about the much-neglected version *Piers Plowman C-Text*, Tanya Schapp makes a useful distinction between “scribal annotation” – marginal notes written alongside the production of the manuscript to guide a prospective readership – and what she calls private annotations, which bear ready comparison to what modern readers do when they annotate books.<sup>31</sup> Textual extrapolations are, according to Schapp, more frequent in “private” annotations than in scribal ones.<sup>32</sup> Margery Kempe’s annotators seem to engage in both kinds of annotation, suggesting both an interest in directing other readers and in private reading. The conjecture that the Kempe annotators’ marginal notes resemble scribal annotations has enormous consequences – it means that they were effectively projecting their marginalia onto the original production of the book and thus in some ways suggesting that their marginal glosses could be considered integral to the text proper. In fact, in the history of some manuscripts, it sometimes occurs that what are marginal comments in earlier manuscripts become part of the text proper in later copies; perhaps Kempe’s Mount Grace annotators remained keen on that possibility as well.

Two types of annotation appear most frequently in the Kempe manuscript: the “nota” symbol, a fairly conventional annotation drawing the attention of the reader to a particular passage, and textual extrapolation, as discussed above. The latter comprise an

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<sup>30</sup> In fact, Mary Carruthers, in her study *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), points out that marginal *tituli* occur in early medieval Biblical commentaries, appearing usually as summaries or as a quotation of the first few words in a textual division. Paraphrased marginal rubrics arise out of the former Biblical commentary technique and textually-gleaned marginal rubrics out of the latter. Indeed, these marginal *tituli* were included in Biblical commentary both as “finding aids” for other readers and, as Carruthers argues, as mnemonic *and* meditative devices (244).

<sup>31</sup> Tanya Schapp, “From Professional to Private Readership: A Discussion and Transcription of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Marginalia in *Piers Plowman C-text*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 102,” in *The Medieval Reader: Reception and Cultural History in the Late Medieval Manuscript*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (New York: AMS Press, 2001), 81-116.

<sup>32</sup> Schapp, 89.

*imitatio* of Kempe's vita in which the annotators attempt to enact or simulate her devotion. Many Kempe scholars implicitly express some discomfort with the notion that Kempe's annotators may have been doing something *other* than emending her text, or rendering it properly orthodox. In her essay on the red ink annotator, Kelly Parsons notes that Carthusian monks, while undoubtedly propagating a market for mystical devotional writing, often by women, used the practice of marginal annotations as a way of "watering down" the ecstasy and sensual rapture that pervades the texts.<sup>33</sup> Parsons includes the Kempe marginalia in this characterization, claiming that "censoring red ink emendations of Margery's *Book* occur in MS Add. 61823 in the form of excisions."<sup>34</sup> By "excisions," Parsons refers to those instances in the manuscript in which the annotators cross out words or phrases and (sometimes) insert "corrective" substitutions. While "excisions" and other forms of censorship certainly exist in the Kempe marginalia, they in no way encompass the most prominent form of annotation. Instead, the annotators' primary vocation is to arouse the text, to extract and extend its devotion in places where it seems to be encouraging them to do so.

For instance, in capitulum 44, the red ink annotator has added the words "ebrietas sancta" in the outer margin beside:

Than was hir sowle so delectably fed wyth the swet  
dalyawns of owr Lorde & so fulfilled of hys lofe that as a  
drunkyn man sche turnyd hir first on the o syde & sithyn on  
the other wyth gret wepyng & gret sobbyng, un-mythy to  
kepyn hir-selfe in stabilnes for the unqwenchabyl fyer of  
lofe which brent ful sor in hir sowle.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Parsons, 149.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Hope Emily Allen and Sanford Brown Meech (London: Published for the Early English Text Society, Oxford University Press, 1940), 105.

Here, the annotator almost provides the text with a “table of contents” of affective piety – in this section, we have “ebrietas sancta” or “holy inebriation.” The notion of “ebrietas sancta” that the annotators emphasize in Kempe’s book connects the text with works by Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton.<sup>36</sup> This is a common occurrence in the manuscript – just a few pages later, the red ink annotator inscribes “amor impaciens” in the outer margin to define Kempe’s description of “this creature’s” mystical outburst at the thought of the crucifixion: “& ther sche cryed, ‘I dey, I dey,’ & roryd also wonderfully that the pepil wonderyd up-on hir, hauyng [having] gret merueyl [marvel] what hir eyled [ailed].”<sup>37</sup> As Hope Emily Allen and Sanford Meech, the earliest editors of the *Book*, have noted in passing, Kempe’s text “seems to beg for annotation.”<sup>38</sup> The marginalia appear as a “tally,” to use Lynn Staley’s term, of the events that generically mark religious life.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, Staley undermines her own observation of this marginal “checklist” by concluding that Kempe’s text ultimately fails to concede the “usual” terms of a hagiographic or devotional life.<sup>40</sup> But the marginal annotations do *not* censure (or censor) Margery, nor do they, intentionally or not, lay bare what most would like to call her “fraudulent” claims to sanctity.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Richard Rolle for abundant examples of “ebrietas sancta”: “The heart is shaped into the likeness of that in which the cherished sound exists, making his delightful affection drunk with the heavenly taste from which he flows with interior delights.” In *The Fire of Love and the Mending of Life*, ed. M.L. del Mastro (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 129. See Walter Hilton’s *Ladder of Perfection*: “For whenever grace comes powerfully it imposes a great strain on the spirit, even while it brings joy. It is also a great strain on the body if experienced often, for at the mighty surge of grace the body stirs and moves about like that of a madman or drunkard who can find no ease” (33).

<sup>37</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 107.

<sup>38</sup> Staley, 101.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Staley, 101.

<sup>41</sup> See Vincent Gillespie, “Dial M for Mystic: Mystical Texts in the Library of Syon Abbey and the Spirituality of the Syon Brethren,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Ireland, and Wales: Exeter Symposium VI: papers read at Charney Manor, July 1998*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 246-7, for a similar appraisal of the annotators’ relationship to the text.

We should not, perhaps, be unduly surprised that the annotations cited above are in Latin. Although the annotators' use of Latin may be seen as somewhat of a censoring gesture – that is, an attempt to “authorize” a vernacular religious book by inserting Latin “authority” – there are several reasons to move away from this claim in the Kempe manuscript. To begin with, the use of Latin is not consistent, neither to a particular annotator nor to the entirety of the annotations; in fact, Latin annotations are the striking minority among numerous marginal notes in English. Second, as Vincent Gillespie has suggested, the most prevalent kind of monastic book in the fifteenth century was still the “clerical miscellany,” overwhelmingly dominated by Latin writing.<sup>42</sup> However, as Gillespie notes, the presence of Latin does not preclude a clerical interest in the vernacular by any means.<sup>43</sup> If the prevalence of Latin in fifteenth-century monastic texts is a central component specifically of the clerical miscellany, then the monk-annotators in this case might have been using conventions of clerical texts to annotate Kempe's manuscript, not to censure or confine her writing but to do just the opposite: to approach it as they did clerical miscellanies, which they most certainly used for devotional purposes. In fact, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, with its episodic construction, might itself be read as a miscellany of sorts.

### **Textually Gleaned Marginal Rubrics: The Devotional Table of Contents**

Textually gleaned marginal rubrics in the Kempe manuscript reveal a surprisingly “systematic” interest in the content of the *Book*. Using this sub-type of marginal annotation, the annotators consistently take note of passages related to two aspects of the

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<sup>42</sup> Gillespie, “Vernacular Books of Religion,” 317.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

text: Kempe's saintly features and portions of the book that resonate with other devotional conventions. They thus help situate Kempe's text in a general way, among hagiographic and other devotional aids, and provide a spiritual encyclopedia in the margins, a kind of table of contents that helps the reader locate the ascent to prayer that the *Book* prescribes. Several textually gleaned marginalia extract moments in the text that constitute requirements for canonization or conventions of hagiography. For instance, in Book 1 capitulum 9, the red ink annotator has extracted "Jhesu helpe me" from the same words in text, Margery's outcry when her husband attempts to touch her:

Than on the Wednysday in Estern Woke, aftyr hyr husbond wold have had knowlache of hir as he was wone befor, and whan he gan neygh hir, sche seyde, 'Jhesus, help me!' and he had no power to towche hir at that tyme in that wyse, ne nevyr aftyr with no fleschly knowyng.<sup>44</sup>

This passage, along with a few others in which her husband propositions her, is the closest Margery gets to real carnal persecution, an essential element to many female saints' lives. While John Kempe's momentary lust and Margery's navigation of it are nothing much compared to the performative escape narrative in, for example, Christina of Markyate, a twelfth-century anchoress who hangs from a hook on the wall to hide from her husband and his sexual advances, it nonetheless constitutes a moment in which Kempe's text resonates with hagiography on two counts: the lusty "persecution" by a spurned male and a miraculous intervention. Yet more worthy of attention is that the annotator responds to this passage and extracts it as one of the moments in the text worthy of continued attention because he recognizes it for its hagiographical resonance.

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<sup>44</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt. Longman Annotated Texts (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 82. All further references will be taken from this edition.

This recognition of the hagiographical qualities of the text recurs in the margins. A repetition of “Jhesu, mercy” occurs at another “miraculous” moment when a stone falls on Margery’s head while she prays in St. Margaret’s Church, and, yelling out “Jhesu, mercy,” she is “miraculously” healed of the possible injury this event might have caused.<sup>45</sup> The text casts this moment as a miracle and, once again, the red ink annotator responds by extracting Margery’s words in order to point a finger at this moment in the text as one of significant contribution to the “tally” of saintly qualities of which, we might imagine, the annotators were keeping count.

Perhaps most explicit is the repetition of the word “saint” itself in Book 1 capitulum 53 repeating the comment of one of the Duke of Bedford’s men, “Damsel, yf euyr yu be seynt in Heuyn, prey for me.”<sup>46</sup> In this case, it becomes ever clearer that the marginalia promote certain moments in the text that refer to formal devotional paradigms, whether these are ultimately hagiographic conventions or devotional aid. Another marginal note, although not technically “textually gleaned,” emphasizes the vow of chastity Margery and her husband John take. This vow is essential to sanctity (and sainthood), and it is no surprise that it has been thus heeded. The red ink annotator repeats the word “vow” in the outer margin beside the description of the vow of chastity Margery and her husband John take: “They dwellyd not togedyr, ne thei lay not togedyr, for (as is wretyn befor) thei bothyn wyth on assent and wyth fre wil of her eithyr haddyn

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<sup>45</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 83: “Sodeynly fel down fro the heyest party of the chersch-vowte, fro undyr the fote of the sparre, on hir hed and on hir bake a ston wech weyd iii pownd, and a schort ende of a tre weyng vi pownd, that hir thowt hir bakke brakke asundyr, and sche ferd as sche had be deed a lytyl whyle. Soone aftyr sche cryed ‘Jhesu, mercy!’ and anoon hir peyn was gon.”

<sup>46</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 259.

mad avow to levyn chast.”<sup>47</sup> This mutual vow of chastity constitutes one more “tally” on the check-list to Margery’s sainthood.

The other sub-type of textually gleaned marginal rubrics in the Kempe manuscript capitalizes on the text’s resonances with contemporary devotional works. These normally take the form of repetitions in the margins of books directly mentioned in text; sometimes the annotators “complete” a textual reference by writing the name of the text or author in the margin. While the latter marginal annotation is not *technically* a “textually gleaned marginal rubric” because it does not precisely repeat words from in text, I will treat it in this section because it functions more as textually gleaned marginal rubric than as textual extrapolation. In capitulum 17, the text mentions several books, including “Hyltons boke” “Bridis boke” “*Stimulus Amoris*” and “*Incendium Amoris*.”<sup>48</sup> Beside “Bridis boke,” Annotator 1 writes “brigyts” in the outer margin, referencing St. Bridget of Sweden; beside “*Incendium Amoris*,” the red ink annotator adds in the outer margin “of R. hampall,” referencing Richard Rolle. The red ink annotator too emphasizes references to St. Bridget in other parts of the text. For instance, in capitulum 20, Jesus appears to Margery, saying: “For I telle the forsothe, rygth as I spak to Seynt Bryde, ryte so I speke to the, dowtyr, and I telle the trewly, it is trewe every word that is wretyn in Brides boke, and be the it schal be knowyn for very trewth.”<sup>49</sup> Beside this mention of Bridget, the red ink annotator has added “B” in the outer margin, again to draw attention to the reference in text. Interestingly, as Windeatt notes, this reference to Bridget is probably to a particular passage in *Liber Celestis* in which Jesus says to St. Bridget: “Thow mervales

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<sup>47</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 330.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

that I speke and shewe the swilke [such] grete thinges. Hoppes [think] thow that I do it for thiselfe allone? Nai, forsothe, bot for the edificacion of othir and hele of other.”<sup>50</sup> The notion of “edificacion of other” is particularly significant – this means that the annotators not only responded to a moment in Kempe’s text that references a prominent female holy woman but one that refers to a notion of visionary texts as instruction for others. The annotators’ interest in highlighting this particular reference indicates an investment in the instructional aspects of Kempe’s text. Other instances of this sub-type of textually gleaned marginal rubric in the Kempe manuscript include the red ink annotator’s repetition of “Dame Ielyan [Julian of Norwich]”<sup>51</sup> beside Kempe’s mention of her visit to this anchoress in capitulum 18; the red ink annotator’s repetition of “S. bridis madyn”<sup>52</sup> beside mention of a visit with St. Bridget’s maid in Rome in capitulum 38; and the red ink annotator’s repetition of the title “Prykke of Lofe,”<sup>53</sup> a Middle English translation of Bonaventure’s *Stimulus Amoris*, in capitulum 62.

