Painful Transformations: A Medical Approach to Experience, Life Cycle and Text in British Library, Additional MS 61823, *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Submitted by Laura Elizabeth Williams to the University of Exeter
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Signature: …*L.E. Williams*……...

Abstract

This thesis interprets *The Book of Margery Kempe* using a medieval medical approach. Through an interdisciplinary methodology based on a medical humanities framework, the thesis explores the significance of Kempe's painful experiences through a broad survey of the human life cycle, as understood in medieval culture. In exploring the interplay of humoral theory, medical texts, religious instruction and life cycle taxonomies, it illustrates the porousness of medicine and religion in the Middle Ages and the symbiotic relationship between spiritual and corporeal health.

In an age when the circulation of medical texts in the English vernacular was increasing, scholastic medicine not only infiltrated religious houses but also translated into lay praxis. Ideas about the moral and physical nature of the human body were thus inextricably linked, based on the popular tradition of *Christus medicus*. For this reason, the thesis argues that Margery Kempe's pain, experience and controversial performances amongst her *euen-cristen* were interpreted in physiological and medical terms by her onlookers, as 'pain-interpreters'. It also offers a new transcription of the recipe from B.L. Add. MS 61823, f.124v, and argues for its importance as a way of reading the text as an 'illness narrative' which depicts Margery Kempe's spiritual journey from sickness to health. The chapters examine Kempe's humoral constitution and predisposition to mystical perceptivity, her crying, her childbearing and married years, her menopausal middle age of surrogate reproductivity, and her elderly life stage. Medical texts such as the *Trotula*, the *Sekenesse of Wymmen* and the *Liber Diversis Medicinis* help to shed light on the ways in which medieval women's bodies were understood. The thesis concludes that, via a 'pain surrogacy' hermeneutic, Kempe is brought closer to a knowledge of pain which is transformational, just as she transforms through the stages of the life cycle.

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Notes on the text (Definitions and Abbreviations)

Texts:

The version of *The Book of Margery Kempe* which I shall employ throughout this study is EETS O.S. 212, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (London: Oxford University Press, 1997, unaltered reprint). Page numbers will appear parenthetically through the text. I have maintained the original spelling of the EETS edition. References to other editions of *The Book of Margery Kempe* will be made in the footnotes.

All biblical quotations are from the Douay-Reims translation of the Latin Vulgate.

Abbreviations:

BMK: *The Book of Margery Kempe*
MED: *Medieval English Dictionary* <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>
OED: *Oxford English Dictionary Online*
EETS: Early English Text Society (O.S.= Original Series, E.S.= Extra Series)
MS: Manuscript
MSS: Manuscripts
BL: British Library

No part of this thesis has been previously submitted for examination. Selected sections have been presented orally as unpublished papers at various academic conferences between September 2010 and June 2016. A revised section from Chapter One is published in *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 52.1 (summer 2016), as the prize-winning essay from the 2016 ‘Gender and Medieval Studies Group’ annual graduate student essay competition.

This thesis is referenced in the Modern Humanities Research Association style as per the 2013 MHRA Style Guide (third edition).

Introduction

Figure 1(a) Detail from recipe on f.124v of British Library Additional MS 61823

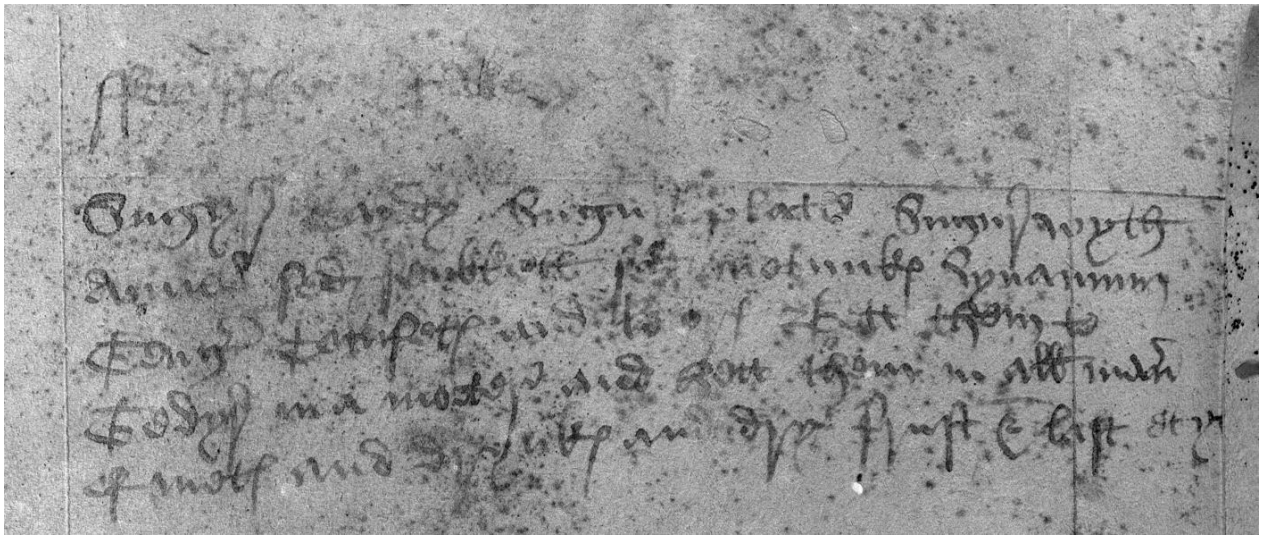

Figure 1(b) Enhanced detail of recipe on f.124v of British Library MS 61823 using multispectral imaging technology[1]

[1] For a larger version of this enhanced image see the Figure 15 in the Appendices. I am indebted to Andrea Clark, Lead Curator of Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts at The British Library, for allowing me access to the manuscript, to Christina Duffy, Imaging Scientist at The British Library, for providing me with the multi-spectral images, and to the British Library Board for supporting my research in this way.

Recipe transcription from f.124v Add. MS 61823[2]

ffor fflv<-> <---->[3]

Sugyre <c>andy[4] Sug<-> <in>plate[5] Sugure wyth
Anne<s>[6] sed[7] fenkkell[8] s<ed> notmikes[9] Synamum[10]
Genger[11] Comfetes[12] and to <---> Bett them to
Gedyre in a mortere and hett[13] them in all maner
of metes and drynkes and dry frust[14] and last ety<->[15]

At bottom of page:

<?>ger <->andy suger pla<->

Translation:

for flux?

Sugar-candy, Sug[ar] 'in plate', Sugar with
aniseed, fennel seed, nutmeg, Cinnamon,
Ginger [to make the] confection and to [then] beat them to
-gether in a mortar and heat them in the manner
of food and drinks and dry first and last eat.

At bottom of page:

...ginger? candy-suger pla<te>

---

[2] My very grateful thanks to Eddie Jones and Daniel Wakelin for their help in transcribing this recipe. All errors in transcription remain my own.
[3] 'ffor flv...' indicates a medicinal purpose for the sugar-candy.
[4] MED s.v. sugre-candī: crystallized cane sugar. OED s.v. sugar-candy: Sugar clarified and crystallized by slow evaporation.
[5] MED s.v. sugre (b) 'in plate', a cheap loaf sugar, flattened at the top [plate in sense].
[6] OED s.v. aniseed: ME anys, aneys, aneis, anise. In Tony Hunt, *Plant Names of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989), Anisus, *Pimpinella anisum L.,* anise, aniseed, annes, anisus, *Laserpitium siler L*, sermountain, anys, p. 25.
[7] MED s.v. sed: 1 (a) The grain or ovule of a plant by which a new plant is propagated, a seed.
[8] MED s.v. fenkel. Also fenecel, finkel: fennel. In Hunt, *Plant Names*: feniculus, *foeniculum vulgare*, fennel, fenkel, fenekyl, fenekele, fenkell, etc., p. 115.
[9] OED ME forms: nootmoge, notemoge, notemuge, notemugge, notmuge, notmugge, nottemevge, nutemug, nute muke, nutmuge, nutmuke, nuttmuge, nuutmugg, notemige, note migge, notemyge, notemygge, notmyg, notmyge, notmygge, etc. In Hunt, *Plant Names*: *Nux Miristica*, notemuges, *Nux Muscata*, etc., p. 187.
[10] MED s.v. c cinamōm(e or canĕl (the powder, stick or roll). In Hunt, *Plant Names*: *Cinnamomum zeylanicum, Cinnamomum cassia* (Cassia), canel, etc., p. 82.
[11] MED s.v genger: The root of the plant Zingiber officinale or of a related species, ginger. In Hunt, *Plant Names*: Zinziber, *zingiber officinale* Rosc., Ginger, gallice, gingivre, gyngir, gyngere, etc., pp. 267-8.
[12] MED s.v. comfit: (a) A confection, such as candy, preserves; (b) in syrup or a sweet sauce.
[13] MED s.v. hēten (v.) Also heaten. Forms: p. hĕt(te.
[14] MED s.v. frust.
[15] That the concoction should be heated then *dried* and eaten suggests that this recipe is for a type of solidified sweet, such as 'dragges'.

On folio 124v of London, British Library, Additional MS 61823, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, can be found a five-line recipe, written in a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century hand.[16] The recipe is extremely faded and difficult to decipher. Although the notation designating ownership of the *Book*, written at the top of the verso of the binding leaf (f.iv-v), and which states 'Liber Montis Gracie. This boke is of Mountegrace', is also written in a late-fifteenth century hand, upon inspection, it does not appear to be of the same annotator.[17] It is possible that another annotator at Mount Grace supplied the recipe, especially since there were extensive monastic herb gardens in use at the time, which have recently been partially recreated. The recipe is a barely-studied aspect of the Salthows manuscript, partly because of its fadedness, but also because scholarship has not yet recognised its great importance as an indication of the medical significance of Margery Kempe's *Boke*.[18] The folio is partially damaged and there has been some prior restoration which obscures some of the writing.[19] However, with the help of digitally-enhanced images of the manuscript using spectral-imaging technology, I have been able to initiate the production of the most penetrating copy of the recipe folio to date.[20]

As a result, I can determine that the recipe is for remedial sugar-candy, or 'dragges', probably intended as a postprandial digestive aid. Another Middle English term for a medicated tablet or lozenge was a 'trociske', but these do not

[16] According to Sanford Brown Meech. See *BMK* p. xliv.
[17] See James Hogg, 'Mount Grace Charterhouse and Late Medieval Spirituality', *Analecta Cartusiana*, 82 (1980), 1-43.
[18] Other than Kelly and Parsons' work, I have found only one brief reference to the recipe in the critical corpus of Kempe Studies. Gail McMurray Gibson suggests the recipe to be a caudel in *Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.51. This is a speculation with which I disagree, as will be shown.
[19] As well as a faint title above the top margin, there is also some writing underneath the bottom margin on f.124v, only partly visible due to the damage and subsequent restoration of this part of the folio.
[20] With grateful thanks to Andrea Clark, Christina Duffy, and the British Library Board for their support with this task, as before.

appear to contain sugar or the same ingredients as 'dragges'.[21] That the recipe begins with 'for flu...' (probably flux – a form of dysentery or outpouring of fluid) tells us that the sugar-candy was medicinal. As well as the inclusion of sugar and cinnamon in the recipe, as had been previously identified by Meech and Allen in 1940, it is now possible to decipher the ingredients of sugar, cinnamon, ginger, aniseed, fennel and nutmeg, which were combined, heated and dried to create a 'comfit' or 'dragge' (modern term 'dredge', or 'dragees'): which in Middle English is a sweet confection or sweetmeat; a sweet medicinal preparation, derived from the Latin *tragēmata* (an item used to dredge up; to clear) which were remedial sweets used from Roman times.[22] A recipe for 'a gude dragy for grauele in þe bleddir' features in the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*:

> Tak annys sede, fenkell sede, percell sede, comyn, careaway sede, gromelle sede, papworte, philipendula, cherestane kyrnells, pyons, clensed radkit, mynt sede, fawthistyll sede ana, & lycoryse þat suffice & mak a dragie þer-of & vse it.[23]

Indeed, in *Piers Plowman* it is stated that one might '...dryuen awey deth with dyas and dragges'.[24] And in Chaucer's translation of *Le Roman de la Rose*, such post-prandial confections are eaten: 'many spices delitable, To eten whan men rise fro table'.[25] As Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat has identified, '[s]pices were first valued for their antiseptic qualities as well as their aromas'.[26] She continues, 'To the medieval doctors, as to the theologians...cookery was chiefly

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[21] MED. s.v. trockiske. See for example, the recipe for 'trosikes' in The *Sekenesse of Wymmen* in *Medieval Women's Guide to Health: The First English Gynaecological Handbook*, ed. Beryl Rowland (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1981), p. 493, l.278.
[22] MED s.v. draǧǧȩ, also drage, dragie, draggeie, dreg(g)e, dregi, dreigge, dreggie, drige, & draget(e.
[23] The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, in the Thornton Manuscript, c. after 1422, (MS. Lincoln Cathedral A.5.2), ed. Margaret Sinclair Ogden, EETS O.S. 207 (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 50.
[24] *The vision of Piers Plowman*, William Langland, (London, J.M. Dent and New York, E.P. Dutton: 1978), B text, 20.174 < http://www.hti.umich.edu/c/cme/>.
[25] *La Roman de la Rose*, ll. 1371-2. At <http://ummutility.umm.maine.edu/necastro/chaucer/texts/rom/roma07.html>
[26] Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, *A History of Food*, trans. Anthea Bell (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), p. 485.

a matter of dietetics, with the object of preserving the physical and mental health of a body kindly provided by God'.[27] Aldobrandino of Siena was particularly concerned with establishing the correct balance between the four flavours of bitter, sweet, acid and salty, in his *Régime des corps* (c.1256).[28] Like the Salerno School, Aldobrandino classified food under the four headings of cold, hot, dry and wet – not because of the consistency or temperature of the foods themselves but with their properties in helping to rebalance humoral disequilibrium. Hot spices, for example, were eaten in cold weather.[29]

> Etiquette demanded that spices were offered as the company rose from the table; their heat was meant to aid the digestion of the copious menu, which in medieval times was in itself highly spiced. If the meal had included fish, as it almost always did, as well as a variety of meat dishes, the coldness and humidity of the fish required immediate correction... [The 'dragges'] were therefore offered in the form of whole seeds, for instance, of coriander, fennel or aniseed. Another advantage was that they deodorised the breath. When means allowed, the seeds were cooked in sugar, providing a sort of sweetmeat [confection]... Wealthy people offered their guests these spices in pretty little boxes; you took them away with you to eat the contents at home, or in your bedroom if you were staying at your host's house. These were known as...bedroom or chamber spices, and eating them was a bedtime ritual much like cleaning the teeth today. [They were] intended to have a therapeutic or at least preventative function, as an aid to digestive troubles due to the excessive intake of food which was neither very fresh nor very well balanced...and for a long time had the reputation for 'dispelling wind and encouraging the seed'. Various spices like cloves, ginger, aniseed and juniper berries were dipped in melted sugar and well cooked in a pan over a flame. The pan was stirred to avoid sticking, and more melted sugar was added as necessary before it caramelised.[30]

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[27] Ibid., p. 486.

[28] Aldobrandino of Siena, *Régime des corps*, ed. R. Pepin (Paris: Landouzy, 1911), cited from Toussaint-Samat, p. 486. Aldobrandino's work, originally composed for the mother-in-law of Louis IX in 1256, was written in the French vernacular and translated into the Italian vernacular in some thirty manuscripts in both languages. Based upon the Arabic works of Constantine the African and Avicenna, these ideas, therefore, emanate from the same medical sources as the English medical texts that we will encounter in this study. See Faith Wallis, ed. *Medieval Medicine: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 493. In England, Sir John Fastolf (b.1380) owned a copy of the *Régime des corps*, as did Henry VII (b.1457), who owned two copies (Cambridge University Library li.V.11 and British Library Royal MS 19 A V), although these were in the original French. Such ideas had therefore begun to circulate in England. My thanks to Linda E. Voigts for her help in determining the ownership of these MSS.

[29] Toussaint-Samat, p. 486.

[30] Ibid., pp. 486-7.

Since there are several accounts of meals and dinner parties enjoyed by Kempe with 'worthy' folk during her peregrinations (and not least her frequent eating of 'cold and humid' fish on Fridays), it is inconceivable that she would not have eaten such 'dragges'. Furthermore, as I will argue in Chapter One, Kempe's tears and mourning indicate a cold and melancholic temperament, and therefore such warming, spiced comfits would have provided an apt counteractant for her constitution. Not only does Kempe experience a bad dose of 'flyx' in Chapter 56, but that she is associated with excess and 'flux' in a more widespread, effluvious and metaphorical sense throughout the *Boke*, makes such a recipe redolent with symbolic value.[31] Given the denotation of the term *recipe* as a formula for the composition or use of a *medicine*, a prescription, a remedy, it is suggestive that the inclusion of a recipe at the close of *The Book of Margery Kempe* by an early reader of the manuscript illustrates a preoccupation with questions of sickness, healing and medicine, in relation to Kempe's narrative, that have so far been little acknowledged.[32]

Furthermore, beyond the literal content of the recipe and its medical signification, the symbolic value of the recipe and its structural positioning requires consideration. How striking, for instance, that it features at the end of the *Boke*, on folio 124v and is justaposed with Margery Kempe's final prayer to the world. A late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century reader of the manuscript has chosen to insert a recipe – a medical remedy – in dialogue with the conclusion of Kempe's narrative and her prayer. I argue that this is a powerful

[31] MED s.v. flux: 1. A pathological flowing of blood (or humours, excretions, discharges) from any part of the body. 2(a) Dysentry. 3(a) Diarrhea; of the womb. (b) flow of excrement produced by medicine, purging. (c) *fig. a constant flow of speech*. In Middle English there is therefore also a metaphorical denotation of 'flux', for verbal effusiveness.

[32] OED s.v. recipe. From the Latin *reciperare*: to refresh, recuperate, recover. It is of course also possible that the recipe is an unconnected jotting by a later user of the manuscript, although I argue that the emphasis on health throughout the *Boke* is suggestive of greater significance in respect of its healing potential.

new way to think about the manuscript both structurally and symbolically, especially in the light of the following statement from the *Boke's* Proem: 'how charytefully he *meued* & *stered* a synful caytyf vn-to hys love, whech synful caytyf many ȝerys was in wyl and in purpose thorw steryng of þe Holy Gost to folwyn [oure] Savyowr...' (my emphasis, 1). Over many years, she is *moved* and *stirred* towards renewal. This opening remark is illustrative of the way in which Margery Kempe's amenuensis heralds her *Boke* as a successful journey from sin to salvation, aided by some internal working – a stirring – or healing process. The Middle English meaning of *stiren* is primarily to 'set in motion' or to literally 'stir', but a less primary meaning is to be risen from sickness.[33] Furthermore, the alternative spelling of *steren* means to burn or offer incense, or to treat a sick person with the smoke or fume of a burning medicinal substance or preparation.[34] This suggests possible alternative meanings of medical as well as spiritual hermeneutics that I argue to be at work in the *Boke*. As historiography has revealed, scholars and theologians, particularly clerics in the lower orders, were often *au fait* with medical treatises, often blending medical metaphors and justifications into their own writings.[35] Indeed, Katherine Kerby-Fulton has noted how the red ink annotator of the manuscript had a job which was 'virtually a scientific investigation'; that episodes such as Margery Kempe's turning blue and grey from her crying 'were matters for professional *discretion* (discretion of spirits), or even *probatio* (testing of the spirits), and they were very "scientifically" understood among religious professionals'.[36] Linne

[33] MED s.v. stiren: 1(a) to set in motion. 8(a) To rise from sickness; rise (from a sickbed or sleep); rouse from sleep or death.
[34] MED s.v. stēren (v.(2)) (a) to burn or offer incense; (b) to treat (a sick person with the smoke or fume of a burning medicinal substance or preparation); suffuse or perfume (sb.) with incense.
[35] See for example Jessalynn Bird, 'Medicine for Body and Soul: Jacques de Vitry's Sermons to Hospitallers and their Charges', in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 91-108.
[36] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 'Professional Readers at Work: Annotators, Editors, and Correctors in Middle English Literary Texts', in *Opening up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual*

Mooney has noted the common practice of the addition of scientific texts to manuscripts of non-scientific content as being 'particularly indicative of the annotator's use of the text since such additions cannot be accounted for as merely adding to the knowledge already recorded in the manuscript; instead, they point to the introduction of a new category of text for a particular reason'. Mooney cites the example of the charms added to Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.9.26, which includes the charm to staunch blood, 'Cryst that was born in bedlem and baptyzed in flem jordan...'[37] Similarly, Linda E. Voigts notes that '[g]iven the expense and effort involved in producing a manuscript book and the universal and common concern for health, it is not surprising that medical material is often to be found in books, and indeed texts, that are primarily nonmedical'.[38] Indeed, Kelly Parsons and Johanne Paquette have suggested that the inclusion of luxurious ingredients in the recipe is at odds with the austerity of Carthusian life, therefore indicating a lay readership outside of Mount Grace.[39] Whether the readers were lay as well as monastic, Kempe's journey begins with the subversion of health and happiness, evidencing a reversal of fortune that culminates in great bodily sickness and thus the paradoxical opportunity for transformation:

> '[God] *turnyd helth in-to sekenesse*, prosperyte in-to aduersyte, worship in-to repref, & love in-to hatered. Thus *alle þis thyngys turning vp-so-*

Approaches, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 207-44 (p. 237). Kerby-Fulton's study does not mention the recipe in Add. MS 61823.

[37] Linne R. Mooney, 'The Use of Medieval English Scientific and Utilitarian Texts', in *Interstices: Studies in Middle English and Anglo-Latin Texts in Honour of A.G. Rigg*, ed. Richard Firth Green and Linne R. Mooney (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 184-202 (p. 189).

[38] Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 'Medical Prose', in *Middle English Prose: A Critical Guide to Major Authors and Genres* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), pp. 315-335 (p. 319).

[39] Kelly Parsons, 'The Red Ink Annotator of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and His Lay Audience', in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 2001), 143-216 (p. 153-4). Johanne Paquette, 'Male Approbation in the Extant Glosses to the *Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Women and the Divine in Literature before 1700: Essays in Memory of Margot Louis*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Victoria: ELS Editions, 2009), pp. 153-69 (p. 158).

> *down*, þis creatur which many ȝerys had gon wyl & euyr ben vnstable was parfythly drawen & steryd to entren þe way of hy perfeccyon, whech parfyth wey Cryst ower Savyowr in hys propyr persoone examplyd. Sadly he trad it & dewly he went it beforn. Than þis creatur, of whom thys tretys thorw þe mercy of Ihesu schal schewen in party þe leuyng, towched be þe hand of owyr Lord wyth grett bodyly sekenesse, wher-thorw sche lost reson & her wyttes a long tyme tyl *ower Lord be grace restoryd her a-geyn, as it schal mor openly be shewed aftyrward*' (my emphases,1-2).

As this extract makes clear, this 'schort tretys and a comfortabyl' is intended to be understood as an account of Margery Kempe's journey from sickness to health, with God as her physician. A series of binary oppositions occur in this passage that illustrate the efficacy of Kempe's healing journey: she is tested with the challenges of health to sickness, prosperity to adversity, worship to reproof, love to hatred. In reaching the depths of such an illness that 'sche lost reson & her wyttes a long tym', Kempe is remade and 'restoryd' by God; her 'reson' now focused more singularly on the Christ whose redemptive medicine will form the foundation of her narrative. That the *Boke* opens with such an overarching healing framework makes it all the more fitting that a subsequent annotator thought to include a curative recipe for 'dragges' as a sort of medical addendum. It also helps us to further understand the intersections between medicine, literature and theology in the Middle Ages, a topic which is gathering scholarly momentum, as the inclusion of this recipe in such sharp alignment with the final prayer evidences a medieval mindset that connects Kempe's spiritual words with a material concoction designed for bodily ingestion; a way for the prayer to be 'eaten' and internalised.[40] As this study will thus

[40] For recent interdisciplinary scholarship, see *Postmedieval*, Special Issue: 'Medievalism and the Medical Humanities', ed. Corinne Saunders and Jamie McKinstry, 8 (forthcoming, 2017); 'Medical Discourse in Premodern Europe': Special Issue, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, ed. Marion Turner, 46 (January 2016); *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015); Michael Leahy, '"To speke of phisik": Medical Discourse in Late Medieval English Culture' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2015); Daniel McCann, 'Heaven and Health: Middle English Devotion to Christ in its Therapeutic Contexts' in *Devotional Culture in Late*

demonstrate, the *Boke* is a story of healing – of Margery Kempe's own spiritual healing and of her praxis of healing and 'pain-surrogacy'. After all, her tears are the drink of angels, and medicinally-potent: they are 'very pyment to hem' (161).[41]

The recipe on f.124v is suggested by Gail McMurray Gibson to be the recipe for Margery Kempe's wine caudle, 'a kind of spiritual chicken soup... of the restoring food and drink of the Eucharist, of the body of Christ that will itself become spiritual food'.[42] Such a reference resonates indeed with Henry of Lancaster's call in *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines* for a 'drink that could comfort me and clean me from within and expel the filth of my wounds.Henry states how God is 'pleased to prepare such precious medicines'; that they are a 'noble…drink, for us sick and afflicted'.[43] He even describes a method for cooking chicken soup, before establishing its metaphoric tenor as a medicine of divine power: 'The capon shut up in the little earthenware pot was the humanity that you took of us; and the little earthenware pot was the fear that the flesh had of earthly agony'.[44] Whilst Gibson's theory is a tempting one, the recipe is

Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ's Life, ed. Ryan Perry and Stephen Kelly (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp.335-362; Rachel Falconer and Denis Renevey, eds. *Medieval and Early Modern Literature, Science and Medicine*. Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 28 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2013); Julie Orlemanski, 'Jargon and the Matter of Medicine in Middle English', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 42, (2012), 395-420; Louise Bishop, *Words, Stones, Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Katie Walter, 'Discourse of the Human: Mouths in Late Medieval Religious Literature' (unpublished dissertation), University of Cambridge, 2006; 'Special Issue: Narrative, Pain, and Suffering', ed. Martha Stoddard Holmes and Tod Chambers, *Literature and Medicine*, 24, (Spring 2005); *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2001); Rosanne Gasse, 'The Practice of Medicine in Piers Plowman', *Chaucer Review*, 39 (2004), 177-97. The ingestion of written prayers and charms will be considered in Chapter Four of this study.