These textually gleaned marginal rubrics lend credence to Staley’s passing observation of the devotional “checklist” extant in the manuscript’s margins. In fact, the devotional “checklist” in Kempe’s margins is actually not unique to this particular manuscript. Rather, manuscripts similar to Kempe’s in content are also comparable in what survives in their margins. British Library MS Additional 37790, a miscellany compiled in the fifteenth century containing various devotional works, including an English translation of Richard Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris*, a short section of Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*, and an English translation of the anonymous

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 294.



French mystical work *Myrroure of Symple Saules* (a text which Mount Grace vicar Richard Methley translated), contains some nearly identical marginal annotations to those that appear in the *Book*. Significantly, this particular miscellany contains one of the only two surviving versions of a revelatory text of Julian of Norwich, with whom we know Margery Kempe had direct contact and who likely influenced Kempe's own spiritual development. Richard Rolle, whom Kempe cites directly in her book, can clearly be readily associated with her. Additionally, the annotators of the Kempe manuscript show interest in the connection between Kempe and Rolle, underlining a veiled reference to him in capitulum 35 with something akin to a modern footnote – “so s. R. hampall” – referring to Rolle, friar of Hampole. In the text and in the margins, Margery Kempe is already significantly associated with Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich, making comparisons of marginalia in these two manuscripts credible.

Throughout MS Additional 37790, words from the text have been translated onto the margins. The choices are not random – instead, the annotator seems to have carefully calculated a noticeable summary of devotion in the margins. Although no medieval reader or annotator would have recognized a “genre” of devotional writing, the marginalia in this manuscript signals to the reader the textual components that comprise what we have now termed the devotional genre. On folio 2 of the manuscript appears “turnyng to god” in the outer margin beside “whate is turnyng to god but fro the worlde turnynge and fro synne fro the feynde...”<sup>54</sup> The manuscript is littered with such notes: on the very same page, we find “turn from world” written in the outer margin beside “Fro the worlde to be turned is not essye [easy] butt all lustis [lust] to putt bak and...all your

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<sup>54</sup> London British Library MS Additional 37790, folio 2.

occupacions to forgett”; on folio 8 appears “Off tribulacion” in the outer margin; on folio 10 we find “off paciens” in the outer margin. These marginal notes, truly not marginal, together comprise a recipe for devotion and outline the process for obtaining a certain kind of spirituality. This marginal table of contents can be considered a pedagogical tool as well as a “generic” marker of the kind of text at hand. On the latter point, one can imagine that a saint’s vita might have markers in the margin indicating necessary components such as “miracles,” “trials,” “temptation,” and “martyrdom,” to name just a few possibilities.

These textually gleaned marginal rubrics function like tables of contents, albeit in the margins, a tool that did in fact exist in fifteenth-century vernacular books of religion prepared or used by monastic readers. For instance, the Vernon manuscript, a fifteenth-century miscellany containing several mystical and devotional works, employs an actual table of contents in the modern sense, appearing at the beginning of the miscellany, to organize the vernacular texts contained therein. Vincent Gillespie has proposed that this table of contents effectively transforms a somewhat “random collection” of texts into “a working anthology.”<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Gillespie suggests that the presence of a table of contents does not only suggest repeated readership of texts, therein necessitating the need for a practical guide to the placement of the contents but it renders the manuscript in question a “spiritual encyclopaedia.”<sup>56</sup> Extending this notion of the “spiritual encyclopaedia” to the Kempe manuscript, the presence of such outlining of contents indicates intent to *guide* a reader through devotional rituals or practices through the use of the text at hand. It also suggests a generic classification of the *Book* itself as a “spiritual

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<sup>55</sup> Gillespie, “Vernacular Books of Religion,” 328.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

encyclopaedia.” Although the Vernon manuscript has an actual table of contents and Kempe’s book does not, the textually gleaned marginal rubrics in Kempe’s text function similarly to the table of contents in the Vernon manuscript and other religious miscellanies, acting as a kind of legend to help readers find component parts of the spiritual ascent to prayer that the entire book outlines.

The Vernon manuscript provides us another venue in which the spiritual encyclopedia or devotional table of contents appears: narrations of the life of Christ. As N.F. Blake notes, part II of the Vernon manuscript functions as a historical chronicle of Christ’s life beginning with a table of contents in Old French of this “*Estoire del Evangelie*”:

I ceste liuere est escrit la estoire del Euangelie en engleis  
solum ceo ke ele est escrit en latin, et continue de la  
Anunciacion nostre seignour Ihesu crist. De la Natiuite  
benette. De sa Passion. De sa Resurexion. De sa Ascencion  
e de sa Glorificacion. Et de soun Auenement a Iugement et  
de nostre presentement en cors en Alme.<sup>57</sup>

Thus the devotional table of contents might appear in theological texts or even in texts derived directly from Scriptural sources. The suggestive presence, then, of such a spiritual encyclopedia in the Kempe manuscript would probably have resonated significantly with the medieval reader and would very likely have recalled to memory other devotional tables of contents in other texts. The annotators, as evidenced by the devotional contents in the margins, seemed to have associated Kempe’s text with both

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in N.F. Blake, “Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organization,” in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge and New York: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 51. Roughly translated: “In this book is written the Evangelical history in English after that which is written in Latin, and continues with the annunciation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of the holy Nativity. Of his Passion. Of his Resurrection. Of his Ascension and of his Glorification. And of his Coming for judgment and of our presentation in body and in soul.”

Scriptural and other devotional sources, such as those which comprise clerical miscellanies such as the Vernon manuscript. In the case of the former, they may have associated Kempe's book with an established devotional practice of *imitatio* of Christ's life, a practice locatable in the text proper not only in Kempe's placement of herself in the company of the holy family but also in specific gestures and behaviors, such as lying prostrate on the ground with her arms spread out in the form of a crucified Christ icon, that employ *imitatio* of Christ as a devotional practice.

The notion of the devotional "tally" in the margins of the manuscript is not limited to the textually-gleaned sub-type of marginalia. The annotators use all sub-types of marginal annotation collectively to chart the ascent through degrees of meditation that the Kempe text itself articulates. This ascent at times resonates tellingly with the Carthusian Adam de Dryburgh's *Quadripartite Exercise of the Cell*. The annotators place "nota" symbols beside Margery's penitential tears, corresponding to Dryburgh's second degree of meditation, in which the supplicant ruminates on his "sins of thought and deed, his carnal inclinations and human frailty." This degree of meditation should be accompanied by tears and compunction, as in Margery Kempe's case.<sup>58</sup> The annotators take note of Margery's tears when she considers the Eucharist,<sup>59</sup> corresponding to the third degree of meditation in which the supplicant reflects on "the love of the Son in his Passion and in His gift of His Body and Blood for our food and drink." Similarly, the red

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<sup>58</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 70-71: Red ink annotator, "Nota" in outer margin beside: "Then on a Fryday befor Crystmes Day, as this creatur, knelyng in a chapel of Seynt John wythinne a cherch of Seynt Margrete in N., wept wondir sore, askyng mercy and foryfynges of hir synes and hir trespas."

<sup>59</sup> Red ink annotator, "Nota" beside "And in that chapel sche had so hy contemplacyon and so meche dalyawns of owr Lord, in-as-meche as sche was putte owt of chirche for hys lofe, that sche cryed what tyme sche schulde ben howselyd as yyf hir sowle and hir body schulde a partyd asundyr, so that tweyn men heldyn hir in her armys tyl hir cryng was cesyd, for sche myth not beryn the habundawns of lofe that sche felt in the precyows sacrament, wech sche stedfastly belevyd was very God and man in the forme of breed."

ink annotator places a textual extrapolation “fantasyes” beside a description of Margery’s struggles with the devil’s temptations and the bombardment of lewd images she confronts of “dyvers men of religyon, prestys, and many other...comyn befor hir syght...schewyng her bar membrys unto hir.”<sup>60</sup> This relates to the fifth degree of meditation, the defense against temptations of the world and the devil. The final manner of meditation, amply noted by the annotators and discussed at more length below, represents the most perfect kind of contemplation, in which the supplicant comprehends the “Truth” and beholds “Him” in all his truth, leading to a complete understanding of the Trinity.<sup>61</sup> The Mount Grace annotators annotated in order to draw attention to this ascent to prayer, systematically delineating the crafted description of meditative process in order to create a map for a particularly Carthusian monastic readership. As will be discussed below, they used different kinds of annotation to systematize this “legend” even further, the sub-types of annotation narrating a process of ascent to prayer in the margins that reflects the same pedagogical material in the text itself. Importantly, the ascent to prayer narrated in the Kempe manuscript and emphasized by the Mount Grace monk-annotators resonates in particular with Carthusian devotional aids, suggesting once again an inscription of the Kempe manuscript in a specifically Carthusian textual community of devotional pedagogy.

### **Paraphrased Marginal Rubrics: The Ascent to Prayer**

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<sup>60</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 282.

<sup>61</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 370, Red ink annotator, “Nota” in outer margin beside “owr Lord of hys hy mercy drow hir affeccyon unto hys Godhed, and that was mor fervent in lofe and desyr, and mor sotyl in undirstondyng, than was the manhood.”

While textually gleaned marginal rubrics in the *Book* can be conceptualized most frequently in two categories (although I grant these are not all-inclusive), as discussed above, paraphrased marginal rubrics resist this type of neat categorization and can be more unwieldy to identify. Nonetheless, the paraphrased marginal rubrics in this manuscript belong to several categories of commentary, including moral judgment or comment and epitomization of the devout features contained in the text proper.

In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the line between paraphrased marginal rubrics and textual extrapolation is not easy to define. The lack of such clear demarcation between the two categories invites several hypotheses. Perhaps the monk-annotators were not that interested in “commenting” on Kempe’s book, so that their textual extrapolations are “diluted” and more reminiscent of paraphrase than commentary. Perhaps the monk-annotators’ interest in *adding* commentary proves low because the text of Kempe’s book *lends itself* to commentary, again nearly asks for it, in a way that renders the line between paraphrase and commentary fascinatingly blurry.

Many of the passages warranting, and thus receiving, paraphrase are rather descriptive while the marginal notes may be called prescriptive. Paraphrased marginal rubrics in *The Book of Margery Kempe* function similarly to textually gleaned marginal rubrics in the sense that they again comprise a devotional recipe or table of contents. The main difference remains in the fact that the extraction of the formal pedagogic-devotional devices from the text in these cases requires more intellectual work on the part of the annotator, who must search for these formal tools in places where the text does not explicitly provide them. Interestingly, the highest volume of annotations in Latin occurs in the context of paraphrased marginal rubrics. In fact, strikingly few of the Latin

annotations fall outside the category of paraphrased marginal rubrics. These Latin annotations are almost never direct translations of the English text (which would render them closer to textually gleaned rubrics despite the change in language), nor are they textual extrapolations, as they remain rather close to the meaning of the text. They are truly paraphrases. Paraphrased marginal rubrics become the locus of the most possibility for *imitatio Margery* on the part of the monk-annotators.

The annotators remain particularly keen on emphasizing both Kempe's trials and her overwhelming love for Christ. Lining up these paraphrased marginal rubrics as a running commentary of their own, we find an interest in charting Kempe's long and anecdotal spiritual preparation for prayer. The paraphrased marginal rubrics follow the progression of this calculated narrative embedded in Kempe's spiritual book. They emphasize in turn the following elements of the text proper: Kempe's marriage vow with Jesus, her attainment of a new virginal status through negotiation with her husband, her trials for heresy and Lollardy, and finally her passion for Jesus and her moments of imaginative contemplation and meditation. The progression of this narrative within the narrative, carefully followed by the monk-annotators, becomes a kind of *scala* to perfect meditation that culminates in the true ability to pray. This "scala" resonates with the "scale of perfection" delineated by the Carthusian monk Walter Hilton. It is also an ascent outlined in the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing*, a text with which Mount Grace had a special relationship – one manuscript securely provenanced to Mount Grace survives, and in addition, we know that vicar Richard Methley also prepared copies of

this text that may also have circulated outside the monastery walls.<sup>62</sup> Margery slowly prepares to receive Jesus, her spiritual spouse, into her imaginative meditation. Walter Hilton describes the ideal state of prayer as one that does not prepare the supplicant to inform Christ of his or her desires but as a spiritual ascent that brings the pious contemplator to a state of readiness to *receive* Christ into his or her presence: “The purpose of prayer is not to inform our Lord what you desire for He knows all your needs. It is to render you able and ready to receive the grace which our Lord will freely give you. This grace cannot be experienced until you have been refined and purified by the fire of desire in devout prayer.” The Mount Grace monk-annotators take great collective pains to delineate clearly this ascent as embedded in Kempe’s book.

Beside Margery’s vow of matrimony to Jesus appears “de desponsacione eius ad deum patrem” in the hand of annotator 2; on the outer margin beside John Kempe’s final agreement to respect Margery’s wish for a “re-birth” as a virgin,<sup>63</sup> the red ink annotator summarizes with the single word “grace.” When Margery is summoned to answer to accusations of Lollardy, she is not surprisingly questioned about the sacrament and responds:

Serys, I beleve in the sacrament of the awter on this wyse: that what man hath takyn the ordyr of presthode, be he nevyr so vicyows a man in hys levyng, yyf he sey dewly tho wordys ovyr the bred that owr Lord Jhesu Criste seyde whan he mad hys Mawnde among hys disciplys ther he sat at the soper, I beleve that it is hys very flesch and hys blood and no material bred, ne nevyr may be unseyd, be it onys seyde.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Parsons, 146.

<sup>63</sup> See Salih, 180, who calls Margery Kempe a “born-again virgin.”

<sup>64</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 234.