[41] MED s.v. piment: a sweetened, spiced wine used for refreshment and in medical recipes; a medicinal potion. Kempe also offers a pyment to Saint Elizabeth in her vision of the birth of John the Baptist. See *BMK* p. 18, and Chapter Four of this study.

[42] Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, p. 51.

[43] Henry of Grosmont, First Duke of Lancaster, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*: *The Book of Holy Medicines*, trans. Catherine Batt (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014), p. 189.

[44] Ibid., p. 240-1.

clearly for sugar-candy, or 'dragges', also made clear by the fact that it should be dried before eating ('and dry frust'). Such spiced 'comfytes' also feature in medieval recipe books as culinary decorations. In British Library, Harleian MS 279 (c.1420), 'red anys in comfyte' are used to adorn a dish of 'Fride Creme of Amaundys'.[45] Another recipe for a 'goode potage' named 'Blandissorye' is decorated with 'Red Anys in comfyte'.[46] For a dish of 'Vyande Ryalle' (sliced meat served with a sweet, creamy sauce), the cook should 'caste Aneys in comfyte þer-on'.[47] A similar recipe features in the well-known collection, *Forme of Cury*, which includes a recipe for 'Blank maunger', whichthe cook should flourish 'with aneys in confyt, rede oþer whyt'.[48] The ingredients of the recipe suggest a remedy for complaints caused by coldness, and digestive aids.

Aniseed, or anise, was highly valued from biblical times, when it was used as a form of tithe.[49] As a warming spice, anise was used to balance coldness in the body, as well as a diuretic. *Pimpinella anisum*, the anise plant, is difficult to cultivate in England, apart from in East Anglia, which might suggest its inclusion in this recipe to be more probable.[50] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, one of the core medical texts in this study, recommends 'anneys', mixed with goose fat and butter amongst other ingredients, as a pessary for an over-abundance of humours in the uterus. The 'Book on the Conditions of Women', from the *Trotula* texts – a fundamental medical text in this study –

[45] *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books: Harleian MS 279 (ab. 1430) and Harl. MS 4016 (ab. 1450), with Extracts from Ashmole MS 1439, Laud MS 553 and Douce MS 55*, ed. Thomas Austin, EETS O.S. 91 (London: Oxford University Press, 1888, unaltered 2000 reprint), p. 8.
[46] Ibid., p. 9-10.
[47] Ibid., p. 32.
[48] 'The Forme of Cury' – or 'the (proper) method of cookery' – recipe 38, in *Curye on Inglysch: English Culinary Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (Including the Forme of Cury)*, ed. Constance B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler, EETS, S.S. 8 (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 93-145 (p.106).
[49] Matthew 23:23: Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you tithe mint, and anise, and cumin, and have left the weightier things of the law'.
[50] Teresa McLean, *Medieval English Gardens*, (New York: Courier Corporation, 2014), p. 180.

includes ‘anise’ [anisum] in a recipe for retained menses, as does *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*.[51] The latter text also recommends anise for a windy or aching uterus, as well as for its purgative effects in inducing the evacuation of various matter, from menstrual blood, to dead foetuses, to fibroids [mola] of the uterus.[52] Such efficacy in facilitating the *flow* and issue of bodily matter is evidenced by some recipes which include aniseed as an ingredient for infertility; it features in *Sekeness of Wymmen*, for example, ‘to make a woman able to conceyven chyld yf God wyll’, and in a Hebrew compilation written at the end of 13th century to encourage pregnancy.[53] The potency of anise as a spice of activation and animation holds resonance with my argument for the existence of a topos of substitutional generation and fecundity which I find to be apparent in Add. MS 61823. Bernard of Gordon prescribes anise for stomach indigestion arising from ‘cold humoral disorder’, in combination with the use of leeches and a compound including ginger, which also features in the recipe at the end of the Salthows manuscript.[54] If the coldness is due to wetness (and the idea that Margery Kempe is cold and wet from her tears will be explored in Chapter One), Bernard recommends cinnamon amongst other ingredients; a treatment plan which thus encompasses all of the ingredients in the *Boke’s* recipe. A cold constitution was associated with the humour of black bile, and therefore a melancholic disposition, and Aristotle makes a connection between digestive disorders and melancholia. He writes how ‘melancholy, both the humour and

[51] The *Sekenesse of Wymmen,*, ed.Rowland, p. 152-3.
[52] *Sekenesse of Wymmen*, esp. pp. 154-5.
[53] *Sekenesse of Wymmen*, p. 146. Carmen Caballero Navas, *The Book of Women’s Love and Jewish Medieval Medical Literature on Women. Sefer ahavat nashim* (London: Kegan Paul, 2004), p. 146. One of the sources for *The Book of Women’s Love* was Ibn al-Jazzār’s ‘Zad al-musafir wa-qut al-hadir’, which was translated into Latin by Constantine the African under the title ‘Viaticum peregrinantis’, and circulated widely throughout the Middle Ages. It influenced parts of the *Trotula* and also other vernacular and Hebrew texts. I am grateful to Carmen Cabellero Navas for her help in determining this source.
[54] Bernard of Gordon, *Lilium medicinae*, *Particula* 5, c. 3, trans. Faith Wallis in *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, p. 280.

the temperament, produce air; wherefore the physicians say that flatulence and abdominal disorders are due to black bile'.[55] As Chapter One of this study will argue, I contend that Margery Kempe is a natural melancholic. Could the manuscript recipe annotator, by including anise and other warming ingredients, be signalling towards a salve for Kempe's mournful melancholia? Alternatively, a powder containing anise is recommended in Glasgow, University Library, MS Hunter 185, as a treatment for 'þe mygreyne [migraine] in þe heued'.[56] A more cynical reader might wonder whether the recipe is, in fact, a remedy for the long-suffering listeners of Margery Kempe's noisy cries!

The inclusion of ginger – another spice of warming qualities – is an ingredient of new enquiry for the MS 61823 recipe and is also found in the medical texts that form my central focus. The writer of *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* recalls a 'Jew' who treated the 'quene of France' to induce her menses. A concoction including 'gyngere' was heated and used as a fumigation for the queen's 'matryce'.[57] Hildegard of Bingen prescribes a powder of 'pulverize[d] ginger' to a person whose body is dry and failing, and states how ginger is 'injurious as food for a healthy...person'. It is recommended, she writes, for constipation, stomach ailments, *vicht* (a metabolic problem with symptoms of fatigue, weakness and pains), and for those who desire purgation.[58] Cinnamon also features in the recipe for *vicht.* The *Sekenesse of Wymmen* prescribes ginger for inclusion in powders that will staunch the flow of

[55] Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (London: Nelson, 1964), p. 21.
[56] See *A Middle English Medical Remedy Book, edited from Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 185*, by Francisco Alonso Almeida (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2014), p. 81.
[57] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 90.
[58] Hildegard von Bingen's *Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Rochester: Healing Arts Press, 1998), p. 6 and 17-8.

excess menstrual blood, but also in a different recipe to provoke the menses.[59] Such adaptability of usage indicates that it is the combination of ingredients that also promotes efficacy.

Cinnamon is also a warming spice, recommended in 'On Treatments for Women' for a prolapsed 'uvulva' [vagina], and for the 'exit' of the womb after childbirth, presumably to harness the heat of the spice in order to 'draw' it back up into the body.[60] In *Sekeness of Wymmen*, cinnamon is prescribed in a powder that treats illnesses of the heart due to cold – heart attack, fainting, and the flux caused by cold.[61] It also features in the aforementioned recipe for encouraging the menses, or 'the giving of a hemagoge [emagogum]'.[62] Strikingly, all three of these hot spices – anise, ginger, and cinnamon – are employed together in a recipe, mixed with sugar, and used to prevent vomiting (associated, of course, with 'flux').[63] While this might seem to contradict the action of such hot spices to inspire bodily motion, as we saw above, the action of *preventing* vomiting suggests a strong force at work in settling a tumultuous stomach, and thus concurs with the notion of the spices' heat as efficacious in drawing bodily flux inwards or outwards: in activating movement and somatic energy and countering the cold causation of various afflictions.

Fennel (or in ME fenkel) was used mostly as a diuretic or digestive aid, but also features in a recipe in *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* as an emmenagogue drink to encourage the menses.[64] The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' also includes fennel in a recipe for retained menses, both in the form

[59] *Sekenesse of Wymmen* pp. 82-3, pp. 152-3.
[60] 'On Treatments for Women', pp. 144-5 and pp. 158-9 respectively.
[61] *Sekeness of Wymmen*, p. 83.
[62] Ibid., pp. 156-7.
[63] Ibid., pp. 162-3.
[64] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 92.

of a drink and as a fumigation.[65] One of the other *Trotula* texts, 'On Women's Cosmetics', recommends fennel for whitening the teeth: after washing her mouth after dinner with 'very good wine', she should wipe her teeth with a 'new white cloth' and '[f]inally, let her chew each day fennel or lovage or parsley, which is better to chew because it gives off a good smell and cleans good gums and makes the teeth very white'.[66] There is also a compound recipe from the Appendix to the *Trotula* ensemble called *Rosata novella* which 'gets rid of vomiting and upset stomach' and 'represses weakness and thirst'. It also 'takes away defects from a long sickness marvellously. It suppresses *diaforetic* sweats'. The compound includes sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg, amongst other ingredients.[67] Such remedies, in their combination of ingredients and cure for digestive or oral afflictions, add weight to the suggestion that the recipe in Add. MS 61823 is, indeed, for postprandial 'dragges'.

The existence of such medical knowledge and its interplay with religious doctrine was ubiquitous in the Middle Ages. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 stipulated thus:

22. Physicians of the body to advise patients to call physicians of the soul.

> As sickness of the body may sometimes be the result of sin – as the Lord said to the sick man whom he had cured, Go and sin no more, lest something worse befall you – so we by this present decree order and strictly command physicians of the body, when they are called to the sick, to warn and persuade them first of all to call in physicians of the soul so that after their spiritual health has been seen to they may respond better to medicine for their bodies, for when the cause ceases so does the effect. This among other things has occasioned this decree, namely that some people on their sickbed, when they are advised by physicians to arrange for the health of their souls, fall into despair and so the more readily incur the danger of death. If any physician transgresses this our constitution, after it has been published by the local prelates, he shall be barred from entering a church until he has made suitable

[65] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', pp. 76-7 and p. 78-9 respectively.
[66] 'On Women's Cosmetics', pp. 186-7.
[67] 'Compound Medicines in the *Trotula* Ensemble', in *Trotula*, pp. 199-200.

> satisfaction for a transgression of this kind. Moreover, since the soul is much more precious than the body, we forbid any physician, under pain of anathema, to prescribe anything for the bodily health of a sick person that may endanger his soul.[68]

This interplay is evidenced in Lynn itself, where library records of both religious and medical institutions illustrate the ownership of both types of text. The Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen, founded on the causeway leading to Gaywood in 1145, contained a *Liber Vitae* dating from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, containing a list of the names of visitors and patrons to the establishment who were to be remembered in the prayers of the prior, and the twelve bretheren and sisters there.[69] Such a book indicates the inextricability of the medical and religious activities which occurred at the hospital; a symbiosis of healing work and prayerful enterprise.[70] It is probable that this hospital is the 'place wher seke women dwellyd' (177) that Margery Kempe attended in order to embrace and seek cure for the women there, as will be considered in Chapter Four of this study. Further evidence of the interaction between religious and medical knowledge in Lynn is the existence of Oxford, Bodleian, Ashmole 1398, a book of miscellaneous *medica* from the thirteenth century that was held at the Carmelite convent at Lynn.[71] Margery Kempe was closely connected to both the Dominican and Carmelite Orders in Lynn. The Carmelite friar, Master

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[68] From The Fourth General Council of the Lateran, 1215 AD. 21 in *Papal Encyclicals Online* <http://www.papalencyclicals.net> [accessed 8th May 2016]

[69] Neil Ker, ed., *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, Second Edition (London: Butler and Tanner, 1964), p. 127. The book is now held at Norwich in the Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, B-L ixb. See *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, ed. N.R. Ker, *Supplement to the Second Edition*, ed. Andrew G. Watson (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1987), p. 48.

[70] On the spiritual and medical care in medieval hospitals, see Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital, St. Giles's, Norwich, c.1249-1550* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), especially Chapter One, 'Medicine for the Soul', pp. 1-33. Also Barbara S. Bowers, ed., *The Medieval Hospital and Medical Practice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Pegregrine Horden's chapter in this volume is very useful in considering the religious, regimental and emotional importance of healing: 'A Non-Natural Environment: Medicine without Doctors and the Medieval European Hospital', pp. 133-45.

[71] Ker, *Medieval Libraries*, p. 127.

Aleyn, was an admirer of Kempe and a highly educated intellectual. Indeed, Anthony Goodman writes how, if this is the same Alan of Lynn (b.c.1348) identified by Meech and Allen, 'Margery had as one of her mentors one of the most diligent and learned scholars among the religious in England in his day'.[72] It therefore seems highly likely that Master Aleyn would have had familiarity with this book of *medica*, emphasising the cultural conflation of religious and medical knowledge. That Additional MS 61823 is the story of Kempe's pain and tribulation, the recipe's inclusion is thus an apt conclusion to the text and indication of its curative properties, both for Kempe herself and for the *Boke's* readers, who are simultaneously healed through the text's healing words. The *Boke* and the final prayer are, I argue, regarded by the recipe annotator as providing a form of medicine for the soul.

With this new understanding of the recipe's signification, this thesis is therefore the first full length study of *The Book of Margery Kempe* with a medieval medical approach. In employing the broad framework of the medieval life cycle, and regarding the recipe's inclusion as an important symbolic driver in the way that we read the text, I explore the manner in which Kempe's painful experiences are transformational. In arguing that each life stage offers new and different opportunities for the salvific efficacy of painful *experientia*, the thesis will offer an analysis of Kempe's journey from sin to salvation and from sickness to health. There is an ontological connection between painful phenomena and mystical phenomena, which this thesis will also consider. Like mystical experience, pain represents one of those extra-linguistic experiences whose ontology is accepted as a given and yet intangible and, always, 'other'. Both are esoteric, interior, impossible to 'know' or to quantify by their witnesses. Joanna

[72] Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World* (London and New York: Longman, 2002), pp. 88-9.

Bourke has recently suggested that pain is a self-authenticating phenomenon, not an 'it' in the body – or an entity in itself – but a 'type of event', suggesting that Elaine Scarry's essentialising of pain is an 'ontological fallacy'; that Scarry has fallen into the trap 'of treating metaphoric ways of conceiving suffering... as descriptions of an actual entity'.[73] Javier Moscoso writes that instances of painful experience 'would all be incomprehensible without this duality between the unified form of experience and the cultural modulation that allows the breaking of the (supposedly objective) correspondence between physiological pain and its subjective expression'.[74] In this study of mystical pain, to think about pain as an 'event', to adopt Bourke's term, which is just as collaboratively hinged upon those cultural meanings that are attached to such perceived sensations as the sensations themselves, I will examine Kempe's body-in-pain and the phenomenology of that experience as she journeys through the life cycle, seeking meaning for that pain from God and from her social arena. For just as Kempe's mystical raptures offer her a privileged conduit through which an understanding of heaven might be achieved, so her pains – which she repeatedly emphasises – provide a phenomenological route towards esoteric knowledge. This thesis will therefore answer the following questions: How does Kempe's melancholic disposition open her to mystical experience? How does her medieval community interpret and, indeed, pathologise, her crying? How is trauma and loss – both spiritual and physical – and a melancholic disposition, crucial in forming Kempe's identity during her childbearing years? In what ways does the medieval conflation of theology and medicine mean that the pain of

[73] Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 3-5. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
[74] Javier Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History*, trans. Sarah Thomas and Paul House (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 6-8.

seeking a chaste life is inescapable? How do medieval understandings of menopause 'make male' the ageing female and provide an opportunity for Kempe to replace physiological reproductivity with the role of pain surrogate? How does this mature life stage facilitate a transition to healer of others' pain? And finally, how does elderly life offer Kempe a new opportunity for aged asceticism, and an ultimate position as a death surrogate? In exploring these questions, I offer a fresh way of reading Margery Kempe's text and experience, arguing that pain forms a central and productive facet of her esoteric identification, and therefore will endeavour to further our understanding of mystical epistemology.

Margery Kempe Criticism

Scholarship surrounding *The Book of Margery Kempe* has taken significant turns since the discovery of the Salthows manuscript in 1934. My engagement with Kempe criticism will be integral throughout this study, though I will provide here a brief overview of the trajectory of critical thought over the last eighty years.[75] Early twentieth century criticism, with its Freudian influence, was largely concerned with assessing whether Margery Kempe was a 'genuine' visionary, and more often than not, with labelling her as disordered. Such scholarship characterised Kempe by a *lack*, or inadequacy, rather than by the strategic and conventional form of piety which writers like Liz Herbert McAvoy and Anthony Bale would advocate some seventy years later.[76] In her preface to the *Boke*, Hope Emily Allen described Margery Kempe as neurotic and

[75] See Diane Watt's very useful online bibliography on Margery Kempe criticism: 'Margery Kempe', in *Oxford Bibliographies in British and Irish Literature*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). <DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199846719-0034>.
[76] On Kempe's conventionality and influence by other religious figures whose lives were read to her, see Chapter One of this study, p. 88, n. 56 and p. 107, n.103.

hysterical, requiring the 'professional psychologist', and suffering from 'constitutional deficiencies'.[77] Herbert Thurston's 1936 review of Butler-Bowden's translation of the book was fairly sympathetic to Kempe's mode of piety, though he wrote that she suffered from a 'terrible hysteria' which he regards as a 'mental disease consisting chiefly in an exaggeration of suggestibility'.[78] In the 1960s, David Knowles suggested that Kempe lacked depth and distinction, was an exhibitionist, a 'very hysterical woman' who relayed 'insignificant content' in her reportage of Christ's words.[79] Similarly, Wolfgang Riehle described her use of the word *ravishen* in an erotic and mystical context to reveal a 'sick, neurotic psyche', echoing the patriarchal doubters of her time, although he has since revised this view.[80] Other writers have sought to retrospectively diagnose Margery Kempe (an approach that is reconsidered in this study). Hope Phyllis Weissman, whilst arguing for a Freudian interpretation of Kempe's tears as those of a 'conversion hysteric who theatricalises her symptom to elicit secondary gains', does not seek to trivialise this behaviour but rather to view it as a source of healing from the effects of Original Sin (which the Church taught that stemmed not just from sexual excess but from female sexuality itself). Weissman regards Kempe's 'hysteria', therefore, as efficacious.[81] Diagnoses of Margery's post-partum depression also gained in momentum; Maureen Fries, for example, argued for her 'painful and

[77] Meech and Allen, p. lxv.
[78] Herbert Thurston, 'Margery the Astonishing', in *The Month*, 168 (1936), 446-56, (p.452). From *TBK*, p. lxv.
[79] David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (London: Burns and Oates, 1961), pp. 138-150.
[80] Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, trans. Bernard Standring (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 96. More recently, Riehle has 'come to recognize her importance'. Wolfgang Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England* (Icatha and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 280.
[81] Hope Phyllis Weissman, 'Margery Kempe in Jerusalem: *Hysterica Compassio* in the Late Middle Ages', in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in its Contexts 700 – 1600, Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1982), pp. 201-17 (pp. 207-9).

lengthy postpartum depression (at its unipolar manic phase) following upon a first childbirth'. For Fries, however, Margery's 'hysteria' is not, as Weissman would suggest, a spiritual rebirth, but one of her many flaws – 'an ancient reminder ... of its origin as God's curse upon Eve'.[82] Mary Hardman Farley argues that she is psychotic, as does Richard Lawes, who, as a trained psychiatrist, bases his diagnoses on psychodynamic explanations of human motivation and behaviour, claiming to resist reductionism by employing a 'multi-dimensional approach'.[83] Rejecting proponents of Kempe's 'hysteria', and suggesting that this discourse represents 'scientifically sanctioned abuse', Lawes argues that her symptoms indicate a depressive psychosis in the puerperium, along with temporal lobe epilepsy or psychomotor epilepsy. Lawes considers the *Discretio Spirituum* of the Middle Ages as similar to modern psychiatry as both recognise patterns of inner experience. Other, more daring diagnoses have included Tourette's Syndrome, an idea proposed by Nancy P. Stork, and Becky R. Lee's case that Kempe's hysteria is a psychological advantage.[84] Whilst retroactive methodologies can illuminate our understanding from a neomedievalist perspective, this study will read Kempe's *experientia* in medieval medical terms, in line with Anthony Bale's recent call 'to assess

[82] Maureen Fries, 'Margery Kempe', in *An Introduction to The Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 217-35.
[83] Mary Hardman Farley, 'Her own creatur: religion, feminist criticism, and the functional eccentricity of Margery Kempe', *Exemplaria*, 11 (1999), 1-21 (p. 4). Richard Lawes, 'The Madness of Margery Kempe' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Ireland and Wales*, *Exeter Symposium VI, Papers Read at Charney Manor, July 1991*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), pp.147-68 (p. 148). See also Richard Lawes, 'Psychological Disorder and the Autobiographical Impulse in Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve', in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 217 – 243.
[84] Nancy P. Stork, 'Did Margery Kempe suffer from Tourette's Syndrome?', *Mediaeval Studies*, 59 (1997), 261-300. Becky R. Lee, 'The Medieval Hysteric and the Psychedelic Psychologist: A Revaluation of the Mysticism of Margery Kempe in the Light of the Transpersonal Psychology of Stanislav Grof', *Studia Mystica*, 23 (2002), 102-26.

Kempe's behaviour according to her times', seek to revise our understanding of her experiences through a medieval lens.[85]

The 1980s and 1990s saw a surge in Kempe criticism. Clarissa Atkinson's book length study contextualised Kempe's religious and historical locus, and set out the role of affective piety in the book.[86] Anthony Goodman contributed an equally useful book about Margery Kempe's world and social setting, some twenty years later.[87] Sarah Beckwith's influential study of the materiality of Kempe's mysticism argued for Kempe's resistance to patriarchal structures.[88] Gail McMurray Gibson's study of Kempe's devotion hinged on its role as performative while also arguing for her saintly status; a point that has also been made by scholars such as Diane Watt and Katherine J. Lewis.[89] In her study of motherhood discourse, Wendy Harding emphasised the medieval diagnosis of Margery as possessed by evil spirits; violent actions and diabolic visions that embody the pain and misery of Eve's legacy, arguing that Kempe behaves as if she is giving birth.[90] Pain also features in Ellen Ross's criticism, who suggests that Kempe is 'not interested in the pain that accompanies discipleship for its own sake'.[91] I deviate from Ross's reading here as whilst she

[85] Anthony Bale, 'Introduction', *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. xxx.
[86] Clarissa W. Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).
[87] Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World* (London: Longman, 2002).
[88] Sarah Beckwith, 'A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe', in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 34-57.
[89] Gail McMurray Gibson, *Theatre of Devotion*, pp. 47-65; Katherine J. Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England', in *A Companion to 'The Book of Margery Kempe'*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer: 2004), pp. 195-215; and Diane Watt, 'Margery Kempe', in *Medieval Women's Writing: Works by and for Women, 1100-1500* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), pp. 116-35.
[90] Wendy Harding, 'Medieval Women's Unwritten Discourse on Motherhood: A Reading of Two Fifteenth Century Texts', *Women's Studies*, 21, (1992), 197-209 (p. 206).
[91] Ellen Ross, '"She Wept and Cried Right Loud for Sorrow and for Pain": Suffering, the Spiritual Journey, and Women's Experience in Late Medieval Mysticism', in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp. 45–59.

establishes the cultural-religious context of pain-identification and martyrdom clearly, she overlooks the very *fact* of Kempe's painful experience and its value as a source of self-knowledge.

The question of authorship has understandably dominated the field of Kempe Studies. In 1975, John Hirsh argued for the scribe of the *Boke* as its author.[92] Conversely, Lynn Staley has drawn a distinction between Kempe the author and Margery, her fictional creation, with the scribe functioning as a literary trope. Staley's book length study made important claims, including that the work is a piece of fiction that must be read in the light of its historical context.[93] Ruth Evans argues that the *Boke* is a collaborative work, hinged on the construction of 'this creature' as a vital aspect of its functioning.[94] Felicity Riddy takes a similar stance in describing the *Boke* as 'polyvocal', sidelining the notion of authorship in favour of 'discourse'.[95] Discourse surrounding the *Boke's* authorship continues, with recent contributions from Nicholas Watson and Sebastian Sobecki helping to situate the text in terms of its historicity, with Sobecki's discovery of new evidence making it more probable that Margery Kempe's son was the first scribe, and Robert Spryngolde the revising, clerical scribe.[96]

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[92] John C. Hirsh, 'Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Medium Aevum*, 44 (1975), 145-50.
[93] Lynn Staley Johnson, 'The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 820-38, and Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
[94] Ruth Evans, 'The Book of Margery Kempe', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c.1350-c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 507-21.
[95] 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), pp. 435-53.
[96] Nicholas Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Voices in Dialogue*, pp. 395-434. Sebastian Sobecki, '"The writyng of this tretys:" Margery Kempe's Son and the Authorship of Her Book', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 37 (2015), 257-83. See also Roger Ellis, 'Margery Kempe's Scribe and the Miraculous Books', in *Langland, the Mystics, and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S.S. Hussey*, ed. Helen Phillips (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1990), pp. 161-75.