Beside this response, the red ink annotator inscribes “*examinacio dura*” in the outer margin. The red ink annotator also duly notes her “*langor amoris*” and “*langyng loue*” beside passages of the most ecstatic outpouring:

On a Good Fryday, as the sayd creatur beheld preystys knelyng on her kneys and other worschepful men wyth torchys brennyng in her handys befor the sepulcre, devowtly representyng the lamentabyl deth and doolful beryng of owr Lord Jhesu Crist aftyr the good custom of Holy Cherch, the mende of owr Ladiis sorwys, wech sche suffryd whan sche behelde hys precyows body hangyng on the crosse and sithyn beriid befor hir syght, sodeynly occupiid the hert of this creatur, drawyng hir mende al holy into the Passyon of owr Lord Crist Jhesu, whom sche beheld wyth hir gostly eye in the syght of hir sowle as verily as thei sche had seyn hys precyows body betyn, scorgyd, and crucifyed wyth hir bodily eye, wech syght and gostly beheldyng wrowt be grace so fervently in hir mende, wowndyng hir wyth pite and compassyon, that sche sobbyd, roryd, and cryed, and, spredyng hir armys abrood, seyde wyth lowde voys, ‘I dey! I dey!’ that many man on hir wonderyd and merveyled what hir eyled.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, beside Margery’s method of prayer as prescribed by Christ, the red ink annotator inscribes “*mentall praer.*” This final step in Margery’s spiritual *scala* delivers her not to another ecstatic outburst of cries and roars but to the essence of prayer as described by Hilton, as Christ appears and defines their prayerful spiritual union: “Dowtyr, whan thou preyist be thowt, thou undirstondist thiselfe what thou askyst of me, and thou undirstondist also what I sey to the, and thou undirstondist what I behote the, to the and to thin, and to alle thi gostly fadyrs.”<sup>66</sup> The paraphrased marginal rubrics do not impose significance or meaning on portions of the text but unify a suggested but buried narrative sequence that the monks perceive as already extant in the text. In many ways, these particular annotations complete the text proper.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 379.

The careful tracing of this ascent in Kempe's *Book* indicates the ways in which the monk-annotators used the margins as a communal space in which to create inter-textual dialogue between Kempe's book and other textual traditions. If we turn our attention to paraphrased marginal rubrics in Additional 37790, a related devotional miscellany containing the short text of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, we immediately notice a similar interest in paraphrasing portions of text that deal specifically with spiritual preparation for prayer. All of the paraphrased marginal rubrics summarize notions of prayer and contemplation described in the text: "What prayer is" and "contemplacion what it is."<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps most important for comparison to Kempe's text are the paraphrased marginal rubrics in manuscripts of *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, a translation of Bonaventura's Latin text *Speculum Vitae Christi*, by Nicholas Love, prior of Mount Grace during Kempe's lifetime. This text circulated widely in late medieval England, surviving in 64 manuscripts.<sup>68</sup> In one manuscript of this text, Cambridge University Library Additional MS 6578, with Mount Grace provenance, most of the marginal rubrics serve to identify source texts. For example, beside Saint Augustine's account of Christ's passion, "Augustinus de agone Christiano" appears in the outer margin.<sup>69</sup> This series of meditations on Christ's life, outlined by paraphrased marginal rubrics that move from Augustine on Christ's passion to "exemplum de beata Cecilia" and to Saint Bernard on martyrdom, again indicates a philosophy of prayer that prepares

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<sup>67</sup> London British Library MS Additional 37790, folio 16.

<sup>68</sup> Michael G. Sargent, "Introduction" to Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), ix.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

the supplicant to receive Christ.<sup>70</sup> Beside Love's appeal to the reader's imaginative powers in prayer – "Now take we here gude entent as we were present in alle that is here spoken of for this is a fulle deuout matire & a profitable to us" – a paraphrased marginal rubric "meditacio deuouta" appears in the outer margin.<sup>71</sup> The paraphrased marginal rubrics again highlight a devotional narrative in text that delineates preparation for prayer. The fact that the four annotators of Kempe's book employed paraphrased marginal rubrics to serve a similar purpose as they and contemporary Mount Grace monks do in Love's manuscript suggests not only that they used the book to similar purposes as they used Love's book but that they may well have associated Kempe's "spiritual autobiography" with Love's exemplary life of Christ and invocation to the correct path to prayer.

In face, the whole *Book* may be seen as a preparation for Margery Kempe's prayers appearing at the end of the *Book*, as the introduction to these prayers so succinctly states: "Thys creatur, of whom is tretim befor, usyd many yeris to begynnyn hir preyerys on this maner."<sup>72</sup> This introduction to Margery's prayers continues to delineate the process of her devotional preparation, expressed in a more "disorganized" manner throughout the *Book*:

First, whan sche cam to chirche, knelyng befor the sacrament in the worschep of the blissyd Trinite (Fadir, Sone, and Holy Gost, oo God and iii Personys), of that gloryowns Virgine, Qwen of Mercy, owyr Lady Seynt Mary, and of the xii apostelys, sche seyde this holy ymne, 'Veni creator spiritus' wyth alle the versys longyng therto, that God schulde illumynyn hir sowle, as he dede hys

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>72</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 421.

apostelys on Pentecost Day, and induyn hir wyth the yyftys  
of the Holy Gost.<sup>73</sup>

We see how the former text, that which “is tretyd befor,” leads ultimately to this point of a specific kind of prayer with the goal of receiving God into one’s presence (“that God schulde illumynyn hir sowle”) and contemplation of the Holy Ghost and comprehension of the Trinity (“induyn hir wyth the yyftys of the Holy Gost”). The Carthusian monk-annotators seemed to have capitalized on this only briefly suggested ascent to prayer, marking its development *throughout* the text of the *Book*.

### **Textual Extrapolation: “Performative” Prayer**

In some ways, textual extrapolation annotations seem like an interruption of the “ascent” to prayer towards which the other categories of annotation build. Yet textual extrapolations prove central in situating Kempe’s book within a specific devotional environment. Most important in this category of annotation are the references to two former Carthusian monks, Richard Methley, vicar of Mount Grace until his death in 1527, and John Norton, prior of Mount Grace between 1509 and 1522. Other textual extrapolations associate Kempe with Richard Rolle whose didactic devotional text, *Incendium Amoris*, Kempe cites herself.

Interestingly enough, from what we can glean from the marginal glosses, there seems to have been somewhat of a tradition of weeping and roaring, à la Margery Kempe, at Mount Grace, or at least for Richard Methley and Prior Norton, both of whom apparently became somewhat exemplary figures. The red ink annotator makes three

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 422.

separate references to these priors, one to Richard Methley alone, one to Prior Norton and one to both priors. Considering the relatively low number of textual extrapolations, at least compared to the overwhelming volume of “nota” glosses, three references to these priors may be considered significant. In one of many passages describing Kempe’s abundant tears, the red ink annotator has added in the lower margin: “R Medlay v. was wont so to say.” This appears in concert with a particularly contemplative and more private moment, as Margery’s tearful outbursts go:

Than aftyr this sche was in gret rest of sowle a gret whyle,  
and had hy contemplacyon day be day, and many holy  
speech and dalyawns of owyr Lord Jhesu Cryst bothe  
afornoon and aftyrnoon, wyth many swet terys of hy  
devocyon, so plentyvowsly and contynualy that it was  
mervayle that hir eyne enduryd, er how hir hert mygth  
lestyn that it was not consumyd wyth ardowr of lofe, wych  
was kyndelyd wyth the holy dalyawns of owyr Lord, whan  
he seyde to hir many tymes...<sup>74</sup>

The marginal gloss apparently refers to the fact that Richard Methley would often describe his own tearful outbursts in a similar manner, particularly noting that his heart was “consumyd wyth ardowr of lofe.” The annotator’s reference to Richard Methley indicates a particular interest in the pedagogical possibilities of this passage, as Methley was known for his glossed translations of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which, according to James Hogg, reveal him as a “skilled spiritual director, wise in the ways of God towards souls seeking perfection.”<sup>75</sup>

Later in the text, another marginal reference to both Methley and Norton appears beside a fascinating passage describing a contemplative “conversion” of sorts for

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>75</sup> James Hogg, ed., Richard Methley: *To Hew Heremyte a Pystyl of Solytary Lyfe Nowadayes*, Analecta Cartusiana 31 (Salzburg, 1977), 101.

Margery, markedly different from her primary revelation at the very start of the book, in which the annotators actually take *less* interest. They appear significantly more invested in this second, more subtle, internal conversion that marks a new height of Margery's spiritual contemplativeness:

And sche had so gret compassyon and so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn that sche myt not kepe hirself fro kryng and roryng, thow sche shuld a be ded therfor. And this was the *fyrst cry that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon*. And this maner of crying enduryd many yerys aftyr this tyme, for owt that any man myt do, and therfor sufferyd sche mych despyte and mech reprefe. The cryeng was so lowde and so wondrous that it made the pepyl astoynd, les than thei had herd it befor and er elly[s] that thei knew the cause of the crying. And sche had hem so oftyntymes that thei madyn hir ryth weyke in hir bodyly myghtys, and namely yf sche herd of owyr Lordys Passyon.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, this marks Margery's first cry "in any contemplacyon," and although we might note that this is not the first time Margery cries for love of Jesus or mourning at his Passion, it denotes the first of a series of a very specific *type* of crying. Beside this important moment of conversion, the red ink annotator comments: "so fa RM & f Norton of Wakenes & of the passyon." This gloss suggests an invocation to imitate Margery's, Richard Methley's, and Friar Norton's rather precise devotional scheme – that is, to imagine vividly, almost pictorially, Christ's crucifixion and to undergo a concrete, bodily response, in this case a particular kind of cry.

Bodily response to images of Christ's passion and crucifixion, and other holy scenes for that matter, must by no means be viewed as hysterical, haphazard, or anything else of the sort. Instead, they were systematic, almost choreographed, bodily positions

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<sup>76</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 163, my emphasis.

and sensations that could also be codified and even ritualistic. Barry Windeatt rightfully points out the strikingly precise sources for Margery's gestures and movements when she makes pilgrimage to Mount Cavalry. In this scene, one perhaps often cited as an example of Kempe's seemingly extravagant and outrageous devotional style, Kempe recounts how she "fel down" when she imagined "owyr Lord wyth hir bodyly ey suffering hys Passyon at that tyme" in that very same place. She recounts her precise gestures: "[sche] walwyd and wrestyd wyth hir body, spredyng hir armys abrode, and cryde wyth a lowde voys as thow hir hert schulde a brostyn asundyr, for in the cite of hir sowle sche saw verily and freschly how owyr Lord was crucifyed." Windeatt glosses this moment as one that should be compared with "some iconographical motifs associated with Christ and Mary in devotional tradition."<sup>77</sup> The obvious comparison is to the outspread arms of Christ on the cross. Yet, and even more astonishingly, Windeatt proposes that Kempe's cry resonates with a description of Christ's own dying cry that appears in Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, another Mount Grace text. Margery's dramatic fall to the ground perhaps refers to Mary's swoon at the scene of Jesus' death. The fact that Margery sees Mary's swoon in one of her revelations ("Than hir thowt owr Lady fel down and swownyd, and Seynt John toke hir up in hys armys and comforyd hir wyth swete wordys as wel as he cowde er myth")<sup>78</sup> supports this claim. Even Kempe's writhing constitutes an *imitatio* of other iconographical depictions of Biblical moments. Bodily response, then, signifies a devotional technique that requires a kind of inter-textual knowledge of the Bible and various iconographic, largely visual, but also textual, depictions of these same bodily responses and gestures at the scene of the Biblical event

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 349.

being contemplated. When the red ink annotator draws attention to Margery's imagination of Christ's Passion and her specific, contemplative bodily response, he not only associates her with his local surroundings, and indeed with Richard Methley's written descriptions of his own spiritual experiences known to have been the property of Mount Grace, but he also suggests that this specific devotional technique be espoused and ritualized by himself and his monastic companions as an integral part of prayer. The Orders and Constitutions of the nuns of Syon Abbey, now British Library MS Additional 146, demonstrate the importance of bodily response to prayer. An instructive passage preceded by the rubric "Of bodely behauoure" describes how "by the outwarde bodely meuyng is ofte knowen the inward disposicion of ye sowle." As a result, the nuns are admonished "neuer [to] exceed the bowndes of honeste neyther in laughing, stonyng, syttyng nor goyng," as not only laughing but the particulars of gestures in sitting and standing may indicate some form of incorrect prayerful practice.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, prescribing gestures is quite a common practice in medieval texts meant as aids to prayer, most notably in books of hours. In addition to encouraging the reader to imagine him or herself *in* the Biblical scene narrated (something that Kempe does quite often), marginal rubrics in books of hours sometimes gloss certain prayers with particular notes on how to stand, sit or kneel during recitation. Charity Scott-Stokes has noted one example in the fourteenth-century Percy Hours, in which readers, probably female, added or had added in the margins "performative" glosses, or notes which "prescribe the location to be sought out when a prayer is to be recited, or the posture to be adopted

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<sup>79</sup> London British Library MS Additional 146, folio 40r.



during recitation, such as kneeling before the Cross, or lying prostrate on the ground.”<sup>80</sup>

An even more precise prescription of gesture occurs in British Library MS Additional 146, which dictates strikingly precise instructions for sitting and standing during prayer and other gatherings. For standing in church, this manuscript dictates the following, preceded by the rubric “Of stondynge”:

Wher so euer they stonde namely in diuine seruise in the churche they schal not stonde up on oo fote aloue holding up yt other. Nor one ouer another. Nor yet holde ther chynnes or chekes in ther handes lenynge notably wt ther bakkes or armes nor caste out ether armes or handes nor schrugge with the scholders but they schal stonde up ryghte holding ther handes before them honestly with in ther manteles or cowle sleues.<sup>81</sup>

For sitting the rules are just as precise, appearing preceded by another rubric “of syttyng reglerly”:

Also whersomeuer they sytte they schal sytte up ryght gaderynge the extremeteys of ther mantels & cowls aboute hem that they flete nott a brode holding ther handes with in ther cowle sleues in plac[es] of silence & not stretche out ether legges to ferre nor ley one kne ouer another but couer ther fete honestly under ther clothes & not sytte fydyng with hem. And when they sytte betwene two sustres they shal sytte so ordinatly & so directly that neyther they haue ther faces to that one nor ther bakkes turned any dele to that other nor yet caste lyghtly ther hedes aboute nor lene to one syde more than to another.<sup>82</sup>

As John Burrow notes, gestures seem rather random to Westerners, and as a result, scholarship has tended not to seriously consider gesture as an entire codified vocabulary of medieval behavior, both social and devotional. Yet he warns against this neglect, carefully mapping out the particulars of different kinds of gestures, including handshake,

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<sup>80</sup> Charity Scott-Stokes, *Women’s Books of Hours in Medieval England: Selected Texts* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 157.