A distinct interest developed during these decades in the influence of continental female religious women on Margery Kempe's form of piety. The 1992 collection of essays on Margery Kempe contains an important section on this field of study. Alexandra Barratt considers the influence of Elizabeth of Hungary, while Nanda Hopenwasser and Julia Bolton Holloway explore Kempe's devotion to Bridget of Sweden. Several other works have addressed the influence of other holy women on Kempe.[97] In her very useful essays, Susan Dickman also places Kempe in her European context.[98] More recently, Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa has made a fascinating connection between the mysticism of Marie d'Oignies and Margery Kempe in relation to medicine in the Middle Ages, briefly bringing Kempe into dialogue with her European as well as medical contexts: a topic which would benefit from further study, indeed.[99] Vincent Gillespie notes how 'Margery Kempe…translates and internalizes many

[97] Alexandra Barratt, 'Margery Kempe and the King's Daughter of Hungary', in Sandra J. McEntire, ed., *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, (New York: Garland, 1992), pp. 189-202. Nanda Hopenwasser, 'Margery Kempe, St. Bridget, and Marguerite d'Oingt: The Visionary Writer as Shaman', in McEntire, ed., *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, pp. 165-88. Julia Bolton Holloway, 'Bride, Margery, Julian, and Alice: Bridget of Sweden's Textual Community in Medieval England', in McEntire, ed., *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, p. 203-222. See also Gunnel Cleve, 'Margery Kempe: A Scandinavian Influence on Medieval England', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1992*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), pp. 163-75; Janet Dillon, 'Holy Women and their Confessors or Confessors and their Holy Women?: Margery Kempe and Continental Tradition', in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalyn Voaden (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 115-40; Nanda Hopenwasser and Signe Wegener, 'Vox Matris: The Influence of St. Birgitta's 'Revelations' on *The Book of Margery Kempe*: St. Birgitta and Margery Kempe as Wives and Mothers', in *Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, ed. Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 61-85; Ute Stargardt, 'The Beguines of Belgium, the Dominican Nuns of Germany, and Margery Kempe', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 277-313.

[98] Susan Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the English Devotional Tradition', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at the Exeter Symposium, July 1980*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1980), pp. 156-72; and 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of the Pious Woman', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1984*, ed. Marion Glassoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1984), pp. 150-168.

[99] Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Mysticism and Medicine: Holy Communion in the *Vita of Marie d'Oignies* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, in 'Special Issue: Convergence / Divergence: The Politics of Late Medieval English Devotional and Medical Discourses', ed. Denis Renevey and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, *Poetica*, 72 (2009), 109-22.

of the tropes of these continental visionaries into her own spiritual praxis, the texts [like those in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114] dramatize spiritual ambition, love of the Church and its sacraments, eagerness for a properly functioning clerical cadre, and desire for discernment, approval and approbation'.[100]

As a 'worldly' woman seeking a life of holiness and affective piety, Margery Kempe's *Boke* has attracted myriad scholarship on questions of gender, sexuality and the female body. The 1980s and 90s in particular provided a period of rich feminist research on female mystical bodies, inspired by medieval discourse which emphasised the Aristotelian and theological identification of the female with the body, and the male with the spirit. Caroline Walker Bynum's important work on medieval female sexuality has included contributions to scholarship on Margery Kempe.[101] In her pioneering, feminist, book length study of Margery Kempe, Karma Lochrie took a new approach to readings like Bynum's, arguing that women are identified not with the body but with the flesh, 'which stood for all the heaving powers allied against the spirit'.[102] Lochrie argued that the flesh is not synonymous with the body, that 'bodily access to the sacred, however, threatens this ideology of the woman's body by privileging excess, unbridled passion, and ... gives free reign to woman's position as flesh with all the potential for disruption contained therein'.[103] Other feminist readings of the *Boke* include Carolyn Dinshaw's assessment of

[100] Vincent Gillespie, '1412-1534: culture and history', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 163-94 (p. 183).
[101] See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Urzone, 1989).
[102] Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 3.
[103] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p. 4.

Kempe's elastic temporality, and Sheila Delany's study of Kempe and Chaucer's Wife of Bath as victims of a patriarchal capitalist world.[104] Queer readings of the text have included Kathy Lavezzo's study, which argues for the existence of homoeroticism in the shared mourning practices of Margery Kempe and the other women in her text, 'refigur[ing] mourning as an erotic and potentially empowering form of female same-sex bonding in late medieval Europe'.[105] Lavezzo contends that 'medieval Christian perception of gender is not an essential and fixed *category* but an ever changing and contingent *role*', emphasising the fluidity and elasticity of gendered roles: a persuasive viewpoint given the similar elasticity of gender in the context of medicine and the life cycle, as this study will explore.[106] Carolyn Dinshaw has also written a compelling queering of Margery Kempe, viewing her white clothes as a form of 'transvestism'; a 'disjunctiveness between her body and her desire'.[107] The white clothes are also considered by Sarah Salih to be symbolic of Kempe's complex status. Salih also argues elsewhere that Kempe adapts traditional models of piety, preferring the 'softer' end of asceticism and opting for slander over pain or sickness.[108] Liz Herbert McAvoy's important book on Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich is a comprehensive study of Kempe's body and

[104] Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Margery Kempe', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 222-39. Sheila Delany, 'Sexual Economics, Chaucer's Wife of Bath, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature*, ed. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 72-87. See also Jaqueline Jenkins, 'Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis, ed., *A Companion to 'The Book of Margery Kempe'*, pp. 113-28, who argues that Kempe deliberately developed a 'trope of illiteracy'.

[105] Kathy Lavezzo, 'Sobs and Sighs Between Women: The Homoerotics of Compassion in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 175-98 (p. 176).

[106] Ibid., p. 179.

[107] Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Margery Kempe Answers Back', in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 143-82 (p. 148).

[108] Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001). Also Sarah Salih, 'Margery's Bodies: Piety, Work and Penance', in *A Companion to 'The Book of Margery Kempe'*, ed. Arnold and Lewis), pp. 168-170.

quest for authority.[109] She sees Kempe as re-defining wife and mother roles, and, unlike Lawes and Fries, does not see her early suffering after childbirth as simply a postpartum pathology, but rather, as the failure of the priest to hear her confession, leading Margery to 'sink into a madness' that is a 'monstrous re-enactment' of hysteria and self-harm, and 'the language of the suffering and repressed female body'.[110] For McAvoy, Kempe's self-punishment is 'an early attempt to uncover a hermeneutic in order to transcend the suffering and find a meaning within the pain'.[111]

Recent scholarship has leaned towards a cultural-historicist approach, building on the meticulous work by Marea Mitchell in tracing Margery Kempe scholarship since 1934.[112] For example, David Wallace's study of the reception of Kempe's discovered manuscript in the 1930s, Anthony Bale's historical commentary in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and Sebastian Sobecki's discovery of supporting textual artefacts, as we saw above.[113] Julie Chappell's detailed study of the manuscript's rediscovery and movement has also helped to emphasise the *Boke* as a work of immense, historical import.[114] Rebecca Krug, however, has returned debate to that of genre and Kempe's mystical impact, questioning the usefulness of the issue of the ***Boke's*** autobiographical

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[109] Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004).
[110] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 36.
[111] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 38. See also McAvoy '"Closyd in an hows of ston": Discourses of Anchoritism and *The Book of Margery Kempe*' in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 182-94.
[112] Marea Mitchell, *The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).
[113] David Wallace, 'Margery Kempe', in *Strong Women: Life, Text, and Territory, 1347-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 61-132. Anthony Bale, 'The woman in white: why Margery Kempe divides modern readers as much as she did her medieval audience', *The Times Literary Supplement*, December 19 and 26, 2014, pp. 16-17. Sebastian Sobecki, 'The writyng of this tretys'.
[114] Julie Chappell, *Perilous Passages: The Book of Margery Kempe, 1534-1934* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

status, and reigniting dialogue about Kempe's sancity.[115] Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa had persuasively argued that the *Boke* is structured consciously around the liturgical calendar.[116] Laura Varnam has since interrogated the relationship between Margery Kempe, the church and its material objects, making valuable inroads for our thinking about the text in relation to material culture and devotion.[117] In continuation of McAvoy's work on Kempe's motherhood and wifehood, Tara Williams has contributed to an understanding of the ways in which Kempe manipulates and traverses conventional social roles.[118] Diane Watt has recently emphasised Kempe's place in the literary canon, also exploring her fractured relationships with other women.[119]

However, though the emphasis of 1990s scholarship on the female medieval body laid important foundations for our understanding of female mystical experience as conceived in the flesh, very little work has been conducted on Margery Kempe's body-in-pain, its relationship to visionary experience, or the role that medieval medicine can play in enabling a more authentic reading of the phenomenology of her *experientia.* While she has been

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[115] Rebecca Krug, 'Margery Kempe', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature, 1100-1500*, ed. Larry Scanlon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 217-28. In contrast is Janel M. Mueller, 'Autobiography of a New Creature: Female Spirituality, Selfhood, and Authorship in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', In *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 155-171. Also, Rebecca Krug, 'The Idea of Sanctity and the Uncanonised life of Margery Kempe', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture*, ed. Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 129-46.

[116] Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literature, Liturgy, and Iconography* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

[117] Laura Varnam, 'The Crucifix, The Pieta, and the Female Mystic: Devotional Objects and Performative Identity in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 41 (2015), 208-237.

[118] Tara Williams, 'Chapter 4: Vernacularity, Femininity, and Authority: Reinventing Motherhood in *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Inventing Womanhood: Gender and Language in Later Middle English Writing* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011), pp. 114-148. Also Tara Williams, 'Manipulating Mary: Maternal, Sexual, and Textual Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Modern Philology*, 107, (2010), 528-555.

[119] Diane Watt, 'Margery Kempe', in *The History of British Writing, 700-1500*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 232-40.

subject to multifarious and modern diagnoses during the past eighty years, an exegesis of the ways in which *medieval* medical texts can offer explanations for the ways in which Kempe was observed and interpreted by her community has not been fully conducted. This thesis will fill that space by exploring Margery Kempe's pain, the self-knowledge and mystical knowledge that it issues, and its function as a conduit for an amalgam-in-pain with Christ as a vital new area of research in Kempe Studies.

The Experience and Knowledge of Pain

By my calculation, there are eighty-one mentions of pain in *The Book of Margery Kempe.* This includes the derivations *peyne*, *payn*, *peyned*, and so forth, but does not include other related terms of suffering like *angwisch*, *disease*, or *labowr*, of which there are frequent occurences. Pain, then, is unambiguously situated as important and ubiquitous in the book in its proportion as well as its structural signification, as we have seen with the recipe's inclusion. It is no coincidence that one of the most agonising episodes of the *Boke* occurs when Kempe is tested by God, who removes his grace and sends visions of 'mennys membrys & swech oþer abhominacyons' such that she is unable to see the sacrament without envisioning such 'cursydnes' (145). So intense is her suffering, writes Kempe's scribe, that 'It can not be wretyn þat peyn þat sche felt & þe sorwe þat sche was inne' (145). Pain is at this moment so outside of familiar experience that it is ineffable, indescribable in the text. For twelve days she must 'duryn' this loss of grace, this 'gret peyne'; a pain which she cannot endure any longer and which she equates with being 'in Helle', analogised with the burning fires and torturous pits which medieval sermons and iconography made vivid as the ultimate evocations of agony and suffering

(145). But what does pain mean? Does an 'essence' of pain exist? Is its meaning fixed, or mutable? Is it culturally-dependent? Did medieval people *feel* pain differently? How is pain political, social, medical, theological, and spiritual? How might a medieval mystic conceive of their pain differently from a person who has no experience of metaphysical phenomena? Can it ever be understood, given its interiority as a marker of individual experience? And what does pain mean in the medieval world, when cultural paradigms are constructed around the Christian aspiration to live and die well, in *imitatio Christi*; to honour the ubiquitous iconography of the Christic body-in-pain?

Kempe couches her spiritual pain in terms of the visceral experience of bodily suffering, a striking conflation not least in the light of the OED definition of pain which prioritises the denotations of 'punishment; penalty' and suffering in 'hell and purgatory' over those of 'physical or bodily suffering, a continuous, unpleasant or agonising sensation in the body', suggesting a cultural construction of meaning for pain that continues to remain hinged on the connotations of sin and suffering.[120] In contrast, the definition of pain by The International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) is 'an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage'. An important footnote follows, however, that 'pain is always subjective' and that 'each individual learns the application of the word through experiences related to injury in early life'.[121] Scientists like Patrick Wall, who formulated the influential Gate Control Theory (which proposes that nerve gates in the spinal cord transmit pain signals depending on the brain signals being sent back down), see the mind and body as integrated

[120] OED s.v. pain: denotations 1a, 2, and 3a respectively.
[121] U. Lindblom et al., 'Pain terms: A Current List with Definitions and Notes on Usage', *Pain*, 24 (1986), Supplement 1, S1-S226 (p. S217).

but nevertheless that there is an essence of pain: a 'pure pain' which is accompanied by emotion and individual meaning.[122] Esther Cohen sees the IASP definition as problematic in relation to what we might term emotional pain or suffering which, in not being 'triggered by a sensory component evades this definition'. However, as Joanna Bourke points out, the definition does actually allow for emotional pain, given that it can be pain that is '*described* in terms of' tissue damage, and thus overcomes the 'myth of two pains'. Indeed, as David Biro notes, scientific investigations are beginning to determine how psychological pain appears to 'run on the same neural tracks as physical pain', and that, regardless of its original source or taxonomy, '[e]verything is contingent on the *feeling* of pain'.[123] Like Cohen's insightful volume of essays about pain that 'suspend[s] the distinction between the physical and the emotional pain or at least register[s] the porousness of the dividing line between them', I will argue that Margery Kempe's understanding of pain – along with her medieval counterparts – also evades such distinctions.[124] Her *felyngys* in the *Boke* are frequently juxtaposed with her *reuelacyons*, emphasising the primacy of her sensory faculties as markers of her experience; Kempe perceives pain as she *feels* it, as a subjective sensation, as it harbours inside her.[125] As Chapter One will exemplify, ancient and medieval thought did not separate body and soul, as Descartes would come to do in the seventeenth century, and the

[122] Patrick Wall, *The Science of Suffering* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1999), p. 31. For more recent work on gate theory, see Ronald Melzack and Patrick Wall, *The Challenge of Pain*, 2nd updated ed. (London: Penguin, 1996). David Morris breaches the disciplines of the science and culture of pain, concerned with the way in which modern culture has a proliferation of pain, without clear meaning. See *The Culture of Pain* (Berkley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1991), esp. Chapter Two, 'The Meanings of Pain', pp. 31-56.
[123] David Biro, 'Is there Such a Thing as Psychological Pain? And why It Matters', *Culture, Medicine and Society*, 34 (2010), 658-667 (p. 663).
[124] Esther Cohen and Leona Toker, 'Introduction', in *Knowledge and Pain*, ed. Esther Cohen, Leona Toker, Manuela Consonni and Otniel E. Dror (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012), pp. vii-xviii (p. viii).
[125] See, for example, *BMK*, p. 3.

dualistic healing praxis of religion and medicine in the Middle Ages was constructed around the understanding that 'sensation was viewed as a faculty of the soul'. That Christ's wounds were relived through the intense mental exercises of visionaries like Kempe and Julian of Norwich meant that 'medieval pain was...understood as a physical phenomenon configured by psychological processes'.[126]

Elaine Scarry's theory of pain remains one of the most influential in modern scholarship, considering pain as exceptional in human interior states as it lacks an object to provide an outward referent. Scarry notes how 'physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language'.[127] Instead, it is the visibility of painful expression that she considers central to its reception by others: 'It is not simply accurate but tautological to observe that given any two phenomena, the one that is more visible will receive more attention'.[128] This is because, she writes, '[p]hysical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human makes before language is learned'.[129] In fact, recent pain scholarship has challenged Scarry's assumptions about the 'essential' nature of pain, warning, for example, that she 'has fallen into the trap of treating metaphoric ways of conceiving of suffering...as descriptions of an actual entity'. Joanna Bourke continues, 'for Scarry, these metaphors are literalized. 'Pain', rather than a person-in-pain, is

[126] Na'ama Cohen-Hanegbi, 'Pain as Emotion: The Role of Emotional Pain in Fifteenth-Century Italian Medicine and Confession', in *Knowledge and Pain*, pp. 63-82 (pp. 64-5).
[127] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 5.
[128] Scarry, p. 12.
[129] Scarry, p. 4.

given agency'.[130] Bourke's anti-essentialist solution involves thinking about pain as 'a type of event', or 'one of those recurring occurrences that we regularly experience and witness that participates in the constitution of our sense of self and other. An event is designated 'pain' if it is identified as such by the person claiming that kind of consciousness'.[131] This approach is a useful one in the way in which it regards pain as self-authenticating. Like *McCaffery's Principle*, used in modern nursing, which holds that 'pain is whatever the experiencing person says it is, existing wherever he says it does', to define pain as a conscious experience – an event – seems apt given its interiorisation: the person-in-pain is authorised to define his or her own experience.[132]

Like Bourke, Javier Moscoso has recently underlined some of Scarry's suppositions, arguing that she 'assumed the indubitable nature of painful experience for any person who suffers it... [and] she symmetrically defended the difficulty of producing knowledge about the pain of others'. In other words, 'In the first case, pain appeared as the greatest conviction, while in the second, it reflected the greatest of uncertainties'.[133] In writing a cultural history of pain, Moscoso is alert to the danger of assuming a 'unique experience'; he writes, 'Mustn't we recognise the existence of as many experiences as cultures, or, as a last resort, subjects?'[134] For Moscoso, 'pain is a drama...in a sequential form; it displays a dynamic structure that includes a moment of rupture that demands reparation'. Such a notion of rupture is indeed a useful one when considering

[130] Joanna Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 4-5. See also Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 'Elaine Scarry and the Dream of Pain', *Salmagundi*, 130/131 (2001), 202-234.
[131] Bourke, *The Story of Pain*, p. 5.
[132] Margo McCaffery, *Nursing Practice: Theories Related to Cognition, Bodily Pain, and Man-Environment Interactions* (Los Angeles: UCLA Student Store, 1968), quoted from S. Benjamin Fink, 'Knowing Pain', in *Pain and Knowledge*, pp. 1-22 (p.2).
[133] Javier Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History*, trans. Sarah Thomas and Paul House (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 4.
[134] Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History*, p. 5.

the pain-experience of Margery Kempe since the *Boke* is filled with exclamations of bursting and the uncontainable pressure of suffering and sorrow, as we will see. For those in pain, Moscoso writes, 'the probability that their experience will be culturally meaningful increases depending on whether it can be imitated or represented... If the sensations do not correspond to any visible or known cause, some problems will arise'.[135] Of course, this theory is more complex when we consider the multiple representations that occur in medieval practices of *imitatio*: while Kempe meditates on the Christic body-in-pain in order to achieve a spiritual nexus, and imitates on another level those holy women whose affective devotion she admires, her own painful performances illustrate the problems to which Moscoso points. In the *Boke*, only those priests who know the lives of other affective devotees such as Marie d'Oignies can understand the discourse at work in Kempe's 'drama' of suffering, and thus attach to it legitimate 'cultural meaning'.

Conversely, cultural meaning is seen to be embodied *in* individuals by Robert C. Fuller, who regards 'the health of the body [as] a reliable index of the health of our culture (and vice versa). Our bodies register cultural dysfunction'.[136] Bringing together the discourses of religion and modern biological theory, Fuller suggests emotion to be a crucial influence in pain perception: 'Differences in our emotional sensibilities make pain a highly idiosyncratic phenomenon, revealing how fully pain links nerve signals with personal biography'.[137] When in chronic pain, we utilise 'culturally-acquired

[135] Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History*, p. 8.
[136] In arriving at this conclusion, Fuller states, 'The brain is not a passive organ. It actively shapes sensory data into forms that are likely to satisfy our personal needs and interests. Many of these needs and interests are purely biological in nature. Yet we are also cultural beings. Many of our needs and interests therefore arise from the fact that our lives unfold through social and historical networks'. From Robert C. Fuller, *Spirituality in the Flesh: Bodily Sources of Religious Experience* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 131.
[137] Fuller, *Spirituality in the Flesh*, p. 132.

belief systems concerning superheroes or deities who are somehow immune to debilitating sensations', and employ rituals which 'can significantly alter pain signals'.[138] Ritual actions, according to Fuller, 'are capable of producing neurotransmitters that can affect pain signals'.[139] This theory is somewhat problematic when we consider the paradox of the curative power of religious faith alongside the notion of religion as *instigative* of pain, since the most central image of Christian iconography depicts the body of Christ-in-pain in temporal diachronicity; his wounds pouring fresh blood in perpetuity. For medieval mystics such as Margery Kempe, then, pain is simultaneously caused by an intense meditation on the suffering Christ, and alleviated by his redemptive power; a hermeneutic where pain resides as a foundational unit of devotional participation. As Ariel Glucklich attests, despite the 'insurmountable privacy of the body in pain', in fact 'the phenomenon of shared pain is extremely pervasive', for otherwise the suffering of the crucified Christ, or the martyrdom of saints, would not mean anything to anyone.[140] The two 'types' of pain that Glucklich identifies – 'disintegrative' (disruptive, devastating, punitive) and 'integrative' (strengthening, situating, affirming) – are useful for application in this study as much of Margery Kempe's *Boke* is devoted to the unmaking and remaking of her corporeal self as she bursts, collapses, erupts, and becomes whole again. Time and again, however, Kempe's pain will prove to be integrative, as the temporal evolution of her pains through the life cycle will offer

[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 30 and p. 63. For rich studies on the pain of punishment and martyrdom, see Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), and Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).

revised and renewed mechanisms for surrogacy, fecundity and painful productivity.

Pain, for Marla Carlson, is 'unique among sensations, not because it is inexpressible or radically unshareable, but because it creates an urgent need to communicate things to which no one is eager to listen'.[141] For the modern world, Carlson argues in her study of performative pain, 'bodily suffering evokes outrage'; it 'serv[es] as a call to action for the spectator'. But in the medieval world, 'suffering creates order. The onstage suffering of Christians is itself orderly, the result of formulaic ordeals and tortures, all of which mimic Christ's Passion'.[142] And it is the pain of the Passion that remains as the centrefuge of *truth* in Christocentric culture; an individual pain-truth that C.S. Lewis sees as 'God's megaphone' as it 'removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul'.[143]

For medieval scholastics, however, the set definitions of pain that had been inherited from Galen's *De interioribus*, and later in Avicenna's *Canon*, meant that patients' pain was categorised according to 'causal and locative principles and not to the painful feeling as described by the patient'.[144] Avicenna extended Galen's classification of four types of pain within *The Canon* and categorised fifteen types of pain with their causes. These were: itching, coarse, pricking, compressing, stretching, disintegrating, breaking, soft, penetrating, stabbing, Massli (a substance trapped inside an organ); numbing, pulsating,

[141] Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 2.
[142] Ibid. p. 6.
[143] C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Harper Collins, 1940, 2002 reprint), p. 93-4.
[144] Fernando Salmón, 'From Patient to Text? Narratives of Pain and Madness in Medical Scholasticism', in *Between Text and Patient: The Medical Enterprise in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Florence Eliza Glaze and Brian K. Nance (Firenze: Sismel, 2011), pp. 373-95 (p. 381).

heavy, tiredness, and bitter.[145] Because physicians focused on the somatic aspects of painful experience, the use of a standardised vocabulary for naming pain 'inevitably cancelled the particular subjective experience of the individual'.[146] The *truth* of a patient's pain, then, was clouded by the terms with which medical masters and physicians insisted upon imposing upon the sufferers' own descriptions.

In medieval culture, pain developed from an individual feeling to a social, religious and cultural phenomenon; 'suffering was not to be dismissed, vanquished, or transcended: suffering was to be felt with an ever-deepening intensity'.[147] Pain was not simply an emotional preoccupation but a 'teleological, all-embracing civilizing process', by which, as Esther Cohen notes, 'one could perfect one's self'.[148] It was identified with 'us' and not with 'the other'. There were, however, some popular treatments for surgical pain relief in the Middle Ages, including opium, henbane, hemlock and wine.[149] Since Galen had attached hierarchical meaning to the organs of the body in terms of their noble or non-noble nature (the brain, heart, and eyes were considered noble, for instance), with the noble organs being more sensitive to pain, and since Christ was superior and noble in nature, his pain was most acute. As Christ's humanity and medically-perfect complexion came to be emphasised from the eleventh

[145] Osama A. Tashani and Mark I. Johnson, 'Avicenna's Concept of Pain', *Libyan Journal of Medicine*, 5: 5253 (2010), 1-4.
[146] Salmón, 'From Patient to Text', p. 387.
[147] Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 3-4. On the self-inflicted suffering of fourteenth-century nuns to save souls in Purgatory, see Jo Ann McNamara, 'The Need to Give: Suffering and Female Sanctity in the Middle Ages', in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Snell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 199-221.
[148] Ibid, p. 4.
[149] Linda Ehrsam Voigts and Robert P. Hudson, '"A drynke þat men callen dwale to make a man to slepe whyle men kerven hem": A Surgical Anesthetic from Late Medieval England', in *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. Sheila Campbell, Bert Hall, and David Klausner (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 34-56.

century, so he came to stand for the 'greatest possible sensitivity to pain', which was to create imitation in Christian followers: in medieval culture, to be in pain is to be Christ-like.[150]

As Cohen attests, 'pain is good because it is bad'; 'its value is its utility'.[151] It is the utility of pain – as a productive force – which will form the foundation of this study on Margery Kempe; particularly in terms of the knowledge that it provides as she journeys towards an elevated state of epistemology.

'[Do] we know pain?', questions S. Benjamin Fink. This is clearly a difficult question, when it is the very privacy of pain which makes it elude universal knowledge. For Roselyn Rey, however, pain is the 'one experience where the human condition's universality and the species' biological unity is manifest', although she does note its subjective and cultural context.[152] Fink argues that to *know* pain resides in an understanding of pain as non-homogenous, as a plethora of concepts.[153] For Margery Kempe, pain is also multiple in the many ways in which it manifests over her lifetime, but it is simultaneously singularly constructed around knowing *God*, knowing the cost of her painful experience: and what is at stake through that suffering. That the borders of bodily and emotional pain are blurred in the Middle Ages (if not also, increasingly, today) goes some way to explain Kempe's agonised, somatic performances of pain even when that pain is non-physical in origin: she feels, she responds. In what is seen as 'an emerging humanities subdiscipline of pain studies', there is still much work to do around our understanding of the history of

[150] See Esther Cohen, '"If You Prick Us, Do We Not Bleed?": Reflections on the Diminishing of the Other's Pain', in *Knowledge and Pain*, pp. 25-41 (pp. 26-7).
[151] Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*, p. 4 and 8.
[152] Roselyn Rey, *The History of Pain*, trans. Louise Elliott Wallace, J.A. Cadden, and S.W. Cadden (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 5.
[153] S. Benjamin Fink, 'Knowing Pain', in *Knowledge and Pain*, pp. 1-22 (p. 10-12).

pain and its role in forging what pain means in relation to being human.[154] Julian of Norwich tells us that 'the night is cause of oure paine'; the night being the bleak opposition to the light of faith which 'kindly com[es] of oure endless day that is oure fader, God'.[155] But for Julian, pain is purgative and productive: 'This dred doth good, for it helpeth to purge man, as doth bodely sicknesse or such other paine that is not sinne. For all such paines helpe man, if they be patiently taken'.[156] The purgative or cleansing function of pain for Julian is a pseudo-medical activity, pain acts as a detoxifier, eliminating evils from the human body. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas (b. 1225) writes of penitential pain as a 'kind of medicine' which will 'cure' and 'heal' the wrongdoer.[157] In this study, I explore the way in which Margery Kempe's pain conceptualisations follow a similar hermeneutic. Though Scarry argues for pain's destruction of language, I think that Kempe develops her own inimitable language of pain through a very corporeal expression.

The complexity of the removal and distancing of Kempe's private pain experience due to the scribal genesis of the text must not be overlooked. The naming of pain is problematic enough without the further distancing of pain events by scribal activity. This is a problem, of course, for a reading of all of Kempe's experience, not just her pain. My solution is to view the scribe as one of Kempe's early pain-interpreters, like the priests and congregations who

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[154] Martha Stoddard Holmes and Tod Chambers, 'Thinking Through Pain', Special Issue*:* 'Narrative, Pain, and Suffering', *Literature and Medicine*, 24, (Spring 2005), 127-141 p. 133.
[155] Julian of Norwich, Ch. 83, 'A Revelation of Love' in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 377.
[156] Julian of Norwich, 'A Revelation of Love', Ch. 74, in Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, p. 355.
[157] Aquinas, *The Summa Theological*, n. 106, at 2a2ae, from Trisha Olson, 'The Medieval Blood Sanction and the Divine Beneficance of Pain: 1100-1450', *Journal of Law and Religion*, 22 (2006/7), 63-129 (p. 96-7).

watch her writhings and sobbings with discomfort or awe, or the physician who takes notes from a patient's description of her pain. Though that pain can never be replicated in writing, its meaning, as we have seen, is hinged as much on its cultural interpretation as its spontaneous sensation. If the person-in-pain is an 'event', to coin Bourke's term, in *The Book of Margery Kempe* that pain-event has an extended temporal existence, from the moment of Christ's crucifixion, through its medieval representation and devotional inculcation, to individual experiences of pain and towards a final interpretation of that individual pain. This thesis will therefore explore the event(s) of pain through the *Boke*, seeing Kempe's wrangling with pain as one long life-event, toward a nexus with God as physician. Pain has a spiritual currency in the Middle Ages. I thus consider the phenomenology of Margery Kempe's pain by considering its social, political, religious, physiological, motivational, mystical and esoteric components in seeking an understanding of her experience. In announcing her pain in thunderous and gesticulatory ways, Margery Kempe declares her validation as an affective devotee, and as a partaker in the painful *imitatio* of the medieval Christian, operating synchronically with those saints and martyrs in the aftermath of whose legacies she seeks to flourish.

Methodological Concerns

The methodology of this study, centred on the trajectory of the human life cycle, is ratified by the unusual 'wholeness', or integrity, of Margery Kempe's momentous ages and stages. Born in c.1373, she is married and pregnant at *twenty*, takes a vow of chastity in 1413, aged *forty*, and makes her final, holy journey in 1433, aged *sixty*. There is a latent symbolism within her life stages that is suggestive of her distinct rarefaction, the *Boke* as an exalted 'life'.

Indeed, that Kempe is born in 1373 – the year of Bridget of Sweden's death – suggests an uncanny continuity and synchronicity between the two holy women's lives. Bridget is Margery Kempe's lifelong model, and that Kempe's life takes direct continuation from Bridget's is indicative of a further symbolic, even mystical, signification.[158] Furthermore, as Chapter Three will reveal, I have calculated that the ten years of boisterous crying that Kempe is sent by God ceases at the precise age of menopause. The ramifications of this dichotomous loss of fecundity are explored below, but it is clear that Margery Kempe is aligned with life cycle milestones in an unlikely way. However she also violates some typical medieval life cycle taxonomies, as Kim Phillips has shown: 'established notions of the stages of a woman's life...do not fit Margery well'.[159] Women's life cycles were normally characterised less by the ages of man, but by their familial, marital or sexual conditions, encapsulating the virtues or functions of womanhood: virgin / continent (or widow) / married (wife), or daughter / wife / widow, or maid / wife / widow.[160] Given Kempe's problematic status as chaste wife and 'dowtyr' of Christ for much of her life, she deviates from established norms, transcending usual life cycle expectations and

[158] There is not sufficient scope within this thesis to fully examine the influence of St. Bridget on Margery Kempe's life and experience. Bridget was an important model for Kempe in terms of life experience and pilgrimage. On Bridget's life, see Thomas Gascoigne's 'Lyfe of seynt Birgette', in *The Myroure of our Ladye*, ed. John H. Blunt, EETS e.s. 19 (London: N. Trüber & Co, 1873), pp. xlvii-lix. Also see Bridget Morris, *Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1999). For scholarship on the connection between Bridget and Margery Kempe, see the work of Nanda Hopenwasser and Signe Wegener, Julia Bolton Holloway, Gunnel Cleve and Janet Dillon, cited in note 99 of this Introduction.

[159] Kim Phillips, 'Margery Kempe and the Ages of Woman', in *A Companion to 'The Book of Margery Kempe''*, ed. Arnold and Lewis, pp. 17-34 (p. 33).

[160] Ibid., p. 27. When the ages of 'man' do represent women, it is often in relation to the cycles of nature and the woman's biological function. See *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, ed. M.A. Manzaloui, EETS OS 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 55-8. Spring is 'a faire spouse and a full specious damysell arrayed with broches', Summer is 'a spouse full in the body and age, with hetes swellyng', Autumn is 'a woman of full age lakkyng clothes, [l]evyng yougth and hasting to age', and Winter is 'an olde woman, greued and decreped in age, lakkyng clothes, neygh to deth'.

chronological boundaries; in a sense, she writes her own life cycle.[161] Because of this, the following chapters deviate from traditional life cycle categories, too, representing the physiological and spiritual shape of Kempe's adult life in the broad sense, without attempting to impose artificial divisions. In employing a life cycle format I do not attempt to medicalise the life cycle or to imply *dis*ease in any way. On the contrary, I use the framework of the life cycle as one way of subdividing Kempe's life trajectory, based on the interplay between physiology and spirituality (just as medicine and religion were interlinked in the Middle Ages), despite the way in which she deviates from some criteria.

The ancient connection between the four humours and the Four Ages of Man by medical writers as early as the Pythagoreans is indicative of an early interrelation between physiology and the social life stage. Black bile, associated with a melancholic disposition (and Margery Kempe's dominant humour, as I will argue in Chapter One), is aligned with Autumn – the age of 'manhood' or 'decline', from forty until approximately sixty – the very stage of Margery Kempe's most important spiritual evolution, and the stage with which this study is heavily concerned.[162] Kempe's *critical* life stage and concomitant constitution of black bile, as I will suggest, are thus strikingly in line with medical ideas, adding weight to the overarching thesis of this study that Margery Kempe is physiologically predisposed to mystical vision and to weeping (suggesting major repercussions for our understanding of mystics at this age and stage). While the

[161] The specific application of life cycle to Margery Kempe's experience will be exemplified throughout each chapter. Useful studies are, Cordelia Beattie, 'The Life Cycle: the Ages of Medieval Women', in *A Cultural History of Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Kim Phillips (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 15-38; Deborah Youngs, 'Adulthood in Medieval Europe: The Prime of Life or Midlife Crisis?', in *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change*, ed. Isabelle Cochelin and Karen Smyth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 239-264; Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe, c.1300-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[162] See Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 10.

chapters will seek to construct an overarching chronology in terms of Kempe's life cycle, the complexity of the book's narrative, plus the diffusive nature of my thematic structure, mean that there is some necessary overlap between age, stage and topic.[163] Certain pivotal moments inevitably leak into others, just as Kempe's tears symbolise the porous movement and fluidity of her geographical travel, and the oscillation between her earthly and heavenly perspicacity. In summary, I am interested in the cultural and medical assumptions assigned to the various stages of life, and in using these ideologies to exact a new reading of Kempe's pain.

A discussion of methodological approach must include the question of nomenclature. My usual application will be for Margery Kempe or Kempe, not because I align my reading of the text with scholars such as Lynn Staley, who argue for the separation of 'Margery' the character with 'Kempe', her author, but because I wish to de-mythologise Kempe from a growing sense of storytelling familiarity, and reposition her voice as authentic and historically-grounded.[164] This approach is also solidified by Sebastian Sobecki's recent discovery of documents which corroborate the historical genesis of the *Boke*.[165] In this sense, I follow Nicholas Watson's lead in suggesting Kempe as 'primarily responsible for the book's structure, arguments, and most of its language'.[166] Indeed, it is something of an irony that scholarship has debated the extent of

[163] Kempe's scribe states at the beginning of the *Boke* that 'Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thyng aftyr oþer as it wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn þat sche had for-getyn þe tyme & þe ordyr whan thyngys befellyn' (5).
[164] Lynn Staley Johnson, 'The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 820-838, and *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, especially Chapter One, 'Authorship and Authority', pp. 1-38. In 1975, John Hirsh argued that in fact the second scribe is the 'author' of the Book. See John C. Hirsch, 'Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe'*, *Medium Aevum*, 44 (1975), 145-50.
[165] See Sebastian Sobecki, 'The writyng of this tretys'. For a useful discussion of the text's value as a social text, see Kathleen Ashley, 'Historicizing Margery: *The Book of Margery Kempe as Social Text*, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 28 (1998), 371-88.
[166] Nicholas Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Voices in Dialogue*, pp. 395-434 (p. 397).

Kempe's authentic voice; its partial or total construction, and often continued to enact discourse based on first name terms. In applying the name 'Kempe' I maintain sufficient distance and acknowledge the complexity of scribal influence on the *Boke* – as Ruth Evans has argued, '[w]riting is presented as a collaborative exercise' – whilst at the same time reinscribing Kempe's authority as narrator of her own life: the first scribe (almost certainly her son from Danzig) writes down 'as mech as sche wold *tellyn hym*' (my emphasis; 4).[167] In this way, I subscribe to claims of the text's autobiographical form insofar as the *experientia* of the Book is Kempe's alone.[168] Though the third person designation of 'þis creatur' is a necessary stylistic function given that the text *is* written on behalf of another, and that the aim of the *Boke* is almost certainly to sanctify Kempe's life, as several scholars have argued, there remains the point that Kempe has been ordained by God to tell her story.[169] She discloses that '...whan it plesyd ower Lord, he comawnded hyr & chargyd hir þat sche xuld don wryten hyr felyngys & reuelacyons & þe forme of her leuyng þat hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle þe world' (3-4). *The Boke* is therefore of twofold purport: a record of Kempe's 'leuyng', her feelings, her revelations, and the way in which she conforms to contemporary ideals of Christian spirituality; and a testimonial to God's grace. Recent scholarship which emphasises the material culture of the book and its historiography (Wallace, Bale, Sobecki), whilst not prioritising Kempe's voice, nevertheless has made inroads in situating her as an legitimised historical figure as opposed to a disembodied voice which is difficult

[167] Ruth Evans, 'The *Book of Margery Kempe'*.
[168] On the Book's autobiographical status see Janel M. Mueller, 'Autobiography of a New "Creatur"' and Rebecca Krug, 'Margery Kempe'.
[169] On the Book's hagiographical pursuits, see for example, Katherine J. Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England', Diane Watt, 'Margery Kempe', in *Medieval Women's Writing*, and Gail McMurray Gibson, 'Saint Margery' in *Theatre of Devotion*. On the way in which Kempe differs from other saints' lives, see Rebecca Krug, 'The idea of sanctity and the uncanonised life of Margery Kempe'.

to place or to categorise, even if that voice is 'dominant'.[170] As Lynn Staley suggests, '[t]he unwillingness to grant [Kempe] the full measure of [her] achievement suggests our inability to confront women writers as fully enfranchised by their art'.[171] To disembody Margery Kempe as a universalised 'creatur' might be efficacious for the agenda of canonisation, but if we are to seek out her authentic voice we must take account of the visceral and bodily expression with which she frames her experience, and through which she accesses the spiritual world. Whilst the *Boke* remains difficult to categorise and is problematic on a number of levels, this thesis will attempt the removal of the layers of mythology surrounding her and pay close attention to the voice that cries out in pain and which resonates nearly 600 years after its first dictation.

In this study of Margery Kempe's book through a medieval medical lens, I do not attempt to pathologise or to 'diagnose' her experience, but rather to offer a revision to the mass of scholarship that presents retrospective diagnoses of her behaviour in reductive, and anachronistic ways.[172] Kempe herself regards her illnesses and her pains as productive and efficacious; as Anthony Bale states, they are 'crises that precede and hasten self-transformation'.[173] In the light of the current surge in research in the medical humanities, interdisciplinary projects such as the Durham University 'Hearing the Voice', and multidisciplinary scholarship which seeks to understand health and disease more fully in its medieval cultural and scientific contexts, the tide is turning towards a richer understanding of illness and pain experience in the Middle

[170] R.N. Swanson, 'Will the Real Margery Kempe Please Stand Up!', in *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), pp. 141-65 (p. 145).
[171] Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*, p. 3.
[172] Examples of modern diagnostic scholarship are noted above. On the dangers of such activity, see Piers D. Mitchell, 'Retrospective diagnosis and the use of historical texts for investigating disease in the past', *International Journal of Paleopathology*, 1 (2011), 81-88. Also see Juliette Vuille, '"Maybe I'm Crazy?" Diagnosis and Contextualisation of Medieval Female Mystics', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, pp. 103-20.
[173] Bale, BMK, 'Introduction', p. xxx.

Ages.[174] Since this thesis is concerned with the interpretation of meaning and medical discourse in the literary text of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, it adopts a medical humanities methodology as opposed to a 'history of medicine' approach, as I aim to investigate the cultural and social contexts of health and illness in a dialogic trajectory with some medical texts from the Middle Ages.

The field of medical humanities has emerged not least because of 'a biomedical reductionism that attends to pain but not suffering and to disease but not illness'.[175] Taking shape in the late 1960s and 1970s, it helps to clarify ethical issues in clinical decisions, inculcates habits of critical self-examination, and distinguishes the educated from the 'merely trained professional'.[176] In considering medicine in its cultural and social contexts, the medical humanities has symbolised a 'paradigm shift away from what might be called medical reductionism to medical holism, where patients are not reduced to diseases and bodies but rather are seen as whole persons in contexts and in relations'.[177] Whilst there have been inroads through the production of multidisciplinary medical humanities volumes, Victoria Bates and Sam Goodman call for the reversal of the delineation that characterises the separate application of disciplines, and argue for a 'merging' of such positions, 'in dialogue with each other'.[178] That science, medicine, religion, astrology and magic in the Middle Ages were often discussed within the same medieval texts and contexts makes

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[174] See for example, Falconer and Renevey, eds. *Medieval and Early Modern Literature, Science and Medicine*; Yoshikawa, ed., *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*; Bishop, *Words, Stones and Herbs;* and Michael Leahy, unpublished PhD thesis, 'To speke of phisik: medical discourse in late medieval English culture' <http://bbktheses.da.ulcc.ac.uk/133/> (2015), Birkbeck, University of London.
[175] Thomas R. Cole, Nathan S. Carlin and Ronald A. Carson, eds., *Medical Humanities: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 1.
[176] Cole et.al., *Medical Humanities*, p. 6.
[177] Ibid., p. 8.
[178] Victoria Bates, Alan Bleakley and Sam Goodman, *Medicine, Health and the Arts: Approaches to the medical humanities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 4.

a medical humanities approach, with a focus on multidisciplinarity, particularly apt for medieval studies. Of the two key strands of enquiry: the way in which the arts and humanities can re-imagine the clinical encounter, and the construction of a patient-identity via the role of narrative in their experience of suffering, I am most concerned here with the latter.[179] I follow Iona McCleery's example in her study of King Duarte of Portugal, and proponents like Rita Charon, and consider Kempe's book as an 'illness narrative' or 'pathography'. I do not, however, wish to imply that there exists any single diagnosis of illness or disorder in Kempe's 'illness narrative', but that her descriptions of painful experience need close scrutiny if we are to draw closer to an understanding of the phenomenology of her pain.[180] In the 1980s, Roy Porter advocated a patient-centric approach 'from below', to radically reassess the understanding the history of medicine and disease, which differed somewhat from the viewpoint of Michel Foucault, whose definition of the patient and the practitioner was regarded by Porter as somewhat anachronistic for pre-industrial times, since medieval people had less access to medical physicians.[181] And indeed, Arthur Kleinman makes the distinction between illness and disease in his insightful study, prioritising the 'innately human experience of symptoms and suffering. Illness refers to how the sick person and the members of the family or wider social network perceive, live with, and respond to symptoms and disability'.[182] Recent criticism of the

[179] See Martyn Evans and Ilora G. Finlay, 'Introduction', in *Medical Humanities*, ed. Evans and Finlay (London: BMJ Publishing, 2001), pp. 1-12, (p. 7).
[180] Iona McCleery, 'Both "illness and temptation of the enemy": melancholy, the medieval patient and the writings of King Duarte of Portugal (r. 1433–38)' in *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies,* Vol. 1, No. 2, June 2009, 163–178. Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also 'Narratives of Illness', in *Medical Humanities: An Introduction*, ed. Cole, Narlin and Carson, pp. 125-137.
[181] Roy Porter, 'The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from Below', *Theory and Society*, 14 (1985): 175–98. Michel Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*: *An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge), 2003. Cited from McCleery, p. 169.
[182] Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 3.

approaches of narrative medicine have, however, complicated the debate.[183] In merging literary analysis and clinical practice, as Brody has more recently analysed and revised, instead, the 'patient', or sufferer's experience, is prioritised, and more importantly, heard. This endeavour will be the central aim of this study.[184]

Why the Body?

In 1995, Caroline Walker Bynum wrote a piece entitled 'Why All the Fuss about the Body?'.[185] Monica Green reignited the debate in 2010, arguing that '[t]he body serves as both a lens and filter through which pass all the stimulants and stresses of the surrounding world, absorbing the shocks, relishing the pleasures, and nursing the blows. There is no life, no culture, no history without bodies'.[186] She also notes how the medieval body was probably more scarred that we imagine, through accidents, cupping, scarifying, cautery, phlebotomy, and surgery. As a result, she suggests that the medieval body probably felt more pain that most of us – by surgery, accident, illness, judicial torture, self-imposed fleshy chastisement. The field of paleopathology – the assessment of disease and physical trauma in skeletal remains – shows the regularity of physical suffering.[187] Though scholars like Bynum have in the past been

[183] See, for example, Angela Woods, 'Rethinking "Patient Testimony" in the Medical Humanities: The Case of Schizophrenia Bulletin's First Person Accounts', *Journal of Literature and Science*, 6 (2013), 38-54. Also Paul Atkinson, 'The Contested Terrain of Narrative Analysis – an Appreciative Response', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 32 (2010), 661–7, and Seamus O'Mahony, 'Against Narrative Medicine', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 56 (2013), 611-19.
[184] Howard Brody, *Stories of Sickness*, 2nd revised edition [1st edition 1987], (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[185] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Enquiry*, 22 (1995), 1-33. On charges of Bynum's essentialist approach, see Kathleen Biddick, 'Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 389-418.
[186] Monica Green, 'Introduction', in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Medieval Age*, ed. Linda Kalof (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp. 1-16 (p. 3).
[187] Ibid., p. 3.

criticised for reinforcing gender binaries and ideas about the body in an essentialist and reductive manner, Diana Fuss, for example, alerts us to the dangers of avoiding essentialism to the detriment of feminist criticism. Rather than positing an oppositional viewpoint to constructionists like Judith Butler, Fuss argues that 'it is difficult to see how constructionism can *be* constructionism without a fundamental dependency upon essentialism'.[188] It is not a strategy of this study to debate the constructionist versus essentialist approach to the female body. However, in applying a medical approach to my reading of Kempe's bodily pain and experience, it is necessary to clarify my position on this complex field of scholarship. There must, I think, necessarily be an acceptance that the human body to some extent transcends time and space, existing as a biological entity – what Monica Green eloquently describes as 'this same material substrate of flesh, bone, blood, and breath' – yet in this exegesis of medical theory and religious experience, it is clear that whilst those bodies might be in some ways ahistorical, their disorders, degrees of pain perception, remedies, and understandings of all of these factors, are not. I am also mindful to avoid the careless perpetuation of the socio-cultural associations of women with matter and the body and men with spirit and society, through an emphasis on the phenomenology of Margery Kempe's *experience*; not least her mysticality and spiritual conceptualisation of the universe. Since modern understanding recognises human beings to be products of complex evolutionary processes and somatic adaptation, it is my intention to interpret Margery Kempe as a *transformed* being; that as she traverses the life cycle, her physiology

[188] Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 4. On social constructionism and the female body as 'performative', see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990). Also Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

adapts and changes in function and conceptualisation.[189] As she transitions from virgin to wife, from young woman to mother, from young to old and from sick to healed, Kempe's body must prove to be fluid and adaptive rather than fixed or essentialised. In fact, it is Margery Kempe herself who foregrounds the visceral and corporeal manifestation of her mysticism: she perceives through her (two) eyes (bodily and ghostly), her ears, her heart, her body and her 'sowle'. Yet, in her advancing of her 'gostly eye' to its mystical conclusion, it is her very physiology which evolves and adapts. It is also her body that her onlookers diagnose as sick in response to her violent movements and her body that provides the painful experiences that facilitate spiritual understanding. And Kempe clothes that body in transformative ways, first in the fancy clothing of her entrepreneurial years, then in the plain rags of poverty, in a hidden haircloth and finally in the white clothing of virginity and the mantle and wedding ring of Christic wedlock.[190] Such apparel is the loud and physical signification of her transmission on her religious journey: Margery Kempe utilises her body to resemble the evolving state of her soul. Indeed, on this journey in the book, towards her being *restoryd her a-geyn*, Kempe tells her story – her life – using her body as well as her voice: her physical writhings, prostrations and collapsings communicate to us with equal verisimilitude as the words that she dictates. One of the most stark examples of the prominence of Margery

[189] On the construction of gender, see Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cybourgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991). Also Anne Fausto Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) and *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

[190] Kempe asks to wear the mantle, ring and white clothes (p. 34). She wears white clothes in Rome (p. 80), and is commanded to return to black clothing by a Dutch priest (p.84). She later resumes the white clothing on God's command (p.91) and by the generosity of a good man of Norwich (pp.103-4). When questioned on the significance of the white clothes by the Archbishop of York, and asked if she is a 'mayden', she replies, 'I am a wife' (p.124). As will be examined below, Kempe is not afraid to modify her corporeal guise according to the workings of her soul.

Kempe's corporeality is her offer to be driven in a cart, in naked humiliation, for God's love:

> And I wolde, Lord, for þi lofe be leyd nakyd on an hyrdill, alle men to wonderyn on me for þi lofe, so it wer no perel to her sowlys, & þei to castyn slory & slugge on me, & be drawyn fro town to town euery day my lyfe-tyme, ȝyf þu wer plesyd þerby & no mannys sowle hyndryd, þi wil mote be fulfillyd & not myn (184).[191]

That Kempe is willing to suffer her raw and exposed body to be sullied and shamed every day, in perpetuity, for God's love, illustrates the way in which it is her physicality through which she seeks grace and spiritual transcendence. Given such an authorial steer, we cannot ignore Margery Kempe's body, for it is through her eyes, her ears, her heart – her whole visceral being – that she experiences Christ.

Medical Texts

The medical corpus that I have employed in this thesis is based both upon the relevance of the treatises for women's medicine and the relative circulation of those texts in England in the later Middle Ages. By far the most well-known of texts about women's medicine was the so-called *Trotula* ensemble, comprised of the 'Liber de Sinthomatibus Mulierum' (Book on the Conditions of Women), 'De Curis Mulierum' (On Treatments for Women), and 'De Ornatu Mulierum' (On Women's Cosmetics).[192] Despite popular belief, the first and third of these texts were written anonymously, and the second – 'On Treatments for Women' was attributed to a Salertian woman healer named Trota. Each text circulated independently in Europe, but by the end of the

[191] MED s.v. hirdel: A frame or lattice of interwoven twigs, crossed wooden bars; d.) used for the sides of a cart, f.) used as a sledge on which criminals are taken to execution.
[192] Hereafter, the translated name will be employed because I also use the translated quotations from the *Trotula* texts.

twelfth century, an anonymous compiler had brought them together in a single ensemble, with some revisions, and called *Summa que dicitur 'Trotula'* (The Compendium Which is Called the 'Trotula').[193] The circulation of the *Trotula* texts in England was vast, and it soon became the leading work on women's medicine: 'of over ten dozen copies of these twelfth-century southern Italian Latin texts that are extant, at least a quarter were either written in England or migrated there before the end of the Middle Ages. Evidence from inventories and medieval catalogues likewise shows the ready availability of these Salernitan texts in England, and the *Trotula* dominate both the Anglo-Norman and English vernacular traditions'.[194] The wide renditioning of the *Trotula* led to vernacular translations, and since, from the thirteenth century, female readers tended more and more to use the vernacular, it is, according to Green, 'not surprising that seven of the twenty-two known medieval translations of the *Trotula* address themselves directly to female audiences'.[195] However, ownership is hard to determine, and 'it is clear that most if not all of the other later medieval translations were intended for male readers'.[196] The compiler of the *Trotula* is careful to establish his or her motivations for writing early on in the text, which were based on an acceptance of God's design that women were the weaker, colder sex, and therefore 'diseases very often abound in them'. Nevertheless, the compiler appears to be sympathetic to the female cause,

[193] Monica Green, ed. and trans., 'Preface', in *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. xi-xii. There are two editions of Green's *Trotula* editions: the hardcover edition, above, where the Latin text appears opposite its English translation, with full critical apparatus. The other edition is a paperback version containing only the English translation: Monica H. Green, *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Pennyslvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). In this study I will employ the former edition on account of its descriptions of the manuscripts and its comprehensive list of Latin terms.
[194] Monica H. Green, 'Making Motherhood in Medieval Medicine: The Evidence from Medicine', in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400*, ed. Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 173-203 (p. 174).
[195] Green, *Trotula*, p. 61.
[196] Ibid.

pitying, even, which offers some explanation for the absence of more derisory, antifeminist content that is seen in texts such as *De Secretis Mulierum*, as will be shown below.[197] I will quote the English translation from this edition throughout, for the sake of brevity, unless there is a particular lexical complexity which requires further interrogation.