<sup>81</sup> London British Library MS Additional 146, folio 41v.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

head bowing, kneeling and spreading one's arms, in varying social contexts and their precise, codified significance in each case.<sup>83</sup> The textual extrapolation marginal rubrics in Kempe's manuscript might function in a similar way, although in this case they do not impose a prayerful position on the text proper but extrapolate these gestures for use in their own community by comparing them to the actual behaviors of former Mount Grace priors.

In emphasizing the physical, bodily reaction to love of Christ, this series of marginal annotations associates the Kempe manuscript with clerical miscellanies such as the Vernon manuscript. As N.F. Blake argues, it is most likely the case that the Vernon manuscript, a fourteenth-century miscellany consisting of legendary materials, prayer and devotional material, didactic material, and devotional lyrics, was composed in a religious house, probably a monastery.<sup>84</sup> One group of texts within the manuscript includes Richard Rolle's *Commandment, Form of Perfect Living*, and *Ego Dormio*; Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and *Epistle of Mixed Life*; two expositions of psalms *Qui habitat* and *Bonum Est*; and the prose *Mirror of St Edmund*, the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, the *Charter of the Abbey*, and *De Spiritu Guidonis* in English. Many of these texts, as has already been shown, relate to *The Book of Margery Kempe*. These texts, although didactic, also stress "affective Christianity," meditation on the love of Christ and his Passion, and, most importantly, "the individual response to Christ's love and passion." However, Blake emphasizes that the manuscript was not made for private devotional use

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<sup>83</sup> J.A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>84</sup> Blake, 56.

but for communal devotion.<sup>85</sup> This quality of personal response to prayer, which, as in the case of the Kempe manuscript can be quite corporeal, does not necessarily dictate private devotion but can function as a useful individualized gloss on gathered prayer. Indeed, the textual extrapolation (and incidentally the “nota”) marginalia in the Kempe manuscript teach this very principle. When we approach this possibility in the context of the Vernon manuscript, it becomes apparent that this teaching is communal not only because it has correlates in other contemporary manuscripts and is thus actively associated with certain conventions of devotional pedagogy but also because the pedagogy may just as possibly be for use in public prayer as well as in private devotion.

Evidence of an interest in personal response to prayer exists in the marginal glosses of the manuscript of Love’s *Mirror* with Mount Grace provenance. As John Hirsh observes, this story of Christ’s life is meant to be recited in a week, the Friday reading for the Passion to be further structured around the hours, so that the book itself could have functioned in the genre of books of hours.<sup>86</sup> Love inserts direct appeals to prayerful methods in the course of re-enacting Christ’s life. One in particular that appeals to the reader’s imaginative abilities has also been glossed with “meditacio deuouta” in the outer margin beside: “And so in that manere let us ymagine here, & with gostly mirthe as it were rehetyng oure lorde Jesu at this mete, & also hauyng in mynde specially his dere modere, thank we deuoutly in this manere.”<sup>87</sup> This passage, tellingly appealing to a communal “we” probably of monastic *and* lay devotees, incites the reader to impose an imaginative, “affective” vision of Christ and Mary on the scene in the holy life Love

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>86</sup> John C. Hirsh, *The Revelations of Margery Kempe: Paramystical Practices in Late Medieval England* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1989), 31.

<sup>87</sup> Love, 73.

narrates. The textual extrapolation in this case, as in the Kempe manuscript, selects a prescriptive portion of the text that instructs personal response to prayer and titles it “meditacio deuouta” or “devout meditation.” This passage may not prescribe a gesture for prayer as many of the textual extrapolations in the Kempe manuscript do, but it does prescribe an affective *method*, which, in concert with a less private liturgy of prayer, becomes codified as the annotator marks it instructively.

### **“Nota” and its various incarnations: The Highest Degree of Contemplation**

Out of careful consideration of the meaning of the marginal annotation “nota” and its various incarnations, as out of analysis of prescriptive “performative” marginal rubrics, arises the possibility of what I would like to term “communal textuality.” By communal textuality, I mean the text used and annotated for the purposes of an entire community and not for an individual. It is true that “nota,” “nota bene” and other permutations involving the word “nota” are ubiquitous in the margins of late medieval religious manuscripts, but their frequency should not warrant their neglect, particularly in the case of the Kempe manuscript. At the end of capitulum 17, Kempe offers the curious instruction to “rede first the xxi chapetre & than this chapetre aftyr that.”<sup>88</sup> Beside this instruction, the red ink annotator wrote “nota” in the outer margin. At this moment, Kempe demands interaction with the reader – she commands a response by dictating a method of readership. The annotator has taken this command to the next level by materially interacting with the text, veritably entering into it. At this moment, we can glean at least one purpose of the “nota” annotation in this manuscript – it is likely that the

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<sup>88</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 38.

annotator is pointing out this disordered readership to a third party, to another reader. This marks one of the places in the manuscript where the annotator has entered into the text if only to open it for dialogue – he has, in effect, afforded it a community by implying other readers for whom his notes will prove practical in deciphering the text. At the same time, the marginal annotation in this case originates in the text. That is, at this particular moment, the text proper has the same function as scribal annotations meant to direct the reader. When the annotator inscribes “nota” beside this he adds another layer to a kind of “annotation” already in the text. At another moment in the text, beside a description of Margery’s confession of her “temptation” to kiss sick men (“lazerys”): “than the oo woman had so many temptacyons that sche wist not how sche myth best be governyd,” the red ink annotator wrote: “nota A sotel & a sore temptacion. In siche a case we shold be more strange & bold aga[n]ste our gostly enemy.”<sup>89</sup> In this case, the annotator uses Kempe’s temptations as an opportunity for a note of didactic spiritual guidance, which, in referring to a communal “we” may indicate the annotator’s awareness of the other readers of the manuscript. More explicitly, beside the description of a ring on which Kempe had inscribed “Jhesus est amor meus,” the red ink annotator extracted the words “Jhesus est amor meus” and changed the “meus” to “tuus” in the margin.<sup>90</sup> This simple change of pronoun suggests an interest in addressing a third party, another, future reader of the text.

The contemporary tradition of the “nota” symbol in the margins of manuscripts seems extremely didactic – more often than not, “nota” symbols appear beside particularly prescriptive and imperative moments in texts. For example, in British Library

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<sup>89</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 327.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

MS Additional 37790, beside a didactic section of Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*, appears "nott well this is saying" in the outer margin beside the words "Truly if you despise techynge of doctrine" in text.<sup>91</sup> Similarly in the same manuscript, "nota" appears in the outer margin beside "Therefore no man shulde dar presume nor be pryde vayne of hym selfe," clearly a command of sorts.<sup>92</sup> Another example appears in a manuscript of Richard Rolle's *Prick of Conscience*, a highly popular and highly circulated late medieval religious text, in which "nota b[e]n[e]" is inscribed in the outer margin beside "And answar for them th[a]t lyffed nogth well/For thus says the p[ro]phet Ezechele," an exhortation to answer and advocate for the meek.<sup>93</sup> In a Walter Hilton manuscript, British Library MS Stowe 39, we find "nota b[e]n[e]" beside a slightly different kind of command, "That es: in lagh [love] of my lorde I sal thynke both day and night. This is the begynnyng of all p[er]fession that man sees for to stabil his herte deply to think of god and of his werkes. For many a tyme is bett[er] a gude thought in holy meditacion then many a word in p[ra]yer said."<sup>94</sup> This placement of "nota bene" suggests its functional use as imperative; in this particular case, it demands a certain kind of silent prayer and devotion and retention of prayers, thoughts, and images.

"Nota" marginalia in the Kempe manuscript draw particular and surprisingly abundant attention to Margery's tears. Considering the imperative use of the "nota" symbol discussed above, in what way might Kempe's cries in particular be exemplary? I have touched on this very briefly in the section on textual extrapolation, but the particular prescriptiveness of Kempe's tears and its interaction with the "nota" symbol in the

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<sup>91</sup> Folio 11.

<sup>92</sup> Folio 25.

<sup>93</sup> London British Library MS Additional 24203, folio 96.

<sup>94</sup> London British Library MS Stowe 39, folio 6.

manuscript requires further explication. The “nota” marginalia uncover an internal narrative in Kempe’s book that inextricably links her tears to a precise method of devotion – a method of devotion that becomes quite popular in the later medieval period, particularly for Carthusians, of private prayer *in the context of* the ritual liturgy, indeed performed simultaneously. As a result, a certain kind of causality of the tearful process becomes apparent – rather than suggesting that Margery’s tears result from her vivid imagination of Jesus’ passion, the monk-annotators conjecture that Kempe’s particularly imaginative and contemplative devotional style renders her *able* to receive Jesus into her prayerful presence. The monk-annotators, rather than viewing these moments as simple “examples,” actively read and tease them out, as they attempt to locate the particular elements of Kempe’s devotion that ultimately and finally enable her to pray.

One of the three fifteenth-century annotators, Annotator 2, takes particular interest in noting Margery’s tearful and highly affective reaction to her pilgrimage to Mount Cavalry. When she arrives, she “fel down that sche mygth not stondyn ne knelyn, but walwyd and wrestyd wyth hir body, spredyng hir armys abrode, and cryed wyth a lowde voys as thow hir hert schulde a borstyn asundy.”<sup>95</sup> These gestures, as I have already noted, encompass a specific, near-ritualized practice, appropriate to pilgrims, of *imitatio* of the holy family as a *method* of devotion. Annotator 2 comments “nota de clamore” beside the precise reasons for Kempe’s spiritual “outburst”: “And sche had so gret compassyon and so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn that sche myt not kepe herself fro kryng and roryng, thow sche schuld a be ded therfor. And this was the fyrst cry that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon.” The monk-annotator is here invested not in the

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<sup>95</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 163.

phenomenon of Margery's cries and roars but in extracting something formulaic from the description. The text itself marks this moment at Mount Cavalry as one of extraordinary weight, "the first cry that evyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon." The book's disorderly composition perhaps obscures this moment in a series of other ecstatic outbursts. The annotator's "nota de clamore," however, re-claims the gravity of this moment by drawing particular attention to it. The annotator wishes to characterize, in a precise manner, this first cry of "contemplacyon," noting the particular aspect of Kempe's tears relating to the imaginative devotional cause behind them. In essence, he notes that Margery's ability to "se" the "peyn" of Jesus enables her to have her first "cry of contemplacyon." If we recall that the red ink annotator draws attention to the similar behaviors of monks at Mount Grace Priory, we can begin to understand that the "nota" symbol and its abundant appearance beside Margery's tearful moments delineates a devotional practice of literally seeing and imagining the life of Christ. As a way of determining whether their devotional imaginations were correctly focused and exercised, Mount Grace monks may have used Margery's descriptions of her cries as a guide to comprehend whether they experienced the internal stirrings and external showings that result from *true* contemplation, à la Margery.

Another passage, beside which both annotator 3 and the red ink annotator inscribe "nota," illustrates this principle even further. As Margery's cries become more and more elaborate, she acquires a number of critics: "Sum seyde that sche had the falling evyl, for sche, wyth the crying, wrestyd hir body, turnyng fro the o syde into the other, and wex al



blew and al blo, as it had ben colour of leed.”<sup>96</sup> Interestingly enough, the two annotators who comment on this passage suppress the description of Margery’s persecution and instead focus on this rather precise delineation of her tearful process. The red ink annotator in fact writes “nota de colore,” drawing particular attention to the fact that she “wex al blew and al blo, as it had ben colour of leed.” In fact, this discoloration of the face comprises part of a formal practice of *imitatio Christi* as expounded by Julian of Norwich in her *Revelations of Divine Love*, in which she delineates the five tokens of remembrance of Christ’s passion: the bleeding head, discoloration of the face, the wounded and bleeding body, the “shriveling” flesh, and the “joy and Bliss of the Passion.”<sup>97</sup> The annotators’ attention to the discoloration of the face exhibits not only a probable familiarity with Julian of Norwich and a desire to associate her text with Kempe’s but also an interest in propounding the specific elements of Kempe’s book that display and teach both the steps toward this sense of the “joy and Bliss of the Passion,” a definite goal of private prayer, and the elements that display measurable signs of correct prayerful method. Both annotators take interest in her gesturing and the way in which she “wrestyd hir body, turning fro the o syde into the other.” This bodily contortion can again be compared with the more dramatic instance of the same kind of gesturing at Mount Cavalry. Annotator 2 extracted the precise devotional cause of Margery’s uncontrollable tears to provide a guide for moments of prayer that *should* induce similar behavior in this group of monastic readers. In this second case, annotator 3 and the red ink annotator render the experience of the cries more specific by noting the gestures and physical

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>97</sup> Lochrie, 34.

manifestations of the tears which should also accompany the “peyn” of imagining and literally seeing Jesus’ suffering.