However, the text on women's medicine that was most widely disseminated in late-medieval England were the gynaecological and obstetrical chapters excerpted from the *Compendium medicinae*, written c. 1240, by Gilbertus Anglicus, known as *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*. Two versions of this text exist in different manuscripts. Version One is a translation of fifteen of the chapters of the *Compendium medicinae*, drawing on brief chapters of the *Trotula minor* and more heavily on the *Practica medicinae* of Roger Baron. Despite some abbreviations, the translator renders it into accurate English. Notably, the title of the text in Yale 47 and Wellcome 5650 claims that the womb ('the moder id est matrix') is not simply the site of, but actually *is* 'the sekenesse of wymmen'.[198] Version Two includes the same material as Version One, but is rearranged and includes additional material, including several recipes. Version One, from Yale Medical Library, MS 47, has been transcribed by M.R. Hallaert, and Version Two in London, BL, Sloane MS 2463, has been edited by Beryl Rowland.[199] These editions have since been superseded by Monica Green and

[197] 'Moreover, women, from the condition of their fragility, out of shame and embarrassment do not dare reveal their anguish over their diseases (which happen in such a private place) to a physician. Therefore, their misfortune, which ought to be pitied, and especially the influence of a certain woman stirring my heart, have impelled me to give a clear explanation regarding their diseases in caring for their health' (*Trotula*, p. 65).
[198] Monica H. Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynaecological Texts in Middle English', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 14 (1992), 53-88 (pp. 72-4).
[199] M.R. Hallaert, '*The 'Sekenesse of wymmen': A Middle English Treatise on Diseases in Women*, Yale Medical Library, Ms. 47 fols. 60r-71v' in *Scripta: Mediaeval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 8, (Brussels: UFSAL, 1982). Beryl Rowland, *Medieval Women's Guide to Health: The First English Gynacological Handbook* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1981). Green and Mooney note how Rowland's edition was *not* the 'first' English gynaecological handbook, and that at least four other texts (including *Sickness* 1), antedate it by several decades. Monica H. Green and Linne R. Mooney, 'The Sickness of Women', in *Sex,*

Linne Mooney, who, in their edition of Trinity R.14.52, fols. 107r-135v, make corrections to Hallaert and Rowland's misidentification of the text's Latin source and its relation to the other versions.[200] Green and Mooney note how the Trinity copy of *Sekenesse of Wymmen* 2 was 'almost certainly copied from Sloane 2463, the manuscript published by Rowland', but that an edition of the Trinity copy is merited in order to 'correct the inaccuracies of that edition, to present fuller background information on the text's genesis and sources, and to set the text more securely into the material and probable social contexts of its use'.[201] The Trinity text was probably produced in the mid fifteenth century and appears to be addressed directly to women ('that oo woman may help another in hir sikenes'), although since the number of literate midwives is unknown, it is more likely that such a medical text was read to them instead.[202] There is, however, no 'injunction...against men reading the text, nor even a presumption that the male reader is not within the normative or "approved" intended audience'. In fact, imperatives such as 'take', 'make', 'mix', and so on, could, as Green and Mooney posit, be taken as 'generic addresses'.[203] In this study I will employ references from the Rowland edition of *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, with the acknowledgment that the editorial context is not wholly reliable.

Aging, and Death in Medieval Medical Compendium: Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52, Its Texts, Language, and Scribe, Volume 2, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp. 455-568 (p. 456, n.1).

[200] For corrections, see Jerry Stannard and Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 'Review of Beryl Rowland, *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health'*, *Speculum*, 57 (1982), 422-26. Also Francisco Alonso Almeida, 'Edition and Study of a Middle English Gynaecological Treatise: Yale Medical Library, MS 47, ff. 67r-71v', MA thesis, Facultad de Filologia, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (1997). Also Alicia Rodríguez Alvarez, 'The *Sekenesse of Wymmen* Revised', *Manuscripta*, 40 (1996; appeared 2000), 157-64.

[201] Green and Mooney, *The Sickness of Women*, p. 456, n.1.

[202] *The Sickness of Women*, p. 485 and p. 462 respectively.

[203] Ibid., pp. 466-7. On the concept of shame and women's heath in *The Syknesse of Wymmen* and *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, see Mary C. Flannery, 'Emotion and the Ideal Reader in Middle English Gynaecological Texts', in *Literature, Science and Medicine in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. Falconer and Renevey, pp. 103-15.

Another highly popular gynaecological text which also addresses a female audience and which features in my medical corpus is *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, which has particular similarities with the *Sekenesse of Wymmen*, although they were not based upon the same sources, but both employ extended obstetrical information that derives from the late antique gynaecological text of Musico's *Non omnes quidem*.[204] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, composed in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, is written in Middle English prose, claiming to be translated from French and Latin texts. It survives in five manuscripts, and is a rare example of a medical text written for a lay female audience.[205] As Barratt notes, '[t]hat it was written for a female audience is implicit throughout the text and explicit in the Prologue'.[206] The writer explains that he has translated the text into English because this is the language that literate women are more likely to read, and can pass on the information to illiterate women, therefore having no need to reveal their problems to men.[207] Barratt has edited two versions of the text in her volume: Oxford Bodley MS Douce 37, and Cambridge University Library MS Ii.6.33. The Douce version is longer, includes some additional material and a more expansive style, and adopts pseudo-chapter headings. For this reason, I employ the Douce text in this study.

The natural philosophic text *De Secretis Mulierum* wasfalsely attributed to the Dominican theologian Albertus Magnus (d. 1280)who taught at the University of Paris from 1245 to 1248, and was probably composed in Germany in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, perhaps by a student in Albert's

[204] Green and Mooney, *The Sickness of Women*, p. 463.
[205] Alexandra Barratt, *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing: A Middle English Version of Material Derived from the Trotula and Other Sources* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), p. 1.
[206] Barratt, *The Knowing of Woman's Kind*, p. 2.
[207] Ibid.

circle.[208] The antifeminist treatise, which was highly popular in Germany, circulated widely both in Latin and in several vernacular translations (although it was perhaps less well-known in England).[209] Helen Rodnite Lemay notes how various editions were produced, 'of which over 50 were printed in the fifteenth century and over 70 in the sixteenth century'.[210] It is a work 'that sets forth ideas about women and science that were part of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholastic milieu... As the large number of manuscripts and editions demonstrates, the treatise was immensely popular and we can therefore conclude that the ideas it expressed were highly influential'.[211] Since the primary readers and commentators were clerical, the dissemination of such ideas through the church and therefore into popular medicine, was inevitable.[212] As Green has posited, by the fourteenth century, the practical medical tradition of the *Trotula* texts and and the theoretical, natural-philosophical tradition of the *Secretis Mulierum* began to move towards each other, 'ultimately becoming so closely allied as to be often indistinguishable'.[213] I have therefore chosen to include this treatise in this thesis, not because of its particular, specific circulation in England, but because of its diffusion of ideas from scholasticism through medicine in Europe and the west. It is clear from the reception of Margery Kempe's behaviour by her onlookers, for example, as will be shown,

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[208] Monica Green, '"Traittié tout de mençonges": The *Secrés des dames,* 'Trotula', and Attitudes towards Women's Medicine in Fourteenth- and Early-Fifteenth-Century France' (1998), in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West*, Monica H. Green (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), VI, pp. 146-78 (p. 150). Also Linda E. Voigts, 'Medical Prose', op. cit.

[209] Although the text was largely of natural philosophy and not gynaecology, Green notes how several of the vernacular translations incorporate additional obstetrical material, addressed to midwives. These manuscripts, mostly in France, indicate a crossing of boundary from natural philosophy into medicine. See 'Medieval Gynaecological Texts: A Handlist', in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West*, Appendix pp. 1-36 (pp.1-2, n.3).

[210] Helen Rodnite Lemay, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus'* 'De Secretis Mulierum' *with Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 1.

[211] Lemay, *Women's Secrets*, p. 2.

[212] There are two Commentators on this text; A and B. I will cite from each throughout this study in addition to the original material of pseudo-Albertus, in order to show the development and dissemination of these ideas.

[213] Green, "Traittié tout de mençonges", p. 148.

that these ideas were part of the wider atmosphere of pejorative thought about the female body in the Middle Ages.[214]

Monica Green notes how 'evidence for ownership of texts on women's medicine by male clerics and scholars becomes ample by the end of the thirteenth century'.[215] There was a particular male interest in the 'secrets of women', as is exemplified by *De Secretis Mulierum* and discussed by Green as a wide tradition in her recent book.[216] This is an important point for this thesis, given that the convergence of medicine and theology in the late Middle Ages, and its repercussions for our understanding of Margery Kempe's pain, is a central concern. Some evidence is emerging about women's medical practice, not least those women who, on the death of their husbands, 'suddenly' began to practise medicine.[217] The lack of an institutional identity for midwives, in addition, renders tracing their activities problematic.[218] More recently, Green has identified the masculinisation of gynaecological theory and practice in the pre-modern age, arguing that 'the superior social standing of the book-learned physician or surgeon, long since gendered as male, was now unquestioned'. But though women had 'no claim to the *authoritative knowledge* that distinguished the now professionalized, institutionally-sanctioned practices of male physicians, surgeons, barbers, and apothecaries', it was also the case that 'certain kinds of female medical practice never disappeared'.[219] Women

[214] For an excellent analysis of *De Secretis Mulierum* see Sarah Alison Miller, Chapter 2, 'Gynecological Secrets: Blood, Seed, and Monstrous Births in *De Secretis Mulierum*', in *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 55-89.
[215] Green, 'Making Motherhood', p. 182.
[216] Monica H. Green, 'Slander and the Secrets of Women' in *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 204-245.
[217] Monica H. Green, 'Documenting medieval women's medical practice', in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, ed. Luis García-Ballester, Roger French, Jon Arrizabalaga and Andrew Cunningham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 322-52 (p. 330).
[218] Ibid., p. 337.
[219] Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 299 and p. 290 respectively.

maintained an unrecorded role in the birthing room, held medical authority in the domestic sphere, and as literacy increased from the sixteenth century, created their own genre of writing in the form of a new take on the recipe collection.[220] As Green attests, there is a need to find more evidence about how women accessed medical texts and their ideas, by reading them, commissioning translations, or having them interpreted orally for listening audiences.[221] Certainly, she notes how the 'intended audience of *Trotula* Translation A includes not only literate women but also unlettered women, who can have the book read aloud for their edification'.[222] The handlist of owners of the *Trotula* manuscripts in medieval England includes bishops, priests, chancellors and abbotts, including several monks at St. Augustine's in Canterbury, and a convent of Augustinian friars at York. Since we know that Kempe visited the Archbishops of Canterbury (albeit in Lambeth), and York on several occasions, and the unfortunate exchange with the Archbishop of York, it is highly probable that the theoretical and practical ideas about women's medicine were known by those priests and clerks who interpreted and pathologised her cries and her affectivity.[223]

As well as such gynaecological texts as documented above, this thesis contains material from other medical treatises of the ancient and medieval

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[220] Ibid., p.290.
[221] Green, 'Making Motherhood', p. 182.
[222] Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynaecological Texts in Middle English', p. 58.
[223] See BMK, Book 1, Chapter 15 on her meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel. See BMK, Book 1, Chapter 51, for her meeting with the Archbishop of York. For a list of *Trotula* owners, see Monica Green, 'Appendix 1: Medieval and Renaissance Owners of *Trotula* Manuscripts', in *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 325-44. For a list of printed gynaecological texts, see Monica Green, 'Appendix 2: Printed Gynaecological and Obstetrical Texts, 1474-1600', in *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 345-57. For a handlist of all gynaecological texts in western Europe from the 4th to the 15th centuries, see Monica Green, 'Appendix: Medieval Gynecologicala Texts: A Handlist', in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West*, pp. 1-36. See also Monica H. Green, 'Bibliography on Medieval Women, Gender, and Medicine (1985-2009)', *Digital Library of Sciència.cat*, (2010), Universitat de Barcelona: <http://www.sciencia.cat/biblioteca/documents/Green_CumulativeBib_Feb2010.pdf>.

worlds, as relevant to the chapter topics. For example, the significance of the Hippocratic corpus, Galenic and Aristotelian ideas are considered, St. Augustine (b.354), the naturalist and Archbishop Isidore of Seville (b.560), Ambrose (Bishop of Milan, 340-97), along with the widely circulated works of Constantine the African (d.1087) who translated Ishāq ibn Imrān's works into the *Viaticum and De Melancholia.* Also considered are the ideas of Avicenna (b. 980), Hildegard of Bingen (b.1098), the medieval philosopher Averroes (b.1126), the Dominican friar and proponent of natural theology, Thomas Aquinas (b.1225), the French doctor and medical professor Bernard of Gordon (fl. 1270-1330), Thomas of Chobham (b.c.1215), Albertus the Great's *De Animalibus* (d.1280), the encyclopaedic work, *De Natura Rerum*, compiled by Thomas of Cantimpré between 1228 and 1244, Gilbertus Anglicus' *Compendium Medicinae* (c.1230-40), Henry of Lancaster's *Le Livre de seyntz medicines*, Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Rerum Proprietatibus* (c.1240), Aldobrandino of Siena's *Régime du corps* (1256), Vincent of Beauvaix (d.1264?), Thomas of Cantimpré (b.1201), and the French surgeon Guy de Chauliac (d. 1368). Through the inclusion of these diverse scientific texts I hope to provide a richness to this thesis and an explanation of the long-standing ideas upon which the central gynaecological texts, and the social attitudes of Margery Kempe's milieu, were based.

Chapter Content and Summary

It remains for me to provide here a brief outline of the chapters that will follow. Chapter One, '"Slayn for Goddys lofe": Margery's Melancholia and the Bleeding of Tears', is an exploration of Margery Kempe's humoral and constitutional disposition; a thesis upon which all subsequent chapters are

hinged in framing the context of the tears which continue throughout her lifetime. In arguing that Kempe is a 'natural' melancholic, I also explore the historical correlation of melancholia with a predisposition to mystical rapture and giftedness, considering Kempe's notorious, mournful weeping as a form of pseudo-stigmata that facilitates an affective piety. The second half of the chapter returns to the start of the *Book*, and Kempe's early adulthood, in examining the traumatic episode of childbirth and its repercussions for her future self-identification; the way in which, through Christ's first visionary appearance, all future pain throughout Kempe's adulthood must be cured by his presence as divine physician. Chapter Two, '"þe mukke" of Marriage: Painful Chastity and the Sexual Paradox', explores the previously unstudied paradox of chastity as inescapably painful, focusing on Kempe's early married years. While theological doctrine holds virginity as an ultimate state of holiness and freedom from the pain of sin, medical texts posit chaste living as causative of pain, as sexual intercourse enables the elimination of toxic matter that is aided by the 'heat of the male'. Inevitably, religious women and widows are particularly susceptible to such pain. Since Kempe develops an intense aversion to copulation with her husband John, she experiences a conflation of spiritual and physical pain for some time, in being unable to avoid either scenario. In considering the deadly power of female touch and the adaptive fortifications which Kempe constructs around herself in response to her situation, the chapter not only identifies this paradox but explores the extent to which purification practices, the final vow of chastity, and mystical marriage, enable Kempe *some* analgesic relief.

Chapter Three, 'Lost Blood of the Middle Age: Pain Surrogacy and a New Fecundity', is an exegesis of Margery Kempe's middle age in relation to

the ontological state of menopause and its symbolism as representative of the lost meanings of contaminated menstrual blood. It explores the 'masculinisation' of the menopausal woman and the inherent implications for pain-perception. In this chapter I argue that the fecund replacement strategies, or surrogacy, that Kempe employs instead – wetnursing, godparenting, fostering, image-substitution and pain-bearing – create what I have termed a process of 'pain surrogacy'. This concept, I contend, enables Kempe to *remother* and *reproduce* in a new and sanctified way, following the terminus of her reproductive life after her vow of chastity. Chapter Four, 'Margery Kempe's *Phisik*: The Healing Value of Pain Surrogacy', is a continuation of my study of Kempe's middle age, in terms of her healing practices as a disciple of *Christus medicus*. In continuing to *re*produce as a physician for both earthly and mystical subjects, I argue that Kempe achieves a spiritual flourishing not unlike other holy women of her age, heightened by her transition from wife to widow, and embracing others' pain in her trajectory towards a nexus with Christ.

In Chapter Five, 'Margery Kempe the Elder: Senescence and the Didactic Function of Pain', I explore Kempe's final years of elderliness, the *aged asceticism* that I argue to be an efficacious pain-by-default, and the foreign peregrinations which provide a paradoxical, yet conventional, concomitance of physical pain and spiritual sanctification. The chapter considers Kempe's transformation to church 'elder', teaching and ministering in a final application of the knowledge that her pains have provided. I also argue for the noticeable distinctions between Books I and II as holding significance through their dictation during the period of Kempe's elderly years. Both books signify Kempe's increased authority in old age: Book I is recounted, with the increased wisdom of old age, some twenty years after Kempe's conversion, while Book II

offers a tone of the authentic immediacy of senescent experience, since its dictation is closer to the occurrence of the later events in question. Chapter Six transcends the life cycle paradigm to an extent, in the placement here of my analysis of Kempe's Passion meditations. In so doing, I gesture towards their symbolic status as climactic, and as ultimate indications of her mystical maturity and eschatological insight. In uncovering the physiological Signs of Death that appear in medical and religious texts, and Kempe's role as a death-bed vigilant for her *even christen*, I argue for the continuation of the surrogacy hermeneutic up until the end of the life cycle, in her willingness to be a 'death-surrogate' for Christ himself.

The printed extracts by Wynkyn de Worde in 1501 erase all autobiographical detail of Kempe's life: 'In no extract is there a single circumstance of the worldly life of Margery'.[224] Because of this, I wish to return Margery Kempe, the real and *embodied* woman, back to her text, reading her body as a living text, like the medieval tradition of regarding Christ's body as a book; where, in turn, the 'soul becomes a book written on by Christ', as has been explored by Vincent Gillespie.[225] I therefore offer in the following pages a study of the phenomenology of her pain – her *experientia* – as she journeys through the life cycle in search of a meaning of that pain, and of God. She will, of course, discover that those meanings are the same. This thesis thus represents new and important work because without a focus on the medical discourse at work in the *Boke*, or a detailed study of her pain, we overlook an important strand of Kempe's experience, not least because of the new understanding of the recipe of f.124v that I provide. Furthermore, as a

[224] S.B. Meech in BMK, xlvi.
[225] Vincent Gillespie, 'Strange Images of Death: The Passion in Later Medieval English Devotional and Mystical Writing', *Analecta Cartusiana*, 117 (1987), 110-159 (p. 111 and p. 126).

multidisciplinary study which resists the confines of separateness and brings together fields of literature, medicine, historiography, physiology, and life writing, I offer a powerful contribution to medieval studies and its twenty-first century evolution, where such disciplinary divisions are increasingly regarded as reductive. Though Margery Kempe's pain mutates as she traverses through the life stages – through an adulthood defined by Bernard of Gordon as painful by default: 'an age of hard work, affliction and pain' – its final destination is towards a oneness with the Christ whose own body-in-pain, suspended in temporal agony, calls to her from the moment of her conversion to the moment when she accedes to writing her book, where pain and word somehow collide, and from where she will write her life, in all its painful glory.[226]

[226] Bernard of Gordon, cited from Monica Green, 'Introduction', in *A Cultural History of the Human Body*, p. 3.

Chapter One: 'Slayn for Goddys lofe': Margery's Melancholia and the Bleeding of Tears

> Mourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on. In some people, whom we for this reason suspect of a pathological disposition, melancholia appears in place of mourning.[1]

Sigmund Freud's definition of melancholia takes as its focus the loss of a loved object that, rather than being ultimately relinquished over time as with the comparable condition of mourning, is retained and internalised by the sufferer, who then manifests an 'exclusive devotion to mourning'. Not only does Freud acknowledge our unquestioning acceptance that 'the mood of mourning [is] a "painful" one', he suggests that this experience takes on a metapsychological process: 'this tendency can become so intense that it leads to a person turning away from reality and holding on to the object through a hallucinatory wish-psychosis'.[2] Beyond this, the sufferer is subject to a 'detour of self-punishment' whereby 'the indubitably pleasurable self-torment of melancholia... signifies the satisfaction of tendencies of sadism and hatred, which are applied to an object and are thus turned back against the patient's own person'.[3] The grieving melancholic, then, experiences an uncanny state of pain and pleasure, reliving and re-experiencing a loss which is at once agonisingly acute yet also gratifying because it symbolises a means of retaining a connection – a diachronic oneness – with the lost object of desire. The complex of melancholia, according

[1] Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p. 203.
[2] Ibid., p. 204.
[3] Ibid., p. 211.

to Freud, ‘behaves like an open wound’, drawing energies towards itself and leaving the self impoverished.

As an open wound, melancholia is therefore strikingly resonant with Judeo-Christian imagery. [4] Amy Hollywood makes explicit the connection among mourning, melancholia and Christian mysticism in her study of Beatrice of Nazareth and Margaret Ebner, arguing for a pattern that moves ‘from external objects to their internalization by the devout person (the key component of melancholy for both medieval and modern theorists), and then their subsequent re-externalization in and on the body of the believer (the rendering visible of melancholic incorporation whereby the holy person becomes Christ to those around her)’.[5] In her discussion of medieval mystical rapture, Hollywood suggests that devotees inculcate traumatic memories ‘by rendering involuntary, vivid, and inescapable the central catastrophic event of Christian history so that the individual believer might relive and share in that trauma’. She regards ‘medieval practitioners of meditation on Christ’s Passion’ as having ‘the desire to inculcate something like traumatic memory [as] theologically justified by a promise: through sharing in the suffering of those who witnessed Christ’s death or... sharing Christ’s own pain, one can participate in the salvific work of the cross’.[6]

In this chapter, I argue that Margery Kempe is a crucial example of the interplay between melancholia, mysticism and medieval medical theory.[7] Her

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[4] See Gil Anadjar, ‘Bleeding and Melancholia’ in *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 191-203.
[5] Amy Hollywood, ‘Acute Melancholia’, in *Harvard Theological Review*, Volume 99, October 2006, 381-406, at p. 383. See also David Aers, ‘The Self Mourning: Reflections on Pearl’, *Speculum*, 68, 1, (1993), 54-73.
[6] Hollywood, ‘Acute Melancholia’, p. 397.
[7] I am aware of only one example of scholarship which suggests Margery Kempe to be melancholic: an article by Phyllis R. Freeman, Carley Rees Bogarad and Diane E. Sholomskas, entitled ‘Margery Kempe, a new theory: the inadequacy of hysteria and postpartum psychosis as diagnostic categories’, *History of Psychiatry*, i, (1990), 169-190. However, Freeman et. al. argue for Margery Kempe as suffering from bipolar disorder, characterised by cycles of

tears, for which she is well-known, and which have inspired much scholarship, are usually interpreted as symbolic *expressions* of that mystical experience.[8] However, I suggest here a reversal of that process, with the phenomenology of Kempe's tears presenting as teleological indicators of a *prior disposition* of melancholia that in turn, and in accordance with medieval medical theory, render her more receptive, more acutely sentient, to mystical phenomena and visionary experience. Her weeping, in response to those privileged visions, is thus the inevitable articulation of the melancholic who is unable to relinquish the lost Christic object nor stem the grief which lingers as an 'open wound'. Beyond this, Kempe's many moments of self-doubt and anguish, particularly during mystical conversation with God, similarly evidence a melancholic disposition. I

melancholia and mania. Juliette Vuille has convincingly argued against this theorem based on the fact that the *Book* is non-chronological and therefore 'cycles' are impossible to reliably decipher. See Juliette Vuille, '"Maybe I'm Crazy?": Diagnosis and Contextualisation of Medieval Female Mystics', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Naöe Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), pp.103-120. I would add to this that there are very limited examples of 'mania' in the *Book*, bar Kempe's postpartum episode, and that her weeping, sorrowing and collapsing offer evidence of a singularly melancholic disposition.

[8] Barbara H. Rosenwein argues that Kempe's tears are an "antidote" to hers, and others', despair, in 'Coda: Transmitting Despair by Manuscript and Print' in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 249-266. Hope Phyllis Weissman persuasively suggests that Kempe does cry tears of hysteria, but that those tears are authorised by God, signifying a spiritual childbirth and a resistance to patriarchal oppression. However, Weissman does not justify the use of the term 'hysterical', nor the medieval context in which she regards it as operating. See 'Margery Kempe in Jerusalem: *Hysteria Compassio* in the Late Middle Ages', in *Acts of Interpretation,* ed. Carruthers and Kirk , pp. 201-217. See also Karma Lochrie, "Embodying the Text: Boisterous Tears and Privileged Readings", in *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 167-202. Ellen Ross regards Kempe's suffering to be divided into three types: contrition, compassion and longing. See 'She wept and cried right loud for sorrow and for pain': Suffering, the Spiritual Journey, and Women's Experience in Late Medieval Mysticism', in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp. 45-59. Becky R. Lee, in an avant-garde and speculative article, applies the transpersonal psychology of Stanislav Grof to suggest that Kempe's hysteria opens up the way to transpersonal experience, revealing hidden aspects of reality and enabling her to challenge the status quo. In 'The Medieval Hysteric and the Psychedelic Psychologist: A Revaluation of the Mysticism of Margery Kempe in the Light of the Transpersonal Psychology of Stanislav Grof', *Studia Mystica*, 23 (2002), 102-126. In a similarly experimental essay, Nancy Stork suggests a neurological disorder for Kempe's cries and outbursts in 'Did Margery Kempe suffer from Tourette's Syndrome?' *Medieval Studies*, 59 (1997), 261-300. For a discussion of the red ink annotator's interest in Kempe's tears see Johanne Paquette, 'Male Approbation in the Extant Glosses to the *Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Women and the Divine in Literature before 1700: Essays in Memory of Margot Louis*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Victoria: ELS Editions, 2009), 153-169.

will therefore move forward from Hollywood's analysis by first exemplifying the *medieval* medical theory of melancholia, before examining the under-studied connection between constitutional melancholia and mystical receptivity, suggesting physiological tendencies towards the phenomenology of metaphysical vision.[9] Though this study is primarily concerned with the interpretation of Kempe's experience of pain in the medieval context, I open here with Freud's hypothesis on melancholia because of its roots in ancient and medieval medical ideas about objectified loss and mourning, as we will see.[10] Margery Kempe's notorious weeping is pseudo-stigmatic, evidencing a melancholic woundedness to which she is helplessly subjected but which is concomitantly productive in facilitating visionary perceptivity. As such, the first part of this chapter will shed new light on Kempe's weeping, and suggest a way in which her tears function as ascetic emblems of an outpouring of grief which causes acute pain, but from which she refuses to separate. According to the medieval theories of the non-naturals and the emotions, as Peregrine Horden has shown, such perpetual grief is not conducive to health.[11] As has been suggested by George Mora, she operates in a milieu where the broader notion of social melancholia might be argued to signify a cultural dysprasia of sorts.[12]

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[9] This topic is discussed by Dyan Elliott, although the issue of melancholia is mentioned only briefly, in "The Physiology of Rapture and Female Sprituality", in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and Alastair J. Minnis (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1997), 141-173.

[10] For further scholarship on the psychoanalysis of mourning and melancholia, which was at its height in the 1960s, see Lorraine D. Siggins, 'Mourning: A Critical Survey of the Literature', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 47 (1966), 14-25; M. Torok, 'The Illness of Mourning and the Fantasy of the Exquisite Corpse' (1968), in *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 107-124; and Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, 'Introjection – Incorporation: Mourning or Melancholia', in *Psychoanalysis in France*, ed. Serge Lebovici and Daniel Widlöcher (New York: International Universities Press), pp. 3-16.

[11] Peregrine Horden, 'A Non-Natural Environment: Medicine without Doctors and the Medieval European Hospital', esp. pp. 133-6.

[12] George Mora suggests that there was a melancholic atmosphere during the late Middle Ages, borne from the Hundred Years' War, the Black Death, the decay of Rome, heretical movements, the fall of Constantinople and the Great Schism. In 'Mental Disturbances, Unusual Mental States, and their Interpretation during the Middle Ages', in *History of Psychiatry and Medical*

In bringing into dialogue the complexities of melancholia, mysticism, medical theory and visionary receptivity, and the extent to which physiological predisposition must be acknowledged in the course of our understanding just as mind and body were unified in the medieval imaginary, I gesture towards significant repercussions for the way in which we read the experiences of the visionaries of the late Middle Ages.

As the final part of this chapter will argue, in taking its position at the start of Kempe's adult life cycle (and as her book establishes, the beginning of her story) the post-partum trauma after the birth of her first child soon after the age of twenty, when she married, represents a conscious textual edit which situates that personal trauma as a foundational event for the later, mystical trauma that she will experience and relive. In enduring the abject event of her near-annihilation in childbirth, Kempe undergoes a dichotomous loss of self, brought about by her newfound status as a young (wounded) mother and by her temporary exclusion from the Christian rite of confession which leaves her abandoned and liminal; blocked from absolution and from cure. That it is the appearance of a 'most bewtyuows' Christ, whose blessed 'chere' (8) effects her instant stabilisation and wholeness teaches Kempe two important lessons. First, that she is henceforth the privileged child of God, has direct access to Christ and is able, if necessary, to bypass clerical authority. And second, since Christ signifies cure, the loss of the Christic-object will forevermore signify a concomitant loss of self and of existence. This chapter will therefore begin with a broad examination of Kempe's constitutional melancholia, evidenced by her proclivity for weeping and for her perceptivity of visionary phenomena, along

Psychology: With an Epilogue on Psychiatry and the Mind-Body Relation, ed. Edwin R. Wallace and John Gach (New York: Springer, 2008), pp. 199-223, at p. 212.

with an accentuated melancholy brought about by traumatic loss and mourning in a process of self-fulfilment. It will then analyse the genesis of that trauma paradigm through the episode of her first childbirth. In so doing, I will shed new light on Kempe's tears, and suggest a reason for the pronounced location of her post-partum experience at the entrance of her adult life, and of her text.

Painful Melancholia

Medieval medicine made no particular distinction between mental and physical disorders, and most mental disorders were attributed to physiological causes.[13] Many physiological explanations originate with the Hippocratic corpus and the book *The Sacred Disease*, which rejects supernatural causes of afflictions such as epilepsy, and instead proffers the theory of humoral imbalance. Stephen Medcalf suggests that, 'the medieval classification is psychophysical'; that 'a man's character and his body may be seen at the same glance' in a 'narrowing of the gap between inner and outer'.[14] Furthermore, while the mind-body system of the medieval person was thought to be unified and fluid, this 'narrowed gap' can also be applied to the division between heaven and earth: between physical and spiritual phenomena.[15] As Medcalf argues, for example, though Margery Kempe's onlookers question her

[13] See Simon Kemp, *Medieval Psychology* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) p. 114. Also Angel González de Pablo, 'The Medicine of the Soul. The origin and development of thought on the soul, diseases of the soul and their treatment, in Medieval and Renaissance medicine', *History of Psychiatry*, v (1994), 483-516. For an examination of the historiography of mental disorders, see George Mora, 'Mental Disturbances', pp. 199-223. See also Richard Neugebauer, 'Medieval and Early Modern Theories of Mental Illness', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 36 (1979), 477-483, and Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, 'Visions and Psychopathology in the Middle Ages', *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 170 (1982), 41-49.

[14] Stephen Medcalf, 'Inner and outer', in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen Medcalf (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 108-171, at p. 109. See also

[15] On the thirteenth-century theological debates about human pain and suffering, see Donald Mowbray, Chapter One, 'Thirteenth-Century Theological Ideas about Human Pain and Suffering and the Passion of Christ', in *Pain and Suffering in Medieval Theology: Academic Debates at the University of Paris in the Thirteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer: 2009), pp. 13-42.

qualification to discuss the joys of heaven, Kempe's understanding is less disconnected, illustrated by her passing through that fissure via her marriage to the Godhead in Chapter thirty-five of the *Book*.[16] In interconnection with medieval medical theories of the female as the inversion of the male, it seems a logical transition for female experience to bridge more 'naturally' that inside / outside divide.[17] Indeed, as I will explicate below, Kempe envisions events with equal actuality (she sees 'verily') with her 'gostly eye' as she does with her 'bodily eye'.[18] There is an emphasis on the *truth* of her phenomenological perception that illustrates the heightened receptivity of the melancholic, as was presupposed in medieval culture. As such, an argument for Kempe's melancholic diathesis is supported by the complex web of the medieval systems of body-mind, heaven-earth, inner-outer, that conflate to indicate what must have been the glaring appearance of melancholia to Kempe's contemporaries.

The doctrine of the humours, where illness was caused by disturbances to the balance of the four bodily humours (blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile), was the generally accepted paradigm of ancient and medieval medical thinkers. Galen in particular linked the qualities of hot, cold, dry and moist with their humoral counterparts, and these combinations became the permitted models for a balanced body: blood is hot and moist, yellow bile is hot and dry, black bile cold and dry, and phlegm is cold and moist. Further still, Galen's system of temperaments associated the predominant humour in the body with supposed character traits; the sanguine temperament was dominated by blood, the choleric by yellow bile, the phlegmatic by phlegm, and the melancholic by

[16] Ibid., p. 117.
[17] See, for example, Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 177-183.
[18] See, for example, p. 140 of the *Book*, when Kempe witnesses Christ's crucifixion.

black bile.[19] There was thus a growing correlation between melancholic disease and temperament.[20] Crucially, there was also an ancient connection between the four bodily humours and the four ages of man which linked the 'ageing' stage, between forty and sixty (otherwise termed 'manhood' or 'decline', or the 'autumn' of life), as an age of black bile and melancholy. This notion remained unchanged throughout the medieval and Renaissance periods.[21] Since this study is primarily concerned with Kempe's life journey from age forty and above when the course of her spiritual evolution gains momentum, the symbiosis between life stage and physiological constitution adds weight to the argument for her melancholic disposition and mystical perceptivity.

Later writers developed Galen's theory, reviving ancient doctrine in terms of Christian theology. Medieval scholasticism held that melancholia was one of the four main brain diseases, and by 1300 it was common to equate melancholia with madness.[22] The treatise *De medicina animae*, formally attributed to Hugh of St. Victor but probably written by Hugo de Folieto (d. 1174), states: 'By black bile we may...mean grief...But one may also speak of a different sort of grief, when the spirit is tormented by the longing to be united with the Lord'.[23] The *Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac* regards 'The natural melancholye is þe drastes of good blood and the trowblynesse, grete in substaunce, declynyng in colour to a manere blaknesse, in sauour to sournesse

[19] OED melancholy: etymology, ancient Greek *μελαγχολία* condition of having black bile. See Galen, 'Function of Diseases of Brain and Spinal Cord' in *Diseases of the Black Bile*, from *On the Affected Parts* (ca. 165 C.E.). In Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 61-68.
[20] For a comprehensive discussion of the history of melancholia, see Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, here at p. 14.
[21] Klibansky et. al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 10-11. For a modern study with a psychoanalytical and / or theoretical focus, see Kathleen Woodward, *Ageing and its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).
[22] Fernando Salmón, 'From Patient to Text? Narratives of Pain and Madness in Medieval Scholasticism', in *Between Text and Patient: The Medical Enterprise in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Firenze: Sismel, 2011), pp. 373-95 (p. 389).
[23] Ibid., p. 106-9.

and bitternesse'.[24] Avicenna wrote that melancholics are fearful, with an 'overflowing of thought and a constant melancholic anxiety' characterised by the body's blackness, and its dryness.[25] In Gower's (d. 1408) *Confessio Amantis*, the cold and dry, or melancholic, is described as the worst of temperaments, displaying traits of suspicion, wrath and anxiety.[26] Treatments for melancholia included light and gardens, calm and rest, purges and laxatives; inhalations and warm baths with moistening plants such as nenuphar, violets, and lettuce leaves; and a diet of lamb, lettuce, eggs, fish, and ripe fruit. Phlebotomy was used as a treatment although its duration and intensity was moderated according to the colour, and thus health, of the drawn blood. The root of hellebore was employed from the days of Hippocrates as a cure for melancholic diseases.[27]

Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) regarded the 'disease' of melancholy to have a universal significance in its connection to Original Sin:

> Bile is black, bitter, and releases every evil, sometimes even a brain sickness. It causes the veins in the heart to overflow; it causes depression and doubt in every consolation so that the person can find no joy in heavenly life and no consolation in his earthly existence. This melancholy is due to the first attack by the devil on the nature of man since man disobeyed God's command by eating the apple.[28]

As well as viewing melancholia as almost part of the human condition, as Radden notes, Hildegard makes another observation in relation to female melancholics that has a striking resonance for Kempe's desire for a vow of

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[24] *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, ed. Margaret S. Ogden, EETS 265 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 123.
[25] Avicenna, 'On the Signs of Melancholy's Appearance', in *On Black Bile and Melancholy*, from *Canon of Medicine* (ca. 1170-87 C.E.). In Radden, pp. 75-78.
[26] From Simon Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, pp. 96-7.
[27] See Noga Arikha, *Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), pp. 58-9.
[28] Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae* (an abbreviation for the original title, *Liber compositae medicinae* [*Book of Holistic Healing*]). In *Holistic Healing*, Hildegard of Bingen, trans. Manfred Pawlik and Patrick Madigan, ed M. Palmquist and J. Kulas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994), p. 35.

chastity after her conversion.[29] Hildegard suggests that certain melancholic women lose much menstrual blood and therefore develop 'weak, fragile wombs'. Such women cannot receive or retain the male seed, and 'For that reason they are more healthy, more powerful, and happier without a mate than with one because they become sick from relations with a husband'.[30] Quite possibly, therefore, Kempe is constitutionally unfit for conjugal activity. The idea that sexual abstinence had health benefits for the melancholic female will be explored in Chapter Two of this study.

Constantine the African's (d. 1087) *Viaticum* was a translation of the treatise on melancholia by the tenth-century Arabic medical writer Ishāq ibn Imrān, which in turn was based on an early second-century lost treatise *On Melancholy* by Rufus of Ephesus.[31] Circulating widely in Europe, Constantine makes a connection between the black bile of melancholy and lovesickness. He states:

> The love that is also called "eros" is a disease touching the brain... Sometimes the cause of this love is an intense natural need to expel a great excess of humours... Since this illness has more serious consequences for the soul, that is, excessive thoughts, their eyes always become hollow [and] move quickly because of the soul's thoughts [and] worries to find and possess what they desire.[32]

Here, love, and extreme desire, caused by an excess of humours, is considered pathological. The fluidity of mental-physical boundaries is illustrated by the relationship that Constantine suggests between humours, emotions, intellect and physiology: the hollowed eyes – assumedly dark, or 'black' [*melano*] – as

[29] Radden, p. 80.
[30] Hildegard, *Holistic Healing*, p. 79.
[31] Arikha, *Passions and Tempers*, p. 57.
[32] Constantine the African, *Viaticum* I.20, in Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The* Viaticum *and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 187-193.

physical manifestations of this 'love disorder'.[33] In the Gospel of Matthew, the eyes are the lights of the body, constructing a biblical connection between vision and physiology: 'The light of thy body is the eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil thy whole body shall be darksome. If then the light that is in thee, be darkness: the darkness itself how great it shall be!'[34] Vincent Gillespie has 'illuminated' our understanding of the significance of light and sight in the showings of Julian of Norwich and her development towards 'that final opening of the spiritual eye which will be beyond language, and human understanding'.[35] In fact, Gillespie notes how 'medieval colour theory…sees the black end of the spectrum as linked to earth, to autumn, to manhood, to bile and melancholy, to cold and dryness'.[36] Saint Augustine commentated thus:

> For so Adam in Paradise sinned, and hid himself from the face of God. As long, then, as he had the sound heart of a pure conscience, he rejoiced at the presence of God; when that eye was wounded by sin, he began to dread the divine light, he fled back into the darkness, and the thick covert of trees, flying from the truth, and anxious for the shade.[37]

For Augustine, that sin is a cause of blindness and darkness introduces a powerful subtext of the blackness of melancholy, brought on by a lost relationship with the Divine.[38] This notion is supported by medieval medical authorities such as Henri de Mondeville (d. c.1320), who understood that most

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[33] OED 'melano': Forming words with the senses 'dark-coloured' and 'of or relating to melanin'. From the ancient Greek *μέλας*: black.
[34] Matthew 6:22-23. OED s.v. light: That natural agent or influence which (emanating from the sun, bodies intensely heated or burning, and various other sources) *evokes the functional activity of the organ of sight*.
[35] Vincent Gillespie, 'The Colours of Contemplation: Less Light on Julian of Norwich', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VIII. Papers Read at Charney Manor July 2011*, ed. E.A. Jones (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 7-28 (p. 9).
[36] Gillespie, 'The Colours of Contemplation', p. 24.
[37] Augustine, 'On Matthew 20:30 *Recovery of Sight by the Blind*', VI, in *Sermons from the Halls of Church History: the Writings of a Puritan's Mind, Volume 2*, ed. C. Matthew McMahon et al (Puritan Publications, 2012), p. 44.
[38] See *The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Annette Kern-Stähler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2016).

eye defects and visionary problems were caused by a humoral imbalance.[39] Constantine's interconnection between the eyes and the soul, therefore, represents a dialogy with those theological and medical texts that construct vision as imbued with implications for both body and soul, and specifically suggests the association of desire with 'melancholic disease'.[40] Gerard of Berry, who wrote the earliest surviving commentary on the *Viaticum* in the last decades of the twelfth-century, elaborates on the notion of desire and melancholy, adding that the sufferer is 'fixed on the beauty of some form or figure'. He continues:

> ...the imaginative faculty is *fixated on it* on account of the imbalanced complexion, cold and dry, that is in its organ, for the *spiritus* and innate heat are drawn to the middle ventricle [of the brain], where the estimative faculty functions intensely. The first ventricle therefore grows cold and dries out, so that there remains a melancholic disposition and worry [my emphasis].[41]

The fixation on an object of desire, to which Gerard points, is both a cause of and reason for melancholia: fixation is 'on account' of imbalance, causing further cooling and drying (the ventricle '*therefore* grows cold'), and thus a melancholic disposition 'remains'. That it 'remains', shows Gerard's understanding of melancholia as simultaneously constitutional and self-fulfilling,

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[39] See Joy Hawkins, 'Did Drunkenness dim the Sight? Medieval Understandings and Responses to Blindness in Medical and Religious Discourse', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Yoshikawa, pp. 203-220, esp. pp. 203-206.

[40] Constantine, *Viaticum*, in Wack, p. 189. Cicero (106-43 BC) is quoted as saying: 'Ut imago est animi voltus sic indices oculi' (The face is a picture of the mind as the eyes are its interpreter). Anthony Corbeill notes that 'Pliny (23 AD – 79AD) points to the superiority of the eyes as an indicator of the various emotions – pity, hatred, happiness – and states that the soul in fact "lives" in the eyes. Roman texts from poetry to rhetoric to philosophy concur with this notion, commonly held in antiquity, that the eyes are the mirror of the soul'. In Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 146. See also Martin Porter, *Windows on the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture, 1470-1780* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Interestingly, modern scientific research has recently uncovered a connection between the eyes and personality traits. A study of 428 undergraduates revealed that iris characteristics were linked to different qualities, including tendermindedness, warmth, trust, positive emotions and impulsiveness. See Mats Larsson, Nancy L. Pedersen and Håkan Stattin, 'Associations between iris characteristics and personality in adulthood', *Biological Psychology*, 75, (2007) 165–175.

[41] Gerard of Berry, *Glosule Super Viaticum*, in Wack, pp. 194-205, at pp. 199-201.

aligned with my argument for Margery Kempe's own melancholic temperament and self-fulfilment via the desire-loss hermeneutic that will be elucidated below. It also illustrates a striking connection with the Freudian notion of the 'lost object', bringing into dialogue the medieval and the modern. Thomas Aquinas connects fear directly to love, 'because it is inspired by the threatened withdrawl or unattainability of what is loved'. But Aquinas states that fear results from humoral imbalance, proving that emotion involves physiological changes: 'if fear should develop to the point where it upsets reason, then even mental functioning will be disturbed'.[42]

Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, whilst published much later, in 1621, draws on both ancient and medieval sources and illustrates the longevity of such theories of melancholy in the broader historical reach. Burton writes a specific chapter on *Symptoms of Maids', Nuns', and Widows' Melancholy,* in which he establishes female melancholia as proceeding from the 'vicious vapours' that come from menstrual blood. Such vapours cause an inflammation of the back:

> ...the whole malady proceeds from that inflammation, putridity, black smoky vapours, etc.; from thence comes care, sorrow, and anxiety, obfuscation of spirits, agony, desperation, and the like, which are intended or remitted, *si amatorius accesserit ardor* [should the amatory passion be aroused], or any other violent object or perturbation of the mind. This melancholy may happen to widows, with much care and sorrow, as frequently as it doth, by reason of a sudden alteration of their accustomed course of life, etc; to such as lie in child-bed, *ob suppressam purgationem*; but to nuns and more ancient maids, and some barren women, for the causes abovesaid...[43]

Since Burton includes maids, post-partum women (those in 'child-bed'), widows, ancient maids and barren women, one wonders upon any category of females that he has, in fact, omitted. In this example, all women are subject to the putrid

[42] Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, pp. 79-80.
[43] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), p. 414-5.

vapours that cause inflammation and melancholy, but notably, the ensuing sorrowful emotions increase or relinquish (*intend* or *remit*), depending on the existence of an 'amatory passion' or 'violent object'.[44] Such grief results in 'much solitariness, *weeping*, distraction, etc.' [my emphasis].[45] Once again, the physiological innateness of melancholia appears to be perpetuated, or fulfilled, by the presence or denial of a powerful object of desire, an object whose loss – to return to the Freudian hypothesis where this chapter first began – symbolises a trauma which, in the melancholic, cannot be eased.

My argument for Margery Kempe's melancholia as a perceived cause of her prolonged crying and collapsing rests also on the corollary of the heightened cognitive and emotional receptivity of the melancholic. Throughout history, melancholics have often been accorded an ontological connection with creative energy or brilliance, giving rise to the dichotomy of disorder and giftedness; a predisposition, perhaps, to mystical experience that is paradoxically advantageous. Aristotle first asked 'Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, or are infected by the diseases arising from black bile?'[46] Other ancient writers, like Theophrastus in his book on melancholy, examined the interplay between melancholia and frenzied creativity, and so 'the dark source of genius – already implicit in the word "melancholy" – was uncovered'.[47] In the second century AD, Rufus of Ephesus claimed that melancholics had the gift of prophecy.[48]

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[44] OED **'**intend': To stretch out, extend, expand, increase, intensify. **'**Remit': To give up, resign, or surrender (a right, claim, possession, etc.); to relinquish.
[45] Burton, *Melancholy*, p. 415.
[46] From Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy*, p. 12.
[47] Klibansky et. al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 41.
[48] Ibid., p. 50.

The medieval philosopher Averroës (d. 1198) linked enhanced faculties to melancholic types, regarding their cold and dry constitutions as a necessary foundation for imaginative experience:

> Superiority of imagination, according to Averroës, is possessed by those who have a cold and dry, i.e., melancholic, balance of humours. This is because the proper functioning of the imagination requires images of relatively long duration and good definition that do not change too frequently. Coldness delays the motion which changes the image while dryness causes the image to endure. Melancholic people tend, for this reason and also because the vapours of black bile tend to bring on sleep, to have more frequent and 'truer' dreams. Indeed, they often perceive in waking what others dream when they are asleep.[49]

William of Auvergne (d. 1249) adopted Aristotle's hypothesis of the giftedness of melancholics, although focused more on their predilection for learning and a 'higher degree' of living, turning from vice and worldly pleasure. But 'Nevertheless', he continues, 'though nature affords these aids to illumination and revelation, they are achieved far more abundantly through the grace of the Creator, integrity of living, and holiness and purity'. He also considered the excellence of the melancholic temperament as fitting for the life of ascetic contemplation.[50] Robert Burton concurs with this natural propensity, but suggests an inner sensory perception that is potentially painful, and linked to a 'terrible object', in striking resonance with the object-fixation of the yearning melancholic that we have seen:

> Phantasy, or imagination, which some call estimative, or cogitative... is an inner sense which doth more fully examine the species perceived by common sense, of things present or absent, and keeps them longer, recalling them to mind again, or making new of his own... In melancholy men this faculty is most powerful and strong, <u>and often hurts</u>, producing many monstrous and prodigious things, especially if it be stirred up by some terrible object, presented to it from common sense or memory.[51]

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[49] Averroes, *Epitome of Parva Naturalia*, in Kemp, p. 98. This notion is also apparent in the *Eudemian Ethics.* See Klibansky et. al, *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 36-7.
[50] From Klibansky et. al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 73.
[51] My emphasis. Burton, *Melancholy*, I, p. 159.

Not only is the faculty of imaginative cognition stronger in the melancholic, according to Burton, but that it 'often hurts' by drawing on memories of 'terrible object[s]', illustrates a connection between mystical perception, melancholia and pain that seems to offer an explanation for Kempe's experiences. Dyan Elliott, in writing about mystical rapture and female spirituality, notes how 'complexions, sound or unsound, inform a person's spiritual aptitude', and that 'the humours act as a conduit for the passions which, in turn, have a major impact on the imagination'.[52] In considering the 'ideal types' of medieval complexion, she sees the efficacious potential of the female melancholic: 'another, and more promising, possibility for the female disposition was melancholic, as the dominant humour, black bile, was associated with earth (cold and dry)'.[53] A woman who was naturally melancholic (as I suggest Margery Kempe to be, and as Hildegard of Bingen implies that *she* was) would have a 'physical predisposition to mystical rapture'.[54]

In internalising and mourning that 'terrible object' to which Burton points – the crucified Christ of Kempe's reworked perception – she enacts a self-fulfilment paradigm, perpetuating melancholia. Amy Hollywood identifies a problem for Beatrice of Nazareth and Margaret Ebner in that 'the idealized other

[52] Dyan Elliott, 'The Physiology of Rapture and Female Sprituality', in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and Alastair J. Minnis (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 1997), pp. 141-173, at p. 149. See also Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 205-208.
[53] Ibid., p. 157.
[54] Ibid., p. 159. Here, Elliott exemplifies Hildegard's self-diagnosed melancholic disposition. On the gendering of melancholia, see Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early-Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Lynn Enterline, *The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early-Modern Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Teresa Scott Soufas, *Melancholy and the Secular Mind in Spanish Golden Age Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990); and Julia Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

they incorporate is idealized precisely in his suffering and death. Melancholia here feeds melancholia rather than allaying it – the death of the other leads to the idealization of and desire for one's own death'.[55] For Kempe, this is only partly true, as her ambivalence towards her own death will show. While her tears function as boisterous intrusions to her community at large, they also signify a melancholic woman who is simultaneously reliant on and distraught at the most devastating image of Christian narrative, unable to accept or relinquish it and so forced, like an 'open wound', to bleed her tears of lamentation.