“Nota” marginalia in this manuscript present a culmination of sorts: they demarcate the highest devotional step on the ladder to perfect prayer in which holy figures “speak” in Margery’s mind and heart and in which she contemplates no longer Christ’s manhood but his divinity, the “Godhead.” In this sense, they complete the marginal narrative of prayerful ascent, from a general spiritual encyclopedia encompassed by textually gleaned marginal rubrics, to a more specific delineation of the ascent to preparedness for prayer, as expressed by paraphrased marginal rubrics, to the beginnings of high contemplation, as demarcated by textual extrapolation, and finally to the reception of Jesus and God into the supplicant’s prayerful company and precise bodily manifestations of imaginative devotion as delineated by “nota” marginalia. For instance, the red ink annotator inscribes “nota feruent loue” beside a description of the appearance of holy figures in Margery’s mind:

Sumtyme owyr Lady spake to hir mend. Sumtyme Seynt Petyr, sumtyme Seynt Powyl, sumtym Seynt Kateryn, er what seynt in hevyn sche had devocyon to, aperyd to hir sowle and tawt hir how sche schuld lovyng owyr Lord and how sche schuld plesyn hym. Her dalyawns was so swet, so holy, and so devowt, that this creatur myt not oftyntymes beryn it, but fel down and wrestyd wyth hir body, and mad wondrousful cher and contenawns, wyth boystows sobbyngys and gret plente of terys, sumtyme seyng, ‘Jhesu, mercy,’ sumtyme, ‘I dey!’<sup>98</sup>

At another similar moment, the red ink annotator again places “nota” beside a description of Jesus “spekyng in hir mende.” These two remarkably similar moments, joined by the

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<sup>98</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 116.

annotator's use of the same marginal notation, describe a prayerful gesture of hearing the voice of holy figures speaking in one's own mind, the proof of success of which is, once again, tears and perhaps writhing gestures. These gestures, although seemingly out of control and random, actually remain uniformly described as "wrestyng" of the body, a particular manner of bodily position which may here be prescriptive as well as descriptive of the corporeal manifestation of hearing the voice of God in one's mind. The annotator, making note of these moments, suggests that they together encompass the goal of silent prayer and may be used together as a guide both to performative gesturing in prayerful ritual and to help the supplicant comprehend at what point he has obtained this highest devotional status. Envisioning oneself in the intimate presence of holy figures was in fact an integral part of Carthusian prayer. In a fifteenth-century Flemish manuscript illustrating scenes in the life of a Carthusian monk, a three-panel image shows a sequence of daily events in the monk's life.<sup>99</sup> On the far left, the monk kneels at church reciting Matins, and on the far right appears a picture of the monk's empty bed, indicating that he has risen for prayer. In the center panel, the monk kneels in prayer in his private cell, book in hand, with Mary appearing before him and embracing him. The illustrator of this scene depicts the intimate vision of Mary as a regular component of prayer rather than as an exceptional visitation. For the Carthusian monk, intimate converse with holy figures was not only super-imposed on regular recitation of liturgy but it constituted a ritual goal of prayer. The monks' attention to moments in Kempe's book where she describes her sense of divine presence and their consistent markings of

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<sup>99</sup> Oxford Bodleian Library MS Douce 374, f.19

“nota” beside such moments suggests recognition of this customary goal of prayer and a desire to learn how to emulate it.

In one particular place in the manuscript, the red ink annotator places “nota” beside a passage of utmost importance, in which Margery describes that whereas before “hir affecyon was al drawyn into the manhod [manhood] of Crist,” she has graduated to contemplation of Christ as “Godhead”: “owr Lord of hys hy mercy drow hir affecyon unto hys Godhed, and that was mor fervent in lofe and desyr, and mor sotyl in undirstondyng, than was the manhood.”<sup>100</sup> This passage represents a crafty personalization of the complex theological issue of the doctrine of the Trinity, an issue frequently discussed and debated in medieval theological texts. This moment constitutes an almost precise recapitulation of Walter Hilton’s designation of the “third degree,” the highest, of devotional contemplation in his *Ladder of Perfection*: “The second degree of love is attained when the soul knows God by faith and Jesus in His manhood through the imagination...In the third degree the soul, so far as it may in this life, contemplates the Godhead united to manhood in Christ.”<sup>101</sup> The different *kind* of tears than those that accompanied Margery’s contemplation of Christ as man reflects her new degree of contemplation: “Yet had sche not that maner of werkyng in crying as sche had befor, but it was mor sotyl and mor softe, and mor esy to hir spirit to beryn, and plentyvows in teerys as evyr it was befor.”<sup>102</sup> Tears, then, prove a precise kind of bodily response to varying levels of devotional contemplation, corresponding in turn to an ascent through the “degrees,” as Hilton describes them, on the ladder to perfect devotion. The red ink

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<sup>100</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 371.

<sup>101</sup> Hilton, 188.

<sup>102</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 371.

annotator notes Kempe's description of the nature of her tears in this case as something instructive, as it helps indicate to readers how they might measure their own degree of devotional contemplation. Hilton too seems quite concerned with teaching his readers how to detect God's presence during prayer, and hence the level of contemplation they have reached: "Sometimes He comes secretly when you are least aware of Him, but you will recognize Him unmistakably before He goes, for He stirs your heart in a wonderful way, and moves it strongly to contemplate His goodness. Then your heart melts with delight at the tenderness of His love like wax before the fire, and this is the sound of His voice."<sup>103</sup> Margery's description of the change in her cries as she achieves a new level of contemplation is actually more specific than Hilton's and is thus conducive to pedagogical use, as has been amply noted above.

Indeed, the use of different kinds of tears in varying kinds of prayer becomes more explicit in the prayers that end the *Book*. The prayers, as noted above, encapsulate an arrival at the ascent to which the entire text and marginal annotations build; they also recapitulate the development of devotional strategy contained in the *Book* itself. At the beginning of the prayer section appears comment that "thys creatur...usyd many yerys to begynnyn hir preyerys in this maner."<sup>104</sup> The text continues to describe in brief how Margery began "First, when sche cam to chirche" praying to Jesus and Mary to "illumynyn hir sowle"<sup>105</sup> and how her prayers become increasingly complex. The evolution of her tears appears in the context of this development of Kempe's prayer. First, she prays for "a welle of teerys spryngyng plentevowsly, wyth the which I may

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<sup>103</sup> Hilton, 235.

<sup>104</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 421.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

waschyn away my synnys thorw this mercy and thi goodness.”<sup>106</sup> These constitute the compunctive tears, appearing at the beginning of the *Book*, which, as discussed above, correspond to an early degree of meditation as outlined by the Carthusian Adam de Dryburgh. After, Kempe prays for a different kind of cry: “alle the teerys that may encresyn my lofe to the and moryn my meryte in hevyn, <and> helpyn and profityn myn evyn-Cristen sowlys, lyvys er dedys, visite me wyth her in erth.”<sup>107</sup> These tears correspond more closely to the tears Margery sheds later in the *Book* – tears of love rather than of compunction. These prayers, a culmination of the preparation the text delineates, also recapitulate the development of the tears as precisely correlated to different stages of the ascent to prayer. Throughout the text, the Carthusian monks draw attention to the development of the tears for their instructive correspondence with devotional development.

The “nota” symbol is particularly communicative of “communal” use of the book, and while it may on the one hand point the individual reader to moments to which to return in the book, it might just as well be used to point other monastic readers to these same moments.<sup>108</sup> In fact, we know that Carthusian monks were among the most solitary and non-communal of monastic orders, *except* for the fact of their vast communication of devotional ritual and method of prayer *through* the medium of the text.<sup>109</sup> In this view,

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>108</sup> See Tanya Schapp who, among many others, points out that “The primary concern for the scribal annotators was for future readers; it was their duty to enhance the readability of the poem, to provide marginalia which would clarify the meaning of the text and expedite the retrieval of information” (83).

<sup>109</sup> See E. Margaret Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), 336: “Guigo I. and his contemporary priors, it is true, wished that their monks should ‘make books,’ since it was a way of preaching God’s words with their hands, and they could not do so with their mouths; ‘for as often as we write books,’ he says, ‘it seems to us we make publishers of the truth, trusting to God for the reward for those who by them should be corrected from error or advanced in

*The Book of Margery Kempe* may embody another vehicle through which the monks communicated with one another, creating a succinct code in the margins to indicate the uses of each portion of text marked in different stages of the ascent to prayer. Indeed, if we may speculate that some of the marginal notes functioned to prepare the book for a lay readership, as Kelly Parsons has convincingly conjectured, why should we not propose the same communal use of the text and its marginalia *within* Mount Grace?<sup>110</sup>

Yet where precisely do these tears take place and how are they to be inscribed within a larger devotional and even liturgical setting? We know that solitary, private prayer was an important feature of Carthusian life, but this solitude did not preclude the formal singing of the Mass and Office, and many of Margery's crying episodes, particularly the ones the monk-annotators mark off with "nota" symbols, take place in church in the middle of the liturgy.<sup>111</sup> How can we possibly reconcile the seeming

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Catholic truth." See also Michael G. Sargent, "The Transmission by the English Carthusians of Some Late Medieval Spiritual Writings," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1977), 225-40.

<sup>110</sup> It is perhaps important to note that the manuscript of Kempe's book that we have probably *did* circulate to a lay audience, by virtue of the fifteenth or sixteenth-century recipe on the verso of the last folio; it is unlikely and highly improbable that Carthusian monks would have any use for such a recipe, which mentions "cinnamon and sugar to be ground in a mortar." Yet simply because the manuscript did circulate to lay audiences does not mean it was expressly prepared for lay audiences and that all of the marginalia should be read as targeted at the laity. Indeed, as both Vincent Gillespie and A.I. Doyle point out, the fifteenth century saw a rise in the flow of manuscripts between clerical institutions and lay audiences. Yet as A.I. Doyle makes very clear, this fact did not diminish the use of clerical manuscripts and miscellanies by any means: "Although some of the English manuscripts of the *Speculum Spiritualim* and *Donatus Devocionis*, like many of Hilton's or Higden's, must be by non-religious copyists, the recurrence of particular religious provenance or associations argues that recourse for exemplars was made via such links and that texts were transmitted from house to house, not always within the same order, as well as to interested non-religious owners, who not infrequently bestowed their acquisitions in time on their source or on like-minded institutions." In "Publications by Members of the Religious Orders," in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 114.

<sup>111</sup> Karma Lochrie suggests that it is precisely the fact that Kempe's cries occur in public rather than in private, as in the case of Julian of Norwich and many other contemplative and religious figures for whom tears were an important component of prayer, that makes them disruptive and "hysterical" rather than legitimate devotional practice: "Her insistence on the publicity of her tears militates against the very tradition she enlists for her own support. When she takes her tears on the road and into parish churches, she radically alters a tradition which had been previously confined to the oratory and to private prayer" (196).

disruption she makes of the formalized, liturgical process of prayer with the way the monks used her book as a guide *to* formal prayer? In fact, the red ink annotator places a “nota” beside one of Margery’s most disruptive episodes – so disruptive that onlookers have to physically restrain her:

And in that chapel sche had so hy contemplacyon and so meche dalyawns of owr Lord, in-as-meche as sche was putte owt of chirche for hys lofe, that sche cryed what tyme sche schulde ben howselyd as yyf hir sowle and hir body schulde a partyd asundyr, so that tweyn men heldyn hir in her armys tyl hir cryng was cesyd, for sche myth not beryn the habundawns of lofe that sche felt in the precyows sacrament, wech sche stedfastly belevyd was very God and man in the forme of breed.<sup>112</sup>

At this moment appears a thorough intertwining of the Mass and one of Margery’s non-compunctive crying episodes. This indicates an elaborate simultaneity of time, in which Margery’s “hy contemplacyon,” indeed her “habundawns of lofe,” becomes a layer of private devotion, albeit manifested outwardly, that occurs alongside the regular recitation of the Mass and, in this particular case, the Eucharist.<sup>113</sup>

This layer of internalized prayer occurring simultaneously with the Mass is a practice that becomes codified in the fifteenth century in both monastic orders and lay

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Once again, however, the attention to the locale of these tears as related to the prayerful practices of exemplary religious figures at Mount Grace suggests that Kempe’s public tears do not constitute an entirely eccentric gesture but that they have precedent in other kinds of more public devotional techniques.

<sup>112</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 273.

<sup>113</sup> The idea of private devotion occurring alongside communal, liturgical prayer in late medieval Europe has not been favored in most scholarship on private prayer. Historical accounts of the rise of silent and private prayer are sometimes too teleological. Although a very useful study in many respects, Paul Saenger’s *Space Between Words: The Rise of Silent Prayer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) often commits this fallacy. William T. Flynn’s study *Medieval Music as Medieval Exegesis* (Lanham and Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999) rightfully cites evidence for a growing phenomenon of private prayer but suggests the absolute replacement of public prayer with private prayer in the course of analysis of late medieval missals: “Later missals, which omit the musical notation entirely, suggest the practice of quiet, private reading at a side altar. These books no longer imply a life focused on common worship, even if communal liturgical celebrations were still the norm for Sundays and feasts” (3). The absoluteness of this and other claims of the sort need to be questioned.



devotion. Denis the Carthusian vigorously promoted silent prayer, *especially* during the formalized gatherings of liturgical ritual, and he furthermore suggested that external, physical reactions to this highly contemplative and concentrated silent prayer would not be distracting to the completion of the liturgy. He encouraged some level of personal movement – swaying, tears and even vocalization – even though it would produce a contrasting sound to the liturgical rites being formally practiced.<sup>114</sup> We know, of course, that Margery’s vocalizations were not quiet and that instead of swaying, she writhed and fell to the ground, and although these are of course exaggerated versions of Denis the Carthusian’s allowance of “undisciplined gesticulations,” it conforms to the same concept of the simultaneity of private prayer and the liturgy.<sup>115</sup> As Paul Saenger notes, intense meditation on topics “loosely related to Mass” became codified in the fifteenth century, as evidenced in some manuscripts by the inclusion of certain prayers and texts outside of the liturgy of the Mass to be said “*de coeur*.”<sup>116</sup> One late fourteenth-century Paris prayer book includes a forty-page *Oroison contemplative* to be recited silently during Mass and additional texts to be recited silently during the Eucharist.<sup>117</sup> The need for particularly intense meditation during the Eucharist makes sense, considering that the monastic notion of “rumination” on the words of the liturgy reaches its highest point at the moment when physical consumption of Christ’s body joins with allegorical consumption of, or rumination on, the words of the Mass.<sup>118</sup> The Mount Grace annotators’ particular interest

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<sup>114</sup> Paul Saenger, “Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Late Middle Ages,” in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 152.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> I credit Emma Dillon for suggesting this idea to me.

in Margery's private devotional ritual during the Eucharist has a significant textual history and a history that suggests a codified method of contemplative prayer. The "nota" symbol that occurs beside this passage indicates another moment in which the Mount Grace annotator probably used Kempe's devotional ritual to guide or evaluate his own.

If we turn our attention to another manuscript with Mount Grace provenance, British Library Additional 62450, works of St Gregory the Great translated by a prior of Mount Grace in the middle of the fifteenth century, the function of "nota" in the Kempe manuscript proposed above becomes more clearly conversant with its use in other Mount Grace manuscripts. Most of the "nota" and "nota bene" glosses in this manuscript occur beside some mention of "contemplatio." "Nota" marginalia join this exhortation to "contemplatio" with words in text that suggest the substance of this "contemplation" and its accompanying affective responses, including "extasi mea,"<sup>119</sup> "celesti desiderus,"<sup>120</sup> "de amore"<sup>121</sup> and "cogitacion."<sup>122</sup> Not insignificantly, "nota" marginalia in Additional 62450 also draw attention to important prayerful moments, including "Laudate eius in tympano et chors," a phrase from Psalm 150.<sup>123</sup> This seemingly simple use of "nota" and its various avatars in the margins of Additional 62450 reveals a possible effort on the part of Kempe's annotators to associate her book with these and probably other manuscripts with similar features in their library. Indeed, "nota" glosses in Additional 62450 appear in many of the same kinds of textual locations as they do in the Kempe manuscript and serve a strikingly similar purpose. We might, for instance, consider the fact that "nota"

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<sup>119</sup> London British Library MS Additional 62450, folio 23.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, folio 36.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, folio 47.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, folio 38.

glosses in Additional 62450 emphasize both contemplation and the bodily response to it – “extasi mea” – along with the method of reaching it – “celesti desiderus.” In the Kempe manuscript, as amply considered above, “nota” marginalia *also* draw particular attention to contemplative moments and the ways in which tears, writhing and other bodily and affective responses interact with this contemplation. The “nota” marginalia in both manuscripts create a scheme for private devotion layered on the formal work of the liturgy. Additional 62450 uses “nota” glossing to highlight moments in the text that appeal directly to the reader to pray with deep contemplation, ecstasy, and desire, all of which are affective responses felt on the personal level. At the same time, “nota” glosses in this manuscript refer to the simultaneous work of the psalms “Laudate eius in tympano et chors,” thereby effectively placing the personal affective response in a liturgical context, *just as* Kempe’s annotators use “nota” to emphasize the ways in which Kempe’s tears and private ecstatic responses interact with the formal practices of Mass and Office. Finally, if we take into consideration the fact that Additional 62450 is a foundational Latin text targeted at a specialized monastic audience and consider that marginal annotations in the Kempe manuscript are in dialogue with marginal glosses in this manuscript, it seems more and more likely that Kempe’s book was used functionally within this particular monastic setting.

### **Pictorial Marginalia: Margery Kempe and the Carthusian Illustrative Tradition**

Pictorial marginalia in the Kempe manuscript are somewhat sparse, at least compared to the “nota” marginal rubric, and appear simplistic and too literal to merit much comment. They seem a bit “amateurish” and spontaneous, especially when

compared to the dominant genre of pictorial depiction in medieval manuscripts, namely manuscript illumination.<sup>124</sup> The sketches in the margins of the Kempe manuscript do not compare with manuscript illumination on the level of artistic sophistication; this, however, does not mean that they do not have devotional significance. These marginal pictures have correlates and predecessors in other Carthusian and specifically Mount Grace manuscripts. Several manuscripts actually penned at Mount Grace indicate a specific interest in devotional imagery and manuscript illustration. In these cases, unlike in the Kempe manuscript, illustrations are not marginal; instead, most pages appear in two columns with text on one side and illustration on the other, although in some cases illustration and text are entirely integrated. The illustrations in these manuscripts are strikingly similar to the pictorial marginalia in the Kempe manuscript. Carthusian manuscript Additional 37049 contains numerous drawings of hearts identical to the ones in the Kempe manuscript, and although the former are not marginal while the latter are, it is nevertheless illuminating to recognize this similarity in design – doing so allows for the possibility that the Kempe annotators followed an aesthetic specific to devotional manuscripts when they annotated Kempe’s book.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Some appraisals of manuscript illustrations similar to those that appear in Kempe’s manuscript are surprisingly hostile. Samantha Mullaney calls the illustrations in BL MS Add 37049 “childlike” (“Fashion and Morality in BL Add. 37049,” in *Texts and Their Contexts: Papers from the Early Book Society*, ed. John Scattergood and Julia Boffey. Dublin and Portland: Four Courts Press, 1997, 83), and Kerby-Fulton and Despres comment that the text banners in the illustrations are “comically obvious,” akin to “cartoon bubbles” (12). These comments undermine serious consideration of the devotional significance of this illustrative tradition.

<sup>125</sup> There is some conjecture that this manuscript actually originated at Mount Grace Priory. Samantha Mullaney points out that it is almost definitely from the northeast of England, either Yorkshire or Lincolnshire. Given that it is most likely from a Carthusian charterhouse and from the north of England, Mount Grace is a very probably candidate, although, as Mullaney notes, there are several possible candidates of Carthusian charterhouses that are in the correct geographical area. Kelly Parsons discusses this manuscript with relative certainty that it originated at Mount Grace.

The Kempe manuscript's pictorial marginalia allude to a Carthusian illustrative tradition readily observable in two Walter Hilton manuscripts, British Library MS Additional 37049, with Yorkshire provenance, and British Library MS Stowe 39. In addition, some of the features of the marginal illustrations in the Kempe manuscript can be found in devotional miscellanies, such as Additional 37790, and in contemporary books of hours. Aside from the illustrations of the smock (a relic at Aachen that Margery describes) and the wafer (indicating the three hosts at Wilsnack that Margery also sees), most of the pictorial marginal notes in the Kempe manuscript consist of hearts or pointing index fingers (*manicula*). Unlike some of the hidden intricacies in the pedagogical nature of Kempe's text that the other categories of marginal annotation uncover, pictorial annotations are quite straightforward, often illustrating hearts where the text mentions love or heartfelt devotion to Jesus. It will be necessary to consider what significance might be gleaned from the rather direct and traceable resonance of the Kempe pictorial marginalia with Carthusian miscellanies. In addition, it is necessary and illuminating to consider what particular significance the image of the heart holds in formal prayer rituals in late medieval England and Europe more generally.

*Manicula* are particularly imperative annotations in many medieval manuscripts, and the annotator's choice of them in Kempe's book, beside passages emphasizing the supplicant's speech as the voice of God, again suggests an interest in instructing *others* about prayerful practice.<sup>126</sup> More than "nota" marginalia, *manicula* highlight moments in

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<sup>126</sup> A good example of the "instructive" value of *manicula* in a different context may be found in David Wallace's book *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 229-30, in which he argues that a *manicula* in *Melibee* indicates how "its Latin avatar was read (and prepared for future readers) by one fourteenth-century Englishman."

which the supplicant has received Christ into his or her presence, the goal of prayer according to Nicholas Love. The red ink annotator draws a manícula beside the words of Jesus to Margery: “I schal take thi sowle fro thi body with gret myrthe and melodye, wyth swet smellys and good odowrys, and offyr it to my Fadyr in hevyn, ther schalt se hym face to face, wonyng wyth hym wythowtyn ende.”<sup>127</sup> Beside an even more intimate passage appears another manícula: “I am in the, and thow in me. And thei that heryn the, thei heryn the voys of God.”<sup>128</sup> The manícula here points particularly to “I am,” emphasizing Jesus’ voice and presence. A manícula in Hilton’s Yorkshire Carthusian miscellany, Additional 37049, accompanied by “nota b[e]n[e]” in the outer margin (Figure 2), appears in a very similar context.<sup>129</sup> The fact that the manícula and the “nota bene” both appear may suggest that the two do not serve *precisely* the same function. The manícula refers to the text just above it, which also contains a speech of Jesus to the monk at prayer, encouraging him to withdraw from the world in order to feel the full benefits of divine love. The illustration on this page of text in the Carthusian miscellany depicts a monk kneeling in prayer to Jesus, portrayed in a preaching gesture, encased in a cloud just above the monk’s head. This illustration suggests a closer communing of monk with Jesus than in many of the other illustrations in this same miscellany – rather than simply *imagining* a scene from Jesus’ life while praying, this monk engages in dialogue with Jesus, their faces turned directly toward each other. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to propose that the Mount Grace annotators used the manícula in Kempe’s text for a similar purpose as that evident in the Walter Hilton manuscript. While manícula are

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<sup>127</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 137.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>129</sup> London British Library MS Additional 37049, folio 43v.

everywhere in medieval manuscripts, they serve a specific devotional function in the context of the ascent to prayer delineated by the Kempe manuscript and its annotations.

In fact, pictorial sketches other than the manucula appear in similar contexts. The red ink annotator sketches flames beside a passage depicting a token exchange between Jesus and Margery: “Also owr Lord yaf hir another tokne, the which enduryd abowtyn xvi yer, and it encresyd evyr mor and mor, and that was a flawme of fyer, wondir hoot and delectably.”<sup>130</sup> This passage, glossed by the sketch of flames, appears in the context of a more elaborate token exchange, accompanied by Jesus’ intimate words to Margery, “Be this tokyn, dowtyr, beleve it is God that spekyth in the, for wherso God is, hevyn is, and wher that God is, ther be many awngelys, and God is in the and thu art in hym.” Once again we find the suggestion of God speaking *in* and *through* Margery, nearly literally inside her body, and again we find pictorial marginal annotation. The pictures of flames depict the condition of the supplicant’s body *after* the supplicant has received Jesus and God into his or her presence, perhaps functioning somewhat like the “nota” marginalia that draw particular attention to the color of Margery’s face when she cries in true contemplation. The manucula, on the other hand, consistently emphasize Jesus’ voice in particular, and therefore function similarly to the manucula in the Carthusian manuscripts Additional 37049 and Stowe 39 where they appear beside the only illustrations of Jesus speaking *directly* to the monk. At the same time, both kinds of pictorial marginalia (the flames and the manucula) in the Kempe manuscript elaborate on moments in the text emphasizing the divine voice of the supplicant, through whom “God spekyth.” Thus these pictorial marginalia may be said to emphasize moments in the

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<sup>130</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 193.

Kempe manuscript that lend her the authority to preach and emerge as a truly pedagogical figure.

The other prominent kind of pictorial marginalia, sketches of hearts, have similar significance, insofar as they draw attention to verbal exchanges between Jesus and Margery. But in addition, the heart illustrations resonate more specifically with a Carthusian illustrative tradition and emphasize the practice of private prayer. Not surprisingly, heart marginalia appear beside moments in the text that mention “heart” or particularly fervent love. For instance, the outline of a heart in red ink appears in the outer margin beside Jesus’ words to Margery, “For I aske no mor of the but thin hert for to lovyng <me> that lovyth the, for my lofe is evyr redy to the” (Figure 3).<sup>131</sup> Another sketch of a heart in red ink appears again in the outer margin beside “And therfor, dowtyr, yf thou wilt bethynk me wel, thou hast gret cause to lovyng me ryth wel and to yevyn me al holy thin hert, that I may fully restyn therein, as I wil myself.”<sup>132</sup> As noted above, the relationship of margin to text in these cases remains transparent and direct. The image of the heart, however, has significance beyond its obvious relationship to the text here. Heart illustrations are abundant in both BL MS Stowe 39 and Additional 37049. In particular, the image of the heart functions as an intermediary between supplicant and Jesus. Numerous instances of the heart illustration in Additional 37049 depict a Carthusian monk kneeling in prayer to Jesus with a large heart, often identical to the hearts in the Kempe manuscript, between them. Sometimes, the heart has a large opening in its center, indicating the immediacy of Jesus’ wounds and the central and literal impression it makes on prayer. In addition, the hearts usually have text inscribed

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 374.



directly on them or have banners of texts super-imposed or running through them.<sup>133</sup> In most instances, the Carthusian monk imagines scenes from Jesus' life, most prominently his Passion, rather than having direct discourse with Jesus. In two particular cases in Additional 37049, the words "Jhesus est amor meus" run through the heart, which the kneeling Carthusian monk clasps in his hand while peering up at an image of Jesus (Figure 4).<sup>134</sup> This line is ubiquitous in the Kempe manuscript as well; in addition, the red ink annotator adds "Jhesus est amor tuus" beside one instance of this phrase in the manuscript, indicating a familiarity with the phrase and a desire to highlight it and perhaps to connect it to its appearance in other manuscripts, such as Additional 37049.<sup>135</sup> Or, it might be said that in this particular case, the annotator capitalizes on an intrinsic Carthusian-like quality of Kempe's text proper in its use of this phrase. In yet another fascinating heart illustration, the kneeling monk touches a large heart with the word "cont[e]m[pl]acion" inscribed across it (Figure 5).<sup>136</sup> Out of the heart flourishes a tree of virtue, and above the tree Jesus appears flanked by two angels, the wound at his heart open and bleeding. The illustrations of hearts in the Kempe manuscript along with the illustration of hearts in these other Carthusian miscellanies not only suggests an inclusion of Kempe in a Carthusian illustrative tradition but implies the notion of the heart as a source of prayer, an intermediary between the person in prayer and Jesus or God. The image of the heart, as well as Jesus' side wound, also abundant in Additional 37049, is also ubiquitous in late medieval books of hours. For example, in a 1490 book of hours appears an image of the side wound added on one of the folios, with an inscription

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<sup>133</sup> See London British Library MS Additional 37049, folios 20r, 24r, 37r for some examples of this.