Bleeding Tears

Kempe's tears – as plenitudinous within scholarly debate as in their own existence – are, rather than arbitrary expressions of mystical experience, signifiers of a melancholic complexion: products or articulations of her constitutional receptivity. Like the melancholic's natural predisposition to rapture, Kempe, for the same reasons, I suggest, is predisposed to weeping. As she develops in spiritual maturity and realises the productive value of this weeping as a means of achieving a privileged dialogue with Christ, she also recognises their conventionality in female mystical experience.[56] When she hears her priest read of how 'owr Lord wept' in Jerusalem, as he anticipated the 'myscheuys & sorwys' that would ensue, Kempe weeps 'sor' and cries 'lowde' (143), at once grieving for and identifying with the Christ whose lost body

[55] Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, p. 402.
[56] Kempe's amenuensis trusts in her weeping much more after reading of the crying of Marie d'Oignies and Elizabeth of Hungary. See *BMK* p. 152-3. Kempe may have also been influenced by the ideas of St Jerome and St John Climacus, which inspired Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and which was read to Kempe over a number of years. Julian of Norwich advises Kempe that Jerome 'seyth þat terys turmentyn mor þe Devylle þan don þe peynes of Helle' (43). Kempe envisions St. Jerome in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. In her soul he tells her that her tears are a 'synguler & a specyal ȝyft' (99). Angela of Foligno and Marie d'Oignies caused disruption in church by their crying. See Santha Bhattacharji, *God is an Earthquake: The Spirituality of Margery Kempe* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997), pp. 44-50.

signifies the wounds for which she will infinitely weep. Since melancholics are cold and dry by nature, Kempe is dried further still by her copious crying; further exemplifying the way in which she sustains her melancholia in a hermeneutic of mournful self-fulfilment.[57]

Gregory of Nyssa (b. c. 335), bishop and rhetorician, called tears 'the blood in the wounds of the soul'.[58] The tenth-century German monk, Grimlaïcus of Metz, advised the male recluses to whom his Rule was addressed to cause 'the blood of the confessing soul [to] flow out through tears'.[59] According to Jacobus de Voragine (b. c. 1230), tears are the witnesses of pain, wounding the sinner's heart.[60] The author of *The Prickyng of Love* perceives that his 'yȝen were filled ful of his [Christ's] blod'.[61] McAvoy notes how blood flow and tears were 'constantly allied' in the Middle Ages, tending to be associated with feminine piety because of their association with the suffering of the Virgin as *mater dolorosa* in relation to the wounds of Christ at the foot of the cross.[62] The Middle English translation of Philip of Clairvaux's *vita* of Elizabeth of Spalbeck describes her experiencing a stigmata of the eyes: 'Also y and my felawes, booth abbots and monkes, ate mydnyghte and sum othere oures also, sawe blode comynge oute at hir eyen and dropped doune and dyed the linnyn garment that sche was cladde with ouerest'.[63] As well as from her eyes,

[57] The gendering of this idea is emphasised by the first commentator of *De Secretis Mulierum*, who asserts that 'women cry a great deal because they have much humidity that their body must expel'. From *De Secretis Mulierum*, ed. Lemay, p. 130.
[58] Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio funebris de Placilla* (PG 46.880C), from Mary Carruthers, 'On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument: Chaucer's Lachrymose Troilus in Context', *Representations*, 93, No. 1, 2006, 1-21, at p. 7.
[59] From Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), p. 35.
[60] From Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*, p. 29.
[61] Cited from Vincent Gillespie, 'Strange Images of Death', p. 129.
[62] Ibid.
[63] 'The Middle English Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek', in *Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie D'Oignies*, Jennifer N. Brown (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 27-50, at p. 41. The English transcriber(s) of the MS upon which this volume is based – Oxford, Bodleian

Spalbeek bleeds from wounds in her hands, feet and sides. Philip emphasises the stigmatic nature of the blood, stating 'Wee sawe blode, not allynges rede but as it were mengyd with water, rennynge oute thorowe an hool of hir coot made aboute the pappe'.[64] In describing the blood in the same manner as Christ's blood is depicted in the bible, Elizabeth is shown to engender an *imitatio Christi* whereby her blood is identified precisely with Christ's blood: a recognisable motif for a medieval society where blood piety was a popular concern.[65] The cultural coalescence of blood and tears, made explicit through stigmatic weeping, thus offers Elizabeth an opportunity for the internalisation and re-enactment of trauma that Hollywood conceptualises; her tears are recognised, symbolic articulations of her own weeping wounds.[66] This same motif can be seen in a Marian lyric which describes the Virgin's *blody terys fro my herte roote rebowne*, the 'bloody tears' originating in Mary's heart and springing [rebowne] up to her eyes, emphasising the connection between blood and its fluid transference as a material conduit of emotion.[67]

Library, MS Douce 114 – are not known with certainty, although the Carthusians appear to be the most likely translators. See pp. 9-16 of Brown's volume.

[64] Ibid. That the blood runs from Elizabeth's 'pappe' is significant in its allusion to the medieval connection between blood and breast milk. This idea is considered in Chapter Three of this study.

[65] John 19:34 'But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side, and immediately there came out blood and water'. There is a physiological reason for Christ's spilling of water as well as blood. Extreme blood loss causes shock to the body (now termed 'hypovolemic shock'). Symptoms of this include extreme thirst (as Christ was said to experience: see John 19:28) and the accumulation of fluid around the heart and lungs (now termed 'pericardial effusion' and 'pleural effusion'). The practice of medieval blood piety will be considered in Chapter Three of this study.

[66] On female stigmata see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1987). For the development of stigmatic experience from early Latin patristic commentaries to the laity in the thirteenth century, see Carolyn Muessig, 'Signs of Salvation: The Evolution of Stigmatic Spirituality Before Francis of Assisi', in Church History 82:1 (March 2013), 40–68. On the connection between stigmata and bodily pain and illness, see Gábor Klaniczay, "Illness, Self-Inflicted Body Pain and Supernatural Stigmata: Three Ways of Identification with the Suffering Body of Christ", in *Infirmity in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Social and Cultural Approaches to Health, Weakness and Care*, ed. Christian Krötzl, Katariina Mustakallio and Jenni Kuuliala (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 119-136.

[67] IMEV 3692, 'Mary at the Foot of the Cross', no. 40, l.3, in *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, ed. Karen Saupe (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), TEAMS online edition <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/saupe-middle-english-marian-lyrics>

In a similar way, Margery Kempe's tears symbolise the wounding that she experiences at Calvary, when her crying first becomes loud, causing collapse and the dismantling of her corporeal strength. After her conversion and prior to the Holy Land pilgrimage, she weeps soft 'plentyouws teerys of contricyon' (2): it is the experience of visiting the place of Christ's execution and the friars' descriptions of each stage of his suffering that prompts Kempe to envision the Passion with affective devotion:

> & the forseyd creatur wept & sobbyd so plentyvowsly as þow sche had seyn owyr Lord wyth hir bodyly ey sufferyng hys Passyon at þat tyme. Befor hir in hyr sowle sche saw hym verily be contemplacyon, & þat cawsyd hir to haue compassyon. &, whan þei cam vp on-to þe Mownt of Caluarye, sche fel down þat sche mygth not stondyn ne knelyn but walwyd & wrestyd wyth hir body, spredyng hir armys a-brode, & cryed wyth a lowde voys as þow hir hert xulde a brostyn a-sundyr, for in þe cite of hir sowle sche saw verily & freschly how owyr Lord was crucified. Beforn hir face sche herd and saw in hir gostly sygth þe mornyng of owyr Lady, of Sen Iohn & Mary Mawdelyn, and of many oþer þat louyd owyr Lord. & sche had so gret compassyon & so gret peyn to se owyr Lordys peyn þat sche myt not kepe hir-self fro krying & roryng þow sche xuld a be ded þerfor. And þis was þe fyrst cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon (68).

The verisimilitude with which Kempe recounts this episode is illustrated by the very physical way in which she experiences the traumatic event.[68] She sees Christ as if it were with her 'bodyly ey', in the present moment ('at þat tyme') as opposed to retrieving his image through memory or imagination. This perception, enabling Kempe to experience two realities in simultaneity, echoes scientific theories of the heightened receptivity of the melancholic, and suggests the *truth* of the contemplation as she sees Christ 'verily', in her soul. On Calvary, she collapses in somatic failure, her weeping a symptom of heartbreak

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MED s.v. reboune: To recoil from an impact or a force; be driven back forcibly; spring back, return.

[68] On the connection between image, vision and the body, see Cordelia Warr, 'Re-reading the relationship between Devotional Images, Visions, and the Body: Clare of Montefalco and Margaret of Città di Castello', *Viator* 38 (2007), 217-49.

– of lovesickness – for the lost object of her desire ('hir hert xulde a brostyn a-sundyr'), her cries in 'lowde voys' the thundering articulation of loss, threatening the annihilation of her physical self even if the conclusion is her own death: 'þow sche xuld a be ded þerfor'. Such co-suffering suggests the internalisation of Christ's crucifixion within her own body, emphasised by the interiorising of Jerusalem itself inside her soul: 'in the cite of hir sowle sche saw veryly'. In fact, Kempe tells Christ that if she might 'wepyn [in hell] & mornyn for þi lofe as I do her, Helle xuld not noyin me, but it xulde be a maner of Heuyn' (215). To incorporate, and to thus perceive, the event of the Passion, Kempe shows us how the wounds of Christ are her own, their painful inculcation revealed outwardly by the cries of her grief which she wishes to perpetuate.

Such vociferous weeping lasts for ten years, climaxing at Easter time when Kempe's weeping causes her physical weakness[69]: 'And euery Good Friday in alle þe forseyd ȝerys sche was wepyng & sobbyng v er vj owrys to-gedyr & þerwyth cryed ful lowde many tymes so þat sche myth not restreyn hir þerfro, which madyn hir ful febyl & weke in hir bodily mytys' (140). Despite mental and physical exhaustion, Kempe seeks out the discomfort, fearing its loss and subsequent obstruction of Christ's grace: 'And þerfor, Lord, I schal not sesyn, whan I may wepyn, for to wepyn for hem plentyuowsly, spede ȝyf I may. And, ȝyf þu wylt, Lord, þat I sese of wepyng, I prey þe take me owt of þis world' (142). The fear of losing her gift of tears is so acute that it is a reason for mortal departure, as those tears are the very representation of Christ's presence in her soul. As Santha Bhattachaji suggests, the tears represent 'an intense joy', arising from 'a paradoxical sense of the almost unbearable presence of

[69] Kempe's boisterous crying 'enduryd þe terme of x ȝer' (p. 140).

Christ'.[70] Their absence, in contrast, suggests a spiritual dryness, or *acedia*, a state which Mary Carruthers notes can be remedied by weeping: '[t]ears' effect upon a barren soul is life-giving' because they are 'moist and hot', balancing and softening the cold and hard constitution of the spiritually bereft individual.[71] As Evagrius Ponticus [d. 399] writes, 'Pray first for the gift of tears so that by means of sorrow you may soften your native rudeness'.[72] Indeed, when Julian of Norwich experiences great sickness and pain she is 'as baren and as drye as [she] had never had comfort but litille'.[73] Alvarez de Miraval (fl. 1590) notes how one can 'resolve with many tears the evil humours of the soul'.[74] Kempe's tears are therefore an embodiment of grace, of which she desires limitless quantities: 'I wolde I had a welle of teerys' (140-1). That well of tears is coexistent with the open wounds for which she weeps, constructing an infinite process of mourning and melancholia which has the paradoxical benefit of retaining the lost Christic figure, signifying the antithesis of spiritual dryness. As Carruthers illustrates, medieval writers saw weeping as the *re-balancing* of a cold and hard constitution by making it moist. Tears denote spiritual fecundity, providing multipliable nourishment. Beyond this theological understanding, and in relation to medical theory and melancholia, Margery Kempe's tears can be viewed as *reanimating* the melancholic state by purging moisture and drying her further. Christ informs Kempe that God, Mary, and all the saints in heaven are sustained by her tears: 'þu hast ȝouyn hem drynkyn ful many tymes wyth teers of thyn eyne' (52). Her tears are the drink of angels, too, and medicinally-potent:

[70] Santha Bhattachaji, 'Tears and Screaming: Weeping in the Spirituality of Margery Kempe', in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, ed. Kimberly C. Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 229-41 (p. 229).
[71] Carruthers, 'On Affliction', p. 7.
[72] Ibid., p. 8.
[73] Julian of Norwich, 'A Revelation of Love', in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Watson and Jenkins, p. 331.
[74] Angel González de Pablo, 'The medicine of the soul', p. 510.

they are ‘very pyment to hem’ (161). Similarly, as Julian of Norwich tells Kempe during her visit there, tears are torturous to the diabolic: ‘for lerom seyth þat terys turmentyn mor þe Devylle þan don þe peynes of Helle’ (43). But they simultaneously maintain the conditions of dryness and cold which perpetuate melancholy – and mystical perceptivity – in the predisposed individual.

When Kempe becomes temporarily barren of tears, such spiritual fecundity is lost:

> ...sche was sumtyme so bareyn fro teerys a day er sumtyme half a day & had so gret peyne for desyr þat sche had of hem þat sche wold a ȝouyn al þis worlde, ȝyf it had ben hir, for a fewe teerys, er a suffyrd ryth gret bodily peyne for to a gotyn hem wyth (199).

Her ‘gret peyne for desyr’ reveals a lovesickness for which she would sacrifice the earth, while the incorporation of the term ‘bareyn’ further symbolises the status of her tears as indicators of spiritually fertile potential.[75] Not only is her very desire for tears painful, but she emphasises her preparedness to suffer ‘*gret* bodily peyne’ in order to retrieve them, evidencing the indefinite boundary between the somatic and the spiritual, the fluidity of internalised and externalised experience, and the way in which Kempe uses pain as an ascetic device. When Christ removes for a time Kempe’s ‘lowde’ crying, replaced by a more ‘stille’ sorrow ‘as God wolde mesur it hys-selfe’ (155), the public accusations of hypocrisy initialise somatic pain, but also, spiritual progress: ‘& so slawndir & bodily angwisch fel to hir on euery syde, & al *was encresyng of hir gostly comfort*’ (my emphasis,156). Christ’s announcement of this removal of her more dramatic demonstrations of piety illustrates the enactment of the *Christus medicus* tradition, increasing and decreasing her tears in a pseudo-medical action where, just as humoral theory recommends the increase or

[75] MED s.v: barein 1 (a) Barren (woman); sterile (woman or man). 2 Unproductive, non-bearing, fruitless. 4 Intellectually or morally sterile.

purgation of humours, so God manipulates Kempe's weeping ability in order to maximise her spiritual health.[76] Such a notion is also evident during a vision received on a Good Friday, where the sight of Christ being crucified engenders such a traumatic perception that a quasi-suicide cry is cause for her physical removal to the Prior's cloister:

> [The liturgical re-enactment of Christ's death drew] hir mende al holy in-to þe Passyon of owr Lord Crist Ihesu, whom sche beheld wyth hir *gostly eye* in þe sight of hir sowle as verily as þei sche had seyn hys precyows body betyn, scorgyd, & crucified wyth hir *bodily eye*, which syght & gostly beheldyng wrowt be grace so feruently in hir mende, wowndyng hir wyth pite & compassion, þat sche sobbyd, roryd, & cryed, and, spredyng hir armys a-brood, seyd wyth lowde voys, "I dey, I dey", þat many man on hir wonderyd & merueyled what hir eyled. And þe more sche besijd hir to kepyn fro crying, þe lowdar sche cryed, for it was not in hir powyr to take it ne leuyn it but as God wolde send it. Than a preyst toke hir in hys armys & bar hir in-to þe Priowrys Cloistyr for to latyn hir takyn þe eyr, supposyng sche schulde not ellys han enduryd, hir *labowr* was so greet (my emphases,140).

As Kempe attempts to quieten and cease crying, the 'lowdar' her cries become; she reveals that it is 'not in hir powyr' to stop, as God is in control of her weeping. Crying is therefore conceptualised as a phenomenon outside her control and a subjection to which she must dutifully submit: a product of divine will – and of the melancholia which facilitates such visionary receptivity. The dramatic oscillation between ghostly and bodily perception here produces a tension that defies the straightforward categorisation of Kempe's experience, yet also illustrates the authenticity of her understanding. In aligning her two 'eyes' as one, the painful reality of Christ's tortured flesh, perceived through her ghostly eye, is as immediate and acute as her bodily eye would have it, making 'real' the event and dissolving any distinctions between worldly and spiritual experience. The real-time portrayal of Christ's mutilated body is constructed

[76] The tradition of *Christus medicus* is examined in the context of healing in Chapter Four of this study.

through the echoing of rhetorical triads; Christ is 'betyn, scorgyd, & crucifyed', whilst Kempe 'sobbyd, roryd, & cryed'. Similarly, that the climax of her crying out 'I dey, I dey', occurs in the present tense engenders such an urgent immediacy, representing a final articulation of her pain as she mourns Christ's loss; so great that the inevitable outcome must be her death. The intensity of this vision and the blurring of boundaries cause Kempe to be literally 'wownd[ed]' by her compassion; the flesh and blood of the scene emphasise real corporeal damage and the endless outpouring of blood and tears. And, like Mary's lamentation, whose role in the scene is diminished by Kempe's own performance, the portrayal of a great 'labowr' reminds us that it is the pain and love of Christ, and the spiritual fecundity of woundedness, with which she is now identified.[77] Metaphors of spiritual birthing are seen elsewhere: 'sumtyme sche was al on a watyr wyth þe labowr of þe crying' (185), and suggest a drenching in fluid, much like the waters of the amniotic sac which nourish generatively.[78] Kempe joins a well-established tradition in such piety in her 'ghostly labowr', as Karma Lochrie argues. The Dominican theologican Felix Fabri (b. 1441) documented that female visitors to Jerusalem often 'cried out, roared, and wept, as though giving birth'.[79] Different literary depictions of desperation and resignation to death are seen in texts such as Chaucer's 'Book of the Duchess', where the poet's insomnia and sorrow is such that he anticipates death: 'and thus melancholye / And dreed I have for to dye'.[80]

[77] MED s.v: labour 1) Work, esp. hard work. 2) Pains taken. 4 b) Pain, sickness, disease, also, the active phase of an intermittent disease; of birthe. Though the primary meaning of 'labour' is hard work, there are other meanings which involve birthing and generation.
[78] Windeatt denotes 'al on a watyr' as 'drenched' (*BMK* p. 338).
[79] From Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 192.
[80] 'The Book of the Duchess', ll. 23-24, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 330. On lovesickness and suicide in Chaucer's works, see Rebecca McNamara, 'Wearing Your Heart on Your Face: Reading Lovesickness and the Suicidal Impulse in Chaucer', *Literature and Medicine*, 33 (2015), 258-78.

Kempe is clearly able, in agonising temporality, to substitute Christ's painfully sacrificial experience for her own.

Such *realness* of mourning is explained in Chapter Sixty, when a priest is critical of Kempe's tears after she is affected by the sight of a pieta in Norwich:

> 'Damsel, Ihesu is ded long sithyn'. Whan hir crying was cesyd, sche seyd to þe preste, 'Sir, hys deth is as fresch to me as he had deyd þis same day, & so me thynkyth it awt to be to ȝow & to alle Cristen pepil. We awt euyr to han mende of hys kendnes & euyr thynkyn of þe dolful deth þat he deyd for vs' (148).

Not only is Christ's death perpetually 'fresch' in Kempe's perception, but she regards the ongoing contemplation of his 'dolful deth' to be the duty of the good Christian: to '*euyr*' have mind of his kindness. In foregrounding the *euyr*-ness – the *eternity* of mournful meditation – Kempe establishes herself not only as a model for devotional activity, rebuking the priest, but as a mourner in perpetuity.[81] At St Stephen's Church, she falls to the ground and roars at the grave of the vicar, generating such 'holy thowtys & so holy mendys þat sche *myth not mesuryn* hir wepyng ne hir crying' (147); an innumerate capacity for mental pain that is reminiscent of the advice she receives from Julian of Norwich: '[God] makyth vs to askyn & preyn wyth mornynggys & wepyngys so plentyvowsly þat þe terys may not be nowmeryd' (43), and like Chaucer's Man in Black, whose mourning consists of infinite pain: 'This ys my peyne wythoute red [remedy], / Alway deynge and be not ded'.[82] This boundlessness, whereby Kempe's tears signify a teleological outpouring of melancholia, is exemplified by her uncontrollable crying on Palm Sundays. Her feelings are so great during one episode that 'sche myth not *beryn* it (my emphasis)', again beholding Christ

[81] On this episode and Kempe's multitemporality, see Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Margery Kempe', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. 222-239, esp. 231-2.
[82] 'The Book of the Duchess', ll. 587-8, p. 337.

in her ‘gostly syght as verily as he had ben a-forn hir in hir bodily syght’ (184-5). The homogeneity of interior and exterior perception compels her to articulate mystical experience outwardly: ‘sche *must nedys* wepyn, cryin, & sobbyn whan sche be-held hir Sauyowr suffyr so gret peynys for hir lofe’ (185). In this way, her crying is not the hysterical language of a woman religious, an idea proposed by several scholars, so much as an interiorised necessity: the reversal of that expression; the emanation of what is already there.[83] As a melancholic, Kempe’s phenomenological experience *must* emanate through weeping, as she ‘melt[s] al in-to teerys’ (124). This uncontrollable expulsion of emotion is illustrated when the Palm Sunday sermon causes her to burst outwards. She could ‘no lengar kepyn þe fir of lofe clos wyth-inne hir brest, but, *whebyr sche wolde er not*, it wolde aperyn wyth-owte-forth swech as was closyd wyth-inne-forth’ (185). That ‘sche xulde a *brostyn* for pite’ depicts Kempe’s conflation of her tears with her death. In imagining that her very body will explode with the pressure of her suffering evidences what Jeffrey J. Cohen sees as her ‘emptying herself from her own body’.[84] As Vincent Gillespie has argued, in order to be open to change, one *must* undertake a process of ‘*kenosis*’, or ‘self-

[83] Hope Phyllis Weissman accepts Kempe’s ‘hysteria’, but in the context of its reinterpretation as a means of achieving agency over oppression. See ‘Margery Kempe in Jerusalem: *Hysterica Compassio* in the Late Middle Ages’. For an example of 1960s scholarship that ‘psychologises’ Kempe, see François Vandenbrouke in Jean Leclerq, François Vandenbrouke, and Louis Boyer, eds., *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*, trans. 1960 (London: Burns and Oats, 1968), part 2, p. 426. See also David Knowles, who argues that there is little depth and sobriety in Kempe’s book, but a ‘large hysterical element in Margery’s personality’ in *The English Mystical Tradition*, p. 146. In 1981, Wolfgang Riehle regarded Kempe as having a ‘sick, neurotic psyche’: *The Middle English Mystics*, p. 96. Julia Long suggests that Kempe ‘experiences something of a rebirth through her Saviour, with her “ghostly labours” at Calvary resembling an hysterical childbirth’. See ‘Mysticism and Hysteria: The Histories of Margery Kempe and Anna O.’, in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature*, ed. Evans and Johnson, pp. 88-111. William B. Ober sees Kempe’s experiences as ‘not so much a matter of heightened awareness or altered consciousness as one of increased autosuggestibility, and that is the denominator common to both hysteria and mysticism’. See ‘Margery Kempe: Hysteria and Mysticism Reconciled’, *Literature and Medicine*, 4 (1985), 24-40, p. 39.

[84] Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 173.

emptying'; an act of courage and letting-go in order to achieve God's grace.[85] Kempe's dependence on weeping for her identification and very existence – that she must bleed the tears of Christ – reveals a difficult passage ahead: a helpless route towards annihilation.

Although Amy Hollywood suggests that female mystics such as Beatrice of Nazareth and Margaret Ebner idealise and desire their own death in identification with Christ, Kempe's conceptualisation of her own death is more ambivalent.[86] Whilst her desire for contemplative pain persists, she reveals a fear of physical pain and dying that emphasises the importance of melancholic weeping over corporeal pain for her construction of self. Kempe imagines 'what deth sche mygth deyn for Crystys sake', however, the nature of the death must be 'soft' as it is punctuated by an underlying fear:

> Hyr þow[t] sche wold a be slayn for Goddys lofe, but dred for þe poynt of deth, & þerfor sche ymagyned hyr-self þe most soft deth, as hir thowt, for dred of inpacyens, þat was to be bowndyn hyr hed & hir fet to a stokke & hir hed to be smet of wyth a scharp ex for Goddys lofe (30).

God is pleased with Margery's willingness to die in his name, although her choice of a quick and 'soft' death contrasts with the embracing of pain that Christ communicates; 'it lykyn me wel þe peynes þat I haue sufferyd for þe' (30). The pain exchange is neither literal nor reciprocal as Kempe's earthly reluctance to succumb to extremes of bodily anguish marks a gulf over which she is seemingly unable to cross: Christ's endurance of corporeal pain is a model about which she willingly suffers spiritually, but is unwilling to mirror physically. This fear of death regularly occurs during periods of sickness, for example, during her pilgrimage in Venice: 'owyr Lord mad hir so seke þat sche

[85] Vincent Gillespie, 'Dead Still / Still Dead', *The Mediaeval Journal*, 1 (2011), 53-78 (p. 60-3).
[86] Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia*, p. 402. Kempe's attitude towards death and dying is examined more closely in Chapter Five of this study, in the context of her senescence.

wend to be ded, & sythyn sodeynly he mad hir hool a-ȝen' (66). And on her return to Lynn she falls 'in gret sekenes in so mech þat sche was anoyntyd for dowt of deth' (104).[87] Kempe's feeling of incompletion in relation to her spiritual pathway is revealed when she then asks God to allow her to go on pilgrimage to the shrine of St James at Santiago de Compostela before she dies. Though she is reassured that she will not die yet, her mortal anxiety is paralysing. Like the crying which threatens to split apart her body's frame, her pain is such that to remain existent seems impossible: 'owr Lord Ihesu Crist seyd to hir in hir sowle þat sche xuld [not] dey ȝet, and sche wend hir-selfe þat sche xulde not a leuyd for hir peyn was so gret' (104).