<sup>134</sup> London British Library MS Additional 37049, folio 36v.

<sup>135</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 178.

<sup>136</sup> London British Library MS Additional 37049, folio 62v.

surrounding it: “The mesure of the wonde of our Lorde ihesu crist/[that] he suffurde on the crosse for oure redempcion.”<sup>137</sup> In the late fifteenth-century Lewkenor Hours, a pilgrim devotional card from the East Anglian shrine of the Holy Cross at the Cluniac Priory of Bromholm with an image of a large heart with a Latin prayer and the crucified Jesus inside it appears pasted opposite another Latin prayer invoking the Cross as protection against the devil (Figure 6). In the lower margin, the following gloss appears in a contemporary hand: “This crosse that here peyntyd is/Signe of the crosse of Bromholme is.”<sup>138</sup> The image of prayerful words inscribed on the heart was common in late medieval devotional aids, making explicit the technique of praying from the heart, or, perhaps, *by* heart.

In fact, the image of the heart as vehicle of prayer would probably have been a familiar one to both Kempe and her monastic readers. As Paul Saenger notes, references to the heart as the “organ of prayer” occur rather frequently in fourteenth and fifteenth-century books of hours, as part of what he entitles the rise of silent devotional reading. The heart could be entirely substitutable for the mouth – it was not a matter of speaking prayer in mouth *and* heart but of speaking prayer in the heart *rather than* in the mouth.<sup>139</sup> In a fourteenth-century French book of hours, the following rubric appears in the margin beside a particular prayer: “Comment par dire de bouche *ou* de cuer trois veritez que nous nous mettons hors de peche mortel et en estat de grace” (“How by saying by mouth *or* by

<sup>137</sup> London Lambeth Palace MS 545 fos. 78v-79.

<sup>138</sup> London Lambeth Palace MS 545 fos. 184v-185.

<sup>139</sup> See Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*, 268: “The monastic term in *silentio* had often referred to quiet, muffled oralization in *submissa* or *suppressa vox*. In the fifteenth century, vernacular authors employed a new, explicit vocabulary of silent reading, describing mental devotion from a written text as reading with the heart, as opposed to the mouth. In the fifteenth century, the verb *veoir* and the vernacular phrase ‘to read with the heart’ (*lire au coeur*) were used in French aristocratic texts to refer to private, silent reading, much as in earlier centuries *videre*, ‘to see,’ and *inspicere*, ‘to gaze,’ had been used as alternatives to *legere*, ‘to read.’”

heart three truths we put ourselves out of mortal sin and in a state of grace”).<sup>140</sup> Such translation of the senses extended beyond substitution of heart to mouth to concepts of *hearing* by the eyes and *seeing* with the heart, notions which appeared in fifteenth-century books of hours and devotional treatises. Indeed, Denis the Carthusian narrates a story, as Paul Saenger notes, “indicative” of the new prayer “mentality,” in which Augustine on his death bed asks that the Penitential Psalms be written on the walls so that he may contemplate them with his eyes (and, presumably, his heart).<sup>141</sup> Returning to the Carthusian use of pictorial hearts, in both the Kempe manuscript and the Hilton manuscripts, with this evidence in mind, it seems likely that the illustration of the heart, rather than straight-forward text-painting, signals a developed, increasingly codified, ritual and method of prayer that would have resonated with Carthusian, other monastic, and even lay readers. Indeed, as Karma Lochrie notes, “inscription” of the text on the “hearts” of the readers comprises a key part of the “contemplative” reading process, in which a kind of “triple reading” takes place due to several “translations” of the “mystical” experience from Christ’s body to the “mystic’s” body to the “mystic text” and finally onto the “reader’s heart.”<sup>142</sup> The appearance of hearts in the Kempe manuscript may therefore indicate an appeal to a particular kind of devotional reading process.

As Kathleen Scott aptly notes, the spatial position of illustration in manuscripts should *not* in fact influence our sense of the way in which image interacts with text. The notion that marginal illustrations must be “spontaneous,” “unplanned,” “productional afterthought” is in reality not well supported by careful study of the manuscripts

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<sup>140</sup> Saenger, “Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Late Middle Ages,” 146.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>142</sup> Lochrie, 168.

themselves. Illustrations in the Kempe manuscript remain “marginal,” in their literal location, but not “marginal” in their relationship to the text or their status in the overall *mise-en-page*. Certainly, we should not assume that the marginal hearts in the Kempe manuscript do not function similarly to the non-marginal hearts in Hilton’s Carthusian miscellanies by virtue of their spatial position alone. As Scott argues, the precise “selection of pictorial subjects” for inclusion in the margin indicates a particular “reading or approach to the text.” They therefore function as valuable indicators of an overall concept of the text at hand rather than remaining a random afterthought. In fact, the choice of pictorial subjects for the margins of medieval manuscript had precedents and conventions that render many marginal images evidence of a precise thought process and reception of the overall text. Even a decision as seemingly minor as opting to depict a single figure rather than a narrative scene, active rather than static, represents, according to Scott, an “approach” to the *entire* text and even possibly an entire “late medieval mind-set.”<sup>143</sup> This powerful argument proposes that the particular choice of a symbolic, static figure of prayer, with a substantial pictorial and devotional contemporary tradition, in the margins of the Kempe manuscript should by no means be viewed as a spontaneous, random addition to the text but may in fact be conceived of as an approach to the entire text proper, an approach that intimates a move to align Kempe’s manuscript with other devotional treatises, books of hours and liturgical guides, and that indicates the particular devotional practices the book indeed prescribes.

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<sup>143</sup> Kathleen L. Scott, “Design, Decoration, and Illustration,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45-6.

## The Kempe Manuscript and Books of Hours

A consideration of Kempe's book as functioning in Mount Grace Priory the way books of hours functioned for both the laity and monastic orders proves useful in comprehending the use of imagery, the notion of affective piety, the image of oneself *in prayer*, and the simultaneity of devotional aids and the liturgy. Books of hours began appearing around the thirteenth century in Europe and subsequently became tremendously popular through the late middle ages and into the early modern period, re-appearing both in manuscript and in print. It has been amply noted by many scholars of literature, religion and art history that books of hours epitomize material evidence of the rise of "lay piety." The notion that books of hours provide evidence of the rise of silent, private prayer and a retreat from public devotional gatherings has been hotly debated.<sup>144</sup> Whether or not books of hours mark substantial evidence for a turning point in the narrative of the developments of private and public cultures, they provide abundant examples of methods of converse with holy figures in prayer, perhaps best conceived of as counterparts to the "nota" marginalia sections in Kempe's manuscript, and the ways in which these methods were superimposed on the public performance of the liturgy.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> See Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Books, 1240-1570* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), for a recent and eloquent treatment of the issue: "The history of the evolution of the Book of Hours itself should in any case give us pause before we associate its use with the growth of individualism and a retreat from public religion, a sort of material equivalent, say, to the spread of the *Devotio Moderna*. The devotional temperature of the fourteenth and fifteenth century was admittedly rising steadily, as late medieval Christianity went through the religious equivalent of global warming, inspired in part by the preaching and devotional regime of the Franciscans, and partly by a growing hunger for religious variety and intensity on the part of lay men and women with time, leisure, literacy, and not least, money on their hands. But if we are to judge from the evidence of Books of Hours, the result was not a move towards mysticism and interiority, but rather a twofold trend, one in the direction of greater intimacy, and another in the direction of a decidedly instrumental understanding of prayer" (63-4).

<sup>145</sup> The argument that images in books of hours were created primarily because lay owners could not read has in recent years been questioned. Additionally, as Mary Carruthers has argued, this view tends to "play down the fact that books and churches made for learned groups and liturgical use were also profusely

As Duffy has pointed out, donor portraits or depictions of Jesus' wounds or the instruments of the crucifixion added to particular books of hours are not simply "bookmarks or holy wallpaper." Instead, these images, and particularly those which place the reader in the act of prayer or in the presence of the holy family, were designed to arouse religious devotion, perhaps stir guilt or compunction, or inspire affect. These details were meant to be "gazed at, prayed over and ruminated on."<sup>146</sup> The books prescribed this rumination in a particular way, one which resonates with the kind of pedagogical aid Kempe's book offers. Aside from including personalized items, such as pilgrim badges and abundant extra illuminations, including many of Jesus' heart and wounds, books of hours often indicated gestures for prayer by depicting the donor him or herself at prayer, holding the very book in which the image appears. For example, in one French book of hours in the Walters Art Gallery, the donor is depicted as privy to the Annunciation, not an entirely unusual gesture for these books (Figure 7).<sup>147</sup> On one side of the double spread, the Annunciation scene depicts Mary kneeling at the altar as Gabriel appears behind her with his scroll, inscribed with the words "Ave Maria Gratia Plena, Dominus Tecum." On the other side of the double spread, the owner of the book kneels before the altar, dressed in the same garb as Mary, surrounded by the exact same scenery, reading Gabriel's words "Ave Maria" in Matins in her own book of hours. As the image implies, the owner of the book should not simply recite the prayer "Ave Maria"; instead, she should imagine herself either as Mary or perhaps as the angel

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pictured" (221). We may, therefore, view books of hours not as books for the laity but as a locus in which learned and lay pious communities meet.

<sup>146</sup> Duffy, 16.

<sup>147</sup> Baltimore Walters Art Gallery, MS 267, folios 13v-14.

Gabriel himself, praising Mary at the moment of the Annunciation.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, as Emma Dillon has astutely pointed out, the texts in many Annunciation scenes in medieval books of hours paraphrase Gabriel's words and almost never contain the entire text, and this incompleteness incites the reader or supplicant to complete Gabriel's prayer in a manner that demands his or her own inscription in the Annunciation scene.<sup>149</sup>

In fact, the technique of imaging oneself in the presence of holy figures is familiar to the Carthusian illustrative tradition explicated in some detail in the preceding section. As Jessica Brantley observes, a "surprising number of Carthusian medieval images" depict monks kneeling before divine presences in a manner strikingly similar to images of the kind in contemporary books of hours. These kinds of images appeared both in altarpieces and in personal pictures for private devotion. The Carthusian prior Jan Vos commissioned private pieces of artwork featuring his image among Biblical figures. One altarpiece made for a charterhouse of which Vos was prior depicts a Carthusian monk

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<sup>148</sup> There are many examples of this type of self-translation into holy scenes. In the Bolton Hours, now York Minster Library Add Ms 2 fo.33, John Bolton, Mayor of York, and his family are shown kneeling before the Trinity (Figure 8). There are also abundant examples like those discussed above of readers privy to the Annunciation. See two images from Beaufort Hours from England (c.1410), London British Library Royal 2A.XVIII, folios 23v and 34 for examples of patrons in direct contact with holy figures (Figures 9 and 10). See also an example from a French book of hours (c.1460), London British Library Harley 2900, f.200 for an image of the patron Margaret Oldhall kneeling before Mary and the baby Jesus (Figure 11). As Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Denise Despres note in the context of a discussion of the Douce Piers Plowman manuscript, illustrations and marginalia in many medieval books serve not only a mnemonic but a meditative function, one which is predicated on dictating a particular reading process: "While some of these omissions might be explained by the choice of marginal format, which, as Kathleen Scott has suggested, was no doubt partly motivated by a need for economy, the illustrator is quite capable of handling or suggesting multiple figures (where he wants to) by clever use of perspective or expansion into other margins; thus, the lack of space cannot entirely account for his avoidance of narrative subjects. Rather, his startling neglect of setting and narrative give Douce 104, as we shall argue, the look of a manuscript designed in part to enhance the mnemonic and meditative potential of a visionary work. Mary Carruthers has already briefly pointed out the mnemonic function of some of Douce's images, but no one has so far commented on the apparent meditative function of the cycle, which seems designed to trace a visionary progress through a *mental* (not physical) landscape" (5).

<sup>149</sup> I thank Emma Dillon for this idea.

praying to the Virgin and Child, surrounded by Saints Barbara and Elizabeth.<sup>150</sup>

Although we tend to find books of hours provenanced to lay people, it is clear that pictorial devotional techniques specific to the Carthusian and more general monastic illustrative tradition resonated with and probably set precedents for these images in books of hours.

The notion of making a liturgical text one's own was a feature of many Biblical scenes depicted in various books of hours. In many cases, as in the case of the depictions of the Annunciation, Biblical texts were left incomplete, inviting the reader into the devotional scene, veritably taking on a Biblical persona of sorts, to complete the text. In one French book of hours (c. 1410-1420), the annunciation to the shepherds takes the form of an image of an angel descending swiftly to an active scene, holding a text scroll bearing the words "Puer natus est" (Figure 12).<sup>151</sup> In fact, "puer natus est" is not the phrase uttered by the angel in the annunciation to the shepherds in the Bible. These words ("puer natus est nobis") instead constitute the text of the introit of the third mass on Christmas day. Once again, the substitution of liturgical words for Biblical words allows and invites the reader to enter into Biblical scenes while chanting the liturgy. In addition to incomplete and "incorrect" texts, obscured or sometimes blank scrolls feature prominently, again begging the reader to complete them in their prayers, while inscribing him or herself in their imaginative-pictorial spaces.<sup>152</sup> These text completions function as a kind of imaginative marginal glossing, as the reader does the same kind of work as the

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<sup>150</sup> Brantley, 185.

<sup>151</sup> London British Library MS Yates Thompson 46, folio 61v.