Tears, then, are the liquid manifestation of Kempe's own disintegration. Unlike the female ascetics who seek out bodily anguish in their desire for Christic imitation, Kempe dismantles herself in a sacrificial offering via a complex outpouring of melancholy, a grief which she cannot control, and from which she cannot escape.[88] When secreted in the Prior's cloister, she cries 'as ȝyf hir sowle & hir body xulde a partyd a-sundyr' (138). She is on the verge of rupture, of fragmentation; a very woundedness of self that signifies Kempe's own version of the violent *imitatio* of her contemporaries. Though she does not desire death in the form of accident or illness, it is her only option in the event of the terminal drying up of her tears: 'And, ȝyf þu wylt, Lord, þat I sese of wepyng, I prey þe take me owt of þis world' (I.57.142). It is this unyielding boundedness to tearful mourning that preserves her infinite union with Christ, yet which

[87] MED s.v. doute: 3. (a) Anxiety; fear, fright; for doute of, for fear of (death, etc.). That Kempe is given extreme unction indicates the severity of her illness.
[88] See Sarah Macmillan, "Mortifying the Mind: Asceticism, Mysticism and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114", in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VIII*, ed. Eddie Jones (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 109-124.

inspires the scepticism of her *euen crysten* who are as divided in their diagnoses as Kempe is in her burst and fractured body.

The Pathology of Weeping

The collapsing and bursting of Kempe's pained body in the public and sacred sites in which she operates gives rise to the tendency of her onlookers to pathologise her experience; to interpret her as sick or disordered. When Wenslawe, the German priest from St. John Lateran's in Rome, is given the gift of comprehension of Margery's dialogue, and vice versa, Margery falls to the ground in visible emotion: [89]

> Þan sche wept bittyrly, sche sobbyd boistowsly & cryed ful lowde & horybly þat þe pepil was oftyn-tymes aferd & gretly astoyned, demyng sche had ben vexyd wyth sum euyl spirit er a sodeyn sekenes, not leuyng it was þe werk of God but raþar sum euyl spirit er a sodeyn sekenes, er ellys symulacyon & ypocrisy falsly feyned of hir owyn self (83).

These 'pepil', Kempe's fellow pilgrims from England and perhaps also those worshippers from the local community in Rome, deny the authenticity of her emotions and instead offer the diagnoses of diabolism, illness, or fraud. Such is the contempt, that her countrymen forsake her, unable to reconcile themselves to her displays of otherness, convinced that Kempe's *boystows* demonstrations of affectivity emanate from some disorder or disfunction.[90] They are 'aferd' and 'gretly astoyned', indicating, in fact, a reversal of affliction whereby the exteriority of public fear and bewilderment, as opposed to Kempe's own interior

[89] St John Lateran's Church may have added significance for Kempe because Bridget of Sweden was said to have been seen in 'levitation' there. Hope Emily Allen notes how a special interest by the clergy of this church may have been shown at her canonisation. Had Kempe been aware of these events (as she would likely have been), the efficacy of her own mystical experience in the same church would have held extra value through following in the historical wake of her model, St. Bridget. See *BMK* p. 300 n. 82/10.

[90] MED s.v. boistous: 1(a) crudeness, an unpolished art, noisy, loud (b) strong and powerful. 2: dominated by the element 'earth': gross, coarse, opaque; 5: 'thick' blood.

experience, is problematic: indeed, Kempe's gratitude for her weeping has been illustrated above.[91] The discomfort of the community at the witnessing of her anguished sobbing presents an exclusion paradigm where Kempe demonstrates a mystical esotericism which her devout onlookers cannot share; the excessiveness of her response must indicate something peculiar or privileged. Furthermore, she is told by God that she is a mirror to man; a holy reflection of others' sins, for which she strives to weep and to sorrow. In functioning as a model of devotion and repentance within her parish, Kempe's tears thus become symbols of the failure of the congregation, liquid signifiers of the mass-salvation that she is pledged to effect, and a reason for that congregation's antipathy:[92]

> Dowtyr, þu hast a good ȝele of charite in þat þu woldist alle men were sauyd, & so wolde I. & þei seyn þat so wolde þei, but þu maist wel se þat þei wol not hem-self be sauyd, for alle þei wil sumtyme heryn þe word of God, but þei wil not alwey don þeraftyr, & þei wil not sorwyn hem-self for her synnys, ne þei wil suffyr non oþer to suffir for hem. Neuyr-þe-lesse, dowtyr, I haue ordeynd þe to be a *merowr* a-mongys hem for to han gret sorwe þat þei xulde takyn exampil by þe for to haue sum litil sorwe in her hertys for her synnys þat þei myth þerthorw be sauyd, but þei louyn not to heryn of sorwe ne of contricyon (my emphasis,186).

That Kempe is a mirror of weeping contrition to her onlookers not only noisily reflects back their religious shortcomings, but makes that weeping intrusive both audibly and visually, seeping into others like an uninvited message. Jeffrey Cohen suggests that 'Kempe's sobs and screams carried her out of herself, into the bodies of her auditors and into the wideness of the world', and so Kempe's voice, in its non-verbal, liquid form, becomes the authorised and invasive voice

[91] MED s.v. astoined 1: Of persons: stupified, stunned; insensate, unconscious. 2.) Upset, bewildered, dumfounded; perplexed, embarrassed**,** in bewilderment.

[92] Conversely, Kempe's sorrow and contrition does have a sanctifying effect on those with whom she communes. After meeting Kempe several times, Thomas Marshall, a man from Newcastle, weeps tears of contrition and compunction both night and day. Marshall is recorded as collapsing bodily in a manner similar to Kempe: 'he fel down & myth not beryn it' (108). Likewise, when in Rome, the 'good women' have compassion for Kempe's sorrow, '& gretly meruelyng of hir wepyng & of hir crying, meche þe mor þei louyd hir' (99).

of God on earth.[93] 'Þe Myrour Off chastite', in the late fourteenth-century religious handbook *The Pore Caitif*, which was intended for lay use, establishes itself as a 'myrour of maidens [who should] loke þee þerinne, as folower of þe mekest maide, mairie goddis modir of heuene'.[94] Similarly, as Sister Mary Brady points out, the author of the early fifteenth-century *Myroure of Oure Ladye*, written for the sisters of Syon Abbey, explains its title as designed to emphasise how its readers

> …shulde se her [the Virgin] therin as in a myrouore, and so be styred the more deuoutly to prayse her, & to knowe where ye fayle in her praysinges, and to amende: tyll ye may come there ye may se her face to face wythouten eny myrroure'.[95]

Kempe is therefore designated the highest honour by Christ, as a *merowr* of sorrow upon whom others should gaze as an example, comparable even to the Virgin Mary whose infinite mourning is immortalised in the ubiquitous iconography of Mary at the Foot of the Cross. It is little wonder, then, that Kempe's parish 'audience' sometimes recoil at her weeping, as her privileged devotion is reflected back to them in illumination of where they, themselves, might *fayle in her praysinges*.

Similar discomfort is exemplified by the esteemed Grey Friar who comes to Lynn to be in convent and who is warned of Kempe's outbursts by the parish priest. Despite her attempts to remain silent in church she is unable to bear the anguish of thinking on Christ's Passion; 'Sche kept hir fro crying as long as sche

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[93] Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, p. 156.
[94] '*The Pore Caitif*, edited from MS Harley 2336 with Introduction and Notes', M.T. Brady (PhD dissertation, Fordham University, 1954), p. 176. There exist in the region of forty-four known MSS of complete or partial texts, demonstrating the widespread popularity of *The Pore Caitif.* On the issue of reformist devotion in *The Pore Caitif*, see Nicole R. Rice, 'Reformist Devotional Reading: The *Pore Caitif* in British Library, MS Harley 2322', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VIII*, ed. E.A. Jones, pp. 177-94.
[95] *The Myroure of Our Ladye*, p. 4. The author of *The Myroure of Our Ladye* is unknown, but thought to perhaps be Thomas Gascoigne. See *The Myroure*, pp. viii-ix. Also see Brady, *The Pore Caitif*, p. cxxxii.

myth, and þan at þe last sche *brast owte* wyth a gret cry & cryid wondyr sor' (149), and so the friar eventually has her removed from the church. Like the psychophysical (to use Medcalf's term) melting of inner and outer that was examined above, Kempe's sorrow is uncontainable, resisting somatic restriction and instead diffusing amongst her onlookers in an eruption that sees her turn, to all intents and purposes, inside out. Yet, just as medieval culture conceives of the division between body and soul as fluid and diffusive, so, in the forceful projection of Kempe's cries and screams into the ears and consciousness of her spectators, the absolute division between the individual and her auditors – her pathologising community – can be regarded as softened. Through Margery Kempe's noisy bursting and invading of others' cognition, she explodes or destroys the ontological separation of the individual from the other, disorientating onlookers and afflicting or infecting them with her own agonising grief. Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson suggest the possibility of 'imaginative projection'; that the ability of the sentient human to empathise can effect a transcendence of bodily containment:

> A major function of the embodied mind is empathic. From birth, we have the capacity to imitate others, to vividly imagine being another person, doing what that person does, experiencing what that person experiences. The capacity for imaginative projection is a vital cognitive facility. Experientially, it is a form of 'transcendence'. Through it, one can experience something akin to 'getting out of our bodies' – yet it is very much a bodily capacity.[96]

That Kempe is a divinely-appointed *merowr* of the people makes such potential, empathetic imagining doubly uncomfortable. Dhira B. Mahoney regards Kempe's tears as substitute words, but at the same time, 'themselves

[96] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 565.

language', as they are 'a sign of her power, her link with the Other'.[97] Not only must her spectators recoil from the sight and sound of her agonised sorrowing, but their simultaneous exclusion from Kempe's revelation and contrition results in a conflicted interplay of aversion and desire. But such witnessing could be edifying, according to Carolyn Muessig, as 'performers' of Christ's Passion such as Elizabeth of Spalbeek [*fl.* Second half of the thirteenth century] and Margarita of Cortona (d. 1297) 'acted as a conduit between God and the Christian community', transforming their audiences with their demonstrations of suffering and altering their onlookers' 'interior disposition'.[98]

The friar eventually tires of her outbursts, declaring 'I wolde þis woman wer owte of þe chirche; sche noyith þe pepil' (149). Not only does Kempe seemingly annoy her spectators, who 'turnyd a-ȝen hir', but the priests who approach the Friar for her cause plead with him to 'suffyr hir paciently' as 'oþer good men had suffyrd hir be-fore'; rather a veiled insult that recommends a reluctant tolerance, a *suffering* of her diffused sorrow, rather than an admiration of her piety (150). He also regards Margery as ill: 'he leuyd it was a cardiakyl er sum oþer sekenesse'; a 'psychophysical explanation' in the words of Medcalf, that indicates heart disease or a 'superfluity of humours at the heart'.[99] (Interestingly, Avicenna notes how an excess of black bile [the humour of melancholy] causes 'burning in the cardiac orifice', suggesting that perhaps the friar's diagnosis was not altogether unlikely.[100]) Richard Rolle experienced a fire

[97] Dhira B. Mahoney, 'Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power over Language', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York and London: Garland, 1992), pp. 37-50, at pp. 40-41.
[98] Carolyn Muessig, 'Performance of the Passion: the enactment of devotion in the later Middle Ages', in *Visualising Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 129-142.
[99] Medcalf, 'Inner and outer', p. 116.
[100] Avicenna, *Canon of Medicine*, in *Avicenna's Medicine: A New Translation of the 11th Century Canon with Practical Applications for Integrative Health Care*, trans. Mones Abu-Asab, Hakima Amri and Marc S. Micozzi (Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 2013), p. 196.

of love in his breast; for example, ‘My heart grew hot within me, and fire shall burn in my thinking’.[101] Nonetheless, the friar attempts a negotiation whereby if she admits a ‘kendly seknes’ – a medical false confession, of sorts – he will tolerate her crying: to pathologise Kempe’s tears, to categorise her as infirm and subject to the frailties and failures of the female body, is safer territory than the possibility of accepting her mystical perception and therefore her potential lack of orthodoxy. Kempe refuses to comply, knowing ‘be reuelacyon & be experiens of werkyng it was no sekenes’, and so experiences what she perceives to be ‘gret peyne’ at being excluded from his sermons and being socially ostracised (151).[102] Here, ‘peyne’ lies not in physical affliction, or even in the melancholic diathesis that gives rise to her weeping and sorrowing, but in the psychological distress caused by the male clerics who are empowered to expel her from the very Christian ceremonies that sustain her soul. Kempe is therefore doubly marginalised via an exclusion from liturgical rite and removal into the category of the medically-disordered female whose problematic body required pathologisation. Indeed, Kempe prays to God (to no avail) that he would

> ...take þes cryingys fro me in þe tyme of sermownys þat I cry not at þin holy prechyng & late me hauyn hem be my-self alone so þat I be not putt fro heryng of þin holy wordys, for *grettar peyn may I not suffyr* in þis worlde þan be put fro þi holy worde heryng. And, ȝyf I wer in preson, *my most peyn* xulde be þe forberyng of þin holy wordys & of þin holy sermownys’ (my emphases; 181-2).

[101] *Richard Rolle: The English Writings*, translated and edited by Rosamund S. Allen (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 43.
[102] Even Margery’s priestly amanuensis was included in the body of people who turned their backs on her after the Friar’s declaration: ‘of þe which þe same preyste was on þat afterward wrot þis boke & was in purpose neuyr to a leuyd hir felyngys aftyr’ (p. 152). It is only after reading of Mary of Oignies’ life (b. c. 1177), which was authenticated by male redaction (Jacques de Vitry, her confessor, wrote two books of her life), that Margery’s scribe returns to her with contrition.

Kempe begs for her tears to become private, as the way in which they affront the friar, who wishes to determine a medical cause – a 'kendly seknes' – increases her pain through exclusion from church. But because of Kempe's violent sobbing, and given the medical texts in circulation in the late Middle Ages and the religious clerics that were reading them, it is unsurprising that Margery's community interpret her as somatically dysfunctional.[103] For example, theories of the suffocation of the womb abounded and were based on Galenic and Aristotelian writings which held that certain imbalances of the body or temperature cause the womb to be drawn upward.[104] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* describes the extreme visibility of the painful condition's symptoms and the swooning motion that could be easily confused with Kempe's collapsing and crying:

> Suffocacion of þe maryce ys an angvych þat doth women to suell at þe poynt of here herte & makyth hem to *sovnde & to fall dovne*, þer tethe yonyde to-gedyre with-owt dravynge ore schevynge of breth, & but they be holpe þe sonere in suche case hit ys wondure & euere they releue.[105]

The way in which medieval medical and theological texts connect the uterus and the heart is illustrated in this passage by the heart swelling in direct response to a uterine problem. Symptoms of 'sounding' and falling down are reminiscent of Kempe's boisterous weeping and swooning, which is repeated later in *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* when the effects of impaired

[103] See Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 325-331, for a handlist of owners of *Trotula* manuscripts in the vernacular in England in the Middle Ages. Most of these owners are noblemen or men of religious orders. Similarly, that universities in northern and western Europe were attended primarily by the clergy because of literacy levels meant that many medieval scholars of medicine were clergymen. Perhaps this is a viable explanation for the conviction of the 'Great Friar' – whose education would have quite possibly included medical scholasticism – that Kempe was indeed sick. We are told on pp. 153-4 of the *Boke* that her scribe read *The Prykke of Lofe* by pseudo-Bonaventure, the life of Elizabeth of Hungary, and Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*, which, in contrast, support the tradition of pious weeping. The priest reads also reads these texts to Kempe, as well as the bible, St Brede's book and Walter Hilton's work (*BMK* p. 143).

[104] See Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman*, p. 210.

[105] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 46.

breathing caused by suffocation mean that 'þe body ys as dede. & þat ys cause þat women oþer-whyll *ly a-s'v'ovnynge as þey were dede*'.[106] Similar symptoms according to the 'Book on the Conditions of Women', one of the *Trotula* texts, state that 'Sometimes the woman is contracted so that the head is joined to the knees, and she lacks vision, and she loses the function of the voice, the nose is distorted, the lips are contracted and she grits her teeth, and the chest is elevated upward beyond what is normal'.[107] Such bodily contortions and disruptions are reminiscent of the muffled noises and flailing exhibited by Kempe in church.

The causes of suffocation rest predominantly with the cold sinews of the uterus seeking heat from other internal organs, moving around the body as if it were an animated and self-governed being of its own. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* states:

> The ij anguysch ys suffocacyon of matrice, þat is whan þe matrice rysyth out of hys ryȝht plase & goyth ouer-hy, & þe cause þer-of I schall schev yow by resonne. I have tolde yow here be-fore þat þe matryce is made of synow & eche synov be kynde ys colde & eche þing þat ys colde sekyth hete, & þer-fore þe matrice þat ys cold of hym-selfe, yf hit be not holp with oþer thyngis, hit sekyth hete & so sume tymme hit goyth vp to þe most hottest place of þe body of woman, þat ys þe hert, þe lyuyre, þe mylte & þe longys, þe wyche cleue to-gedyre a-boute þe stomack. And be-cause þat all þe breth þat we draw comyth by contynuall clappynge of þe longis & whan þe matrice, þat ys full of synovs, tochyth þe longis, hit pressyth hem & comburth hem þat þey may not meve ne clappe for-to drav brethe & whan þe breth may not in ne ovt, þe body ys as dede. & þat ys cause þat women oþer-whyll ly a-s'v'ovnynge as þey were dede'. [108]

In the *Timaeus*, Plato compares the womb to a living creature – an animal.[109] Hippocrates discussed the condition of uterine displacement which

[106] My emphasis. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 50.
[107] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula,* p. 85.
[108] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 50.
[109] Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 173.

also referred to the 'hysterical bolus', known 'as early as the high Middle Ages, especially through the *De Mulierum Affectibus*'.[110] Symptoms of suffocation also depend on the prevailing humour; a dominance of the black bile of melancholy can cause disturbances in vision, and signs of madness.[111] Hippocrates in *The Sacred Disease* notes how patients with an excess of bile are noisier and more restless; a further connection to Kempe's outward signification.[112] For the medieval doctor, suffocation of the womb was caused fundamentally by the retention of seed in virgins and widows (a point that will be developed in the second chapter of this study). Such retained matter could even lead to madness, spasm and fainting:

> If the retained substance consisted of menstrual blood, there was a great danger that madness might set in, for menstrual blood contained a mixture of the four humours; when melancholy was overabundant in it, its spreading to the brain could lead to serious disorders of the reason. The spermatic form [of suffocation] was nonetheless the most pernicious; it gave rise to the severest suffocations and spasms, going as far as fainting fits and apparent death.[113]

Indeed, uterine disorders were known to 'trovbelyth þe braynne', and Kempe's weeping is often so great that it is if 'as sche xulde a deyid þerwyth'; that some cognitive process has effected somatic collapse (139).[114] Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), the visionary, preacher and healer, rejects diagnoses of insanity, however, instead suggesting that those people dominant in black bile are prone to evil thought:

> Those who have an excess of bile are not insane, but they are assailed by many wicked thoughts in denial of God, and they think

[110] Jacquart and Thomasset, p. 174.
[111] Jacques Despars' late medieval commentary on Avicenna's *Canon* discusses the *conversio* of suffocation into individual outcomes. See Jacquart and Thomasset, p. 175.
[112] From Kemp, p. 115.
[113] Jacquart and Thomasset, p. 175.
[114] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* refers to the troubled brain, caused by uterine precipitation, p. 52, l. 169. A failure to control one's passions is seen in Galenic terms as a cause of madness, 'and that ungoverned passion might increase to the point of becoming an incurable disease of the soul'. Galen considers the loss of willpower to be irrational; that an ungoverned individual 'is living and acting like a wild animal rather than a man'. See Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, p. 115.

> of this state of mind as a great affliction and even a sickness unto death. Thus they put the devil to flight. People think, however, that they are possessed although they are not. If they persevere under this heavy affliction, they become martyrs.[115]

Given the atmosphere of such ideas in the cultural milieu, the people of Lynn 'concludyn þat sche had a deuyl wythinne hir which cawsyd þat crying. & so þey seyden pleynly & meche mor euyl' (105). Other 'amateur physicians' of Kempe's community diagnosed the falling evil, owing to the *horrowr* of her writhing, howling and the blackening of her complexion:

> Sum seyde þat sche had þe fallyng euyl, for sche wyth þe crying wrestyd hir body turning fro þe o side in-to þe oþer & wex al blew & al blo as it had bencolowr of leed. & þan folke spitted at hir for horrowr of þe sekenes, & sum scornyd hir and seyd þat sche howlyd as it [had] ben a dogge & bannyd hir & cursyd hir & seyd þat sche dede meche harm a-mong þe pepyl (105).

Interestingly the 'falling evil' (modern-day epilepsy), as well as apoplexy, was often confused with uterine suffocation at this time.[116] Certainly, Kempe's spasmodic twisting from side to side, changing palour from blue to ashen, and animalistic howls, could understandably indicate some unnatural affliction to her astonished spectators.[117]

Elizabeth Robertson sees Kempe's extreme emotion as an attempt to overthrow such judgements about female bodies by medical, clerical and patriarchal authorities: 'The very excess of her writing, her extremes of tears and sensual expressiveness, suggest a destabilization of those assumptions'.[118] Robertson sees her taking medical theories to 'their logical extreme' and thus

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[115] From *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, p. 359.
[116] Ibid.
[117] For a retrospective diagnosis of Kempe's possible temporal lobe epilepsy, see Richard Lawes, 'Psychological Disorder and the Autobiographical Impulse in Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve', esp. pp. 230-231. Also Richard Lawes, 'The Madness of Margery Kempe', at p. 158.
[118] Elizabeth Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings*', in Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (eds.) *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (New York and London: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 158.

resisting such bodily definitions. While I concur that Kempe resists social assumptions and categorisations, I find problematic the notion of 'excessiveness' that has been long been considered in Kempe studies, which seems to imply a pejorative subtext for her weeping which undermines its existence as a phenomenological experience.[119] Her bleeding tears are a means of self-medication or purgation that *productively* perpetuate her melancholic disposition, mourning for Christ in order to feel God's privileged 'habundawns of lofe'.

Weeping and mourning therefore form the symptomatic language of another text which runs parallel to Kempe's own, unsanctioned by her yet a narrative of somatic disorder that is the preferred reading of many of those around her. Indeed, even the 'red ink annotator' of the manuscript engages in an approving, marginal *extranarrative*, in direct conversation with the descriptions of her weeping, as Johanne Paquette has noted.[120] However, as we have seen, the helplessness that Kempe emphasises in relation to the profusion or removal of her tears – 'sche myth nowt chesyn, but þat wolde þei not belevyn' (83-4) – evidences how she cannot choose to cry. As such, this powerlessness is an affliction indeed, yet it is one of divine genesis and one for which she desires no cure or relinquishment. When the Archbishop of York *boystowsly* asks her 'Why wepist þu so, woman?', Kempe replies with vehement oneupmanship: 'Syr, ȝe xal welyn sum day þat ȝe had wept as sor as

[119] Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach suggest that 'Hysterics are suggestible and often are thin-boundaried, in the sense of having less delineation between their own sense of self and the traits and attitudes that belong to others. Mystics are thin-boundaried too, with an ability to shift more comfortably between different levels of reality, to soar with the angels, than can those whose sense of material reality and commitment to scientific methodology as the basis of all knowledge is unshakable'. See *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 198.
[120] Johanne Paquette, 'Male Approbation in the Extant Glosses to the *Book of Margery Kempe*', pp. 153-169.

I' (125). In asserting a spiritually superior position over the ecclesiastical authority who seeks to silence and fetter her as a heretic, she not only displays courage, but reclaims her endangered body by asserting the edifying quality of her tears as freely flowing matter which resists manacling or confinement. Kempe's violent sobbing affronts those with whom she interacts, yet those onlookers attempt the pathologisation of symptoms that to her, conversely, represent a desirable and privileged state of mystical discernment; a means of remaining spiritually fruitful. As Kempe sobs and swoons during Mass, reliving trauma and reopening the wounds of Christ's lost body, she enacts the self-fulfilment of the melancholic state to which she is constitutionally inclined. However, that state is also predicated upon the very first traumatic experience to which we are given access in the *Boke*. Her first childbirth is recounted early in the narrative as a synchronic example of the genesis of her first vision and the connectedness of that vision with the trauma of the near-loss of body and self. It is necessary, then, to return to the beginning of Kempe's adult life and of her text in order to consider this central aspect of her identity formation: an identity to which she must be infinitely tied, and from where the rest of her journey will commence.

The Birth of Fear and Loathing: The (Un)making of Margery Kempe

> In þe tyme þat þis creatur had reuelacyons, owyr Lord seyd to hir, "Dowtyr, þow art wyth childe." Sche seyd a-ȝen, "A, Lord, how xal I þan do for kepyng of my chylde?" Owir Lord seyd, "Dowtyr, drede þe not, I xal ordeyn for an kepar". "Lord, I am not worthy to heryn þe spekyn & þus to comown wyth myn husbond. Ner-þe-lesse *it is to me gret peyn & gret dysese.*" (my emphasis, 48)

Margery Kempe's reaction to the news of this pregnancy hardly embraces the joys that one assumes synonymous with new motherhood. *Peyne* is at the forefront of her thoughts: the pain of the marriage debt – 'to comown' with her husband John – which grieves her, and also the physical pains of childbirth that resound as a piercing subtext. That we are told that this pregnancy occurs during 'þe tyme þat þis creatur had reuelacyons' and thus in the throes of her spiritual flourishing explains her emphasis on the inconvenience of caring for, or *kepyng,* the child. Her pregnant state, and the ensuing child, signify to Kempe an embodied, aberrant hermeneutic that is a constant reminder of the conjugal debt and the domestic tedium that plagues her desire for spiritual progression. It is, in short, a *gret dysese* (or dis-ease): a metaphor of motherhood as sickness and perhaps reason for the absence of extended descriptions of Kempe's role as mother to fourteen children in her *Boke*.[121] Indeed, the theological conflation of Original Sin