<sup>152</sup> See the Annunciation scenes in two French books of hours, London British Library MS Additional 18192, f.19 (1436), and London British Library MS Additional 16997, f.21 (1420), for examples of obscured scrolls (Figures 13 and 14).



monk-annotator, albeit retaining images in the mind rather than inscribing “notas” in the margins.

Sometimes, or perhaps even often, as Eamon Duffy and Charity Scott-Stokes point out, owners of books of hours *did* write materials in the margins of their books that function prescriptively in the way the images do. As Scott-Stokes eloquently summarizes, marginal rubrics in books of hours often “introduced a new text and could explain to the user when or how a particular prayer was to be recited or read, and even what the benefits might be.”<sup>153</sup> These rubrics, written in red, apparently synthesized many of the conventions of the variety of categories of marginal annotations in the Kempe manuscript. Like textually gleaned marginal rubrics, they introduced new prayers on a general level, helping the reader locate this prayer in the “spiritual encyclopedia” of the entire process of prayer; like textual extrapolation, they prescribed gestures and positioning to prepare and help the reader experience devotion; finally, much like “nota” marginalia, and sometimes textual extrapolation, they commented on the *purpose* of the prayer, lending to the reader’s imagination the ability to culminate the step-wise ascent to devotional perfection articulated by the inclusion of these types of marginal rubrication. In the Percy Hours, for instance, marginal rubrics beside a group of additional prayers for aid in dangerous situations synthesize these types of annotation in a rather telling way. The rubrics first assign the prayers a title, indicating the degree of importance and the corresponding strength of supplication beside each prayer; next, the marginal notes indicate where these prayers might be performed and whether or not the book must be carried on one’s person depending on the particular situation; finally, they prescribe

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<sup>153</sup> Scott-Stokes, 18.

kneeling gestures for several of the prayers, indicating the performative “genre” of rubrication of which Scott-Stokes takes special note.<sup>154</sup> These illuminations and marginal rubrics helped the reader internalize and, more practically, as Mary Carruthers has pointed out, probably to memorize the prayers; but in addition, as Scott-Stokes argues, they encourage the reader to “dwell devoutly” on the words of the prayer, enacting a formal monastic method of ruminating on liturgical texts through chant.<sup>155</sup>

Although not technically “marginal” annotation, an extra fly-leaf added to a late fifteenth-century book of hours for Mass may be considered a kind of marginal commentary. In this instance, the owner added notes to help him comprehend the mysteries of the Eucharist:

Most mercyfull Lord I beseche thee heartely off thy mercy and grace and forgyfnes of my synnes and thow wyll make me partner of the effects and graces of thy most blessyd bodye and blode the whyche be mynysterd her in thys blessed masse also I beseche thee to mak me partener of all masys that ys seyde thys daye in thys church and in all holly churchys. I beseche thee heartely to make me a pertener of all suffragys of holly church and of all good dedys they wychge be done off all crysten men. Jesu, Jhesu, Jhesu mercy...<sup>156</sup>

This gloss on the Mass indicates personal, meditative devotion (and indeed direct dialogue with Jesus) super-imposed on the experience of the liturgy, and the Eucharist in this case, in church. This rubric, then, bears comparison to the moment in Kempe’s book and the accompanying marginal gloss in which Margery cries and falls on the ground during the Eucharist. This moment in Kempe’s book and the annotators’ accompanying attention to it do not constitute an isolated moment, relevant only to the Kempe

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<sup>154</sup> Scott-Stokes, 159.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>156</sup> London Lambeth Palace Library MS 459 fo. 1r.

manuscript, but clearly has correlates in other manuscripts of the “pedagogical aid to devotion” genre, of which books of hours are a part.

In re-conceiving of the genre of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, it is useful not only to re-title it “devotional pedagogy” but to situate its use and its relationship to formal devotion, such as the recitation of the liturgical Hours of the day, as well as of the Mass and Office. Books of hours were used by both lay and professional religious populations in late medieval England, and it is therefore little surprise that Kempe’s book should be conceived of as conversant in this category, as a book written by a layperson and later used and elaborated upon by a monastic audience. We know that Margery herself was familiar with books of hours from the “miraculous” scene in which part of the ceiling of St. Margaret’s Church falls on her head and she survives unharmed. This “miracle” occurs as she prays with “hir boke in hir hand.”<sup>157</sup> It has been amply conjectured that this book was probably a book of hours. Here we can catch a glimpse of the way in which Kempe probably used her own devotional aid in the context of a public place of prayer, making it all the more plausible and likely that her own book could be used for similar purposes as one long guide to prayer, or gloss on the liturgy, to be used *either* in private devotion *or* in the formal setting of the celebration of the Mass in church (or, and more likely, for some combination of the two). While Kempe’s *Book* may not have literally been carried to church as books of hours were, it serves a similar function as books of hours and should in fact be considered as part of the genre of which books of hours themselves constitute a rather exemplary part.

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<sup>157</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 83.

### **Conclusion: Re-situating *The Book of Margery Kempe***

Today, in St Margaret's Church, Margery Kempe's church in King's Lynn, East Anglia, there is a large panel devoted to Margery, lauded as the church's "best-known medieval parishioner." Her legend and her book are summed up thus:

Daughter of a prominent Lynn merchant, wife of another and mother of fourteen children, she devoted most of her life to religion and love of Our Lord. Never a nun or anchoress, despite a vow of chastity and much criticised and misunderstood, she told the story of her life in *The Book*, easily obtainable in modern editions and very readable. More widely appreciated in recent years, she is now remembered in the Anglican church on November 9.

In the remaining two panels, Margery is depicted variously as a "married woman" conflicted about her role in a world in which religious women are by necessity vowed virgins; as a spiritual persona experiencing the highest kinds of "meditations and visions"; and as a religious person of the world, who later in life attended to the "sick and poor." No mention is made of the situation of the manuscript, although a facsimile of one of the pages of the manuscript is reproduced on one of the panels. This extraordinary glimpse into the contemporary reception of Margery Kempe and her book is a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, the quagmire of the critical view of Kempe as "criticised and misunderstood," as a holy housewife of sorts, perpetually aware of and insecure about her inferior status as a religious woman of the world rather than as a nun or anchoress, haunts the perception of her everywhere, from critical discourse to the informal celebration of her in her hometown. On the other hand, a sense of Kempe's "legitimacy" as both a literary and religious figure is palpable even in this appraisal of her as a holy housewife, mother of fourteen and devoted wife. Indeed, the makers of this

panel not only point to the fact of Kempe's commemoration in the Anglican church as something of a localized saint, but they also draw attention to her textual legacy by reproducing a page of her manuscript, suggesting an awareness of the pivotal nature of this material remnant in any evaluation of this historical figure. The re-inscription of the actual manuscript into the contemporary appraisal of Margery Kempe and her book is precisely the approach I have advocated through this analysis of the surviving marginalia. Once the marginalia are considered, it becomes possible to advocate a methodological approach often under-explored in medieval research. More importantly, once a careful analysis of the marginalia is undertaken, *The Book of Margery Kempe* suddenly appears a rather different kind of text than has previously been conjectured, associated with a different generic tradition and inscribed in a vibrant monastic textual community. Far from being isolated, Margery Kempe's text becomes a ritual guide to devotion, a text with precedents, conventions and, indeed, material companions.

As always, much research remains to be done to continue the re-situation of *The Book of Margery Kempe*. More research on Mount Grace Priory and its manuscripts remains imperative: long studies on Carthusian and Mount Grace methods of annotation and illustration have not been undertaken, although there is enough material evidence to merit such an examination. It is difficult to know to whose hands the Kempe manuscript with Mount Grace provenance passed between its tenure in this monastery and its re-discovery in Colonel Butler-Bowdon's library in 1934. It may be equally impossible to trace the path of the Kempe manuscript(s) Wynkyn de Worde and Henry Pepwell had in hand when they made devotional pamphlets from the *Book* in 1501 and 1521, respectively. Yet closer detective work on the pre-1934 career of the Mount Grace

manuscript seems an essential avenue in any further consideration of the early reception of the *Book*. We can, for instance, conjecture that this particular manuscript copy of the *Book* probably passed to lay readership in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century by virtue of a recipe that appears on the verso of the last folio.

The question remains of whether the Mount Grace annotators simply appropriated Kempe's text for their library or whether there is perhaps enough Carthusian material in the *Book* itself to call these annotations extensions rather than "interpolations." Jennifer Summit deals with this question in another context in her analysis of Henry Pepwell's 1521 print extract from the *Book*, in which he famously calls Kempe a "deuout ancre." Summit convincingly argues that Pepwell's entire pamphlet appears preoccupied with penance and, in fact, the heated issue of indulgences, and that he likewise extracted portions of Kempe's text that do in fact treat the issue of penance. In doing so, Summit subtly suggests that Kempe's text proper does in fact show evidence of a significant amount of concern with penance. She emphasizes sections of the *Book* in which Margery learns the penitential benefits of pilgrimage, including a selection from the twenty-ninth chapter, in which Jesus tells Margery that "as oftentimes as thou sayest or thynkest worshipped be all the holy places in Iherusalem where cryst suffred bytter payne and passyon thou shalte haue the same pardon as if thou were there with thy bodely presence both to thyselfe and to all those that thou wylte gyue to" and the seventy-third chapter: "The same pardon that was grau[n]ted the aforetyme it was confermed on saynt Nycolas daye that is to saye playne remyssyon & it is not onely graunted to the but also to al tho

that beleue, & to all tho that shall beleue unto the worldes ende that god loueth the.”<sup>158</sup> At the same time that Summit highlights the fact that these are indeed concerns of Kempe’s text proper, she also draws attention to the fact that the extract from Kempe’s text is framed in the pamphlet by such clearly penitential texts as Richard of St. Victor’s *Benjamin*, St. Bridget of Sweden’s *Fifteen Oes*, and a prominent Image of Pity. She also notes the inevitably somewhat distorted view of Kempe’s text that the extract, a mere four-page condensation of a several hundred page book, offers, remarking that the short treatise “focuses exclusively on scenes of private revelation or prayer, turning a sprawling and strikingly worldly narrative into a short and intensely inward-looking work of devotion.”<sup>159</sup> Indeed, the framing of the extract as well as the fact that it *is* a condensation of hundreds of pages of complexly developed narrative renders an evaluation of the pamphlet without recourse to the issue of appropriation tenuous. In addition, Summit notes that the choice of extracts reflects a preoccupation with indulgences specific to an early sixteenth-century readership. These readers would have recognized Pepwell’s “decision to frame Margery’s text in the late medieval conventions of indulgenced prayer” as carrying “specific political meanings,” meanings that changed from Kempe’s time, in which the doctrine and practice of indulgence had been criticized by John Wyclif and the Lollards, to the “new source” of contention in the 1520s with Martin Luther’s publication of *The Babylonian Captivity* and his heightened attack on the practice of indulgences.<sup>160</sup> We might ask a similar question about the annotations in the manuscript of Kempe’s *Book*: do the marginalia provide insight into the content of the

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<sup>158</sup> Quoted in Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 132.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

book or do they simply reflect the preoccupations of a particular, narrow readership? This question will continue to arise as studies of manuscripts and marginalia situate themselves alongside more “traditional” literary and textual investigation.

As Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo have noted, extensive examination of marginal annotations in medieval literary texts were considered “worthless” until quite recently “unless they were demonstrably authorial.” Yet these two scholars lament this oversight, rightfully pointing out that “individual readers of the past” have generously left us traces of their reading “in literally thousands of manuscripts.”<sup>161</sup> Their identities and responses to the texts can be uncovered through close paleographical, linguistic and iconographic analysis which has too often been neglected because, as Kerby-Fulton and Hilmo note, it is “detailed and hard” work.<sup>162</sup> Yet this neglect is an unfortunate mistake, and it is now being amply discovered that margins in medieval manuscripts are not simply “play space,” encompassing experimental loci for “profane or for personal and whimsical commentary.”<sup>163</sup> Extensive work on the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts marginalia has brought to light an abundance of theoretical issues that have altered and re-calibrated recent research on Langland’s text proper.<sup>164</sup> Hopefully, the same

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<sup>161</sup> Kerby-Fulton and Hilmo, 7.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Kerby-Fulton and Despres, 134.

<sup>164</sup> Indeed, Kerby-Fulton and Despres have used marginal annotations and illustrations in the Douce manuscript of *Piers Plowman* to understand various generic markers upon which Langland drew: “As later chapters will show, the Douce cycle throws into visual relief the various genres Langland himself drew upon – as they were recognized by medieval readers – and some of these genres (e.g., the persistent pictorial allusion to chronicles and legal treatises) may surprise modern readers who think of *Piers* as largely biblically and devotionally generated” (13). Their argument, like mine, suggests that a reading of *Piers Plowman* along with its readers’ pictorial and marginal additions leads to a new understanding of the import of the text proper. See also C. David Benson, “Another Fine Manuscript Mess: Authors, Editors and Readers of *Piers Plowman*,” in *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies: Essays from the 1998 Harvard Conference*, ed. Derek Pearsall (York: York Medieval Press, 2000), 15: “*Piers* scribes have been treated to extremes of both praise and blame: Kane considered them banal desecrators of great poetry, whereas others have labeled them literary critics (I assume that is praise) or even co-authors. The problem



methodological approach can be taken with this single surviving manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, a text notoriously recalcitrant to generic classification, yet containing the fortunate gem of an informed contemporary reception history inscribed conveniently in the margins of the manuscript's folios.

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with such a debate is that it uses post-Romantic categories (authorial genius, literary critic) not really appropriate to the much messier medieval reality. Even contemporary categories of writing, such as Bonaventure's famous division of writes into mechanical scribe, compiler, commentator and original author tend to blur and overlap in the *Piers* manuscripts. In ways I shall not try to prove here, the *Piers* poet himself adopts all four roles (scribe, compiler, commentator and author) as do the scribes. The result is that the boundaries between their work and his are more difficult to draw than assumed by the Athlone editors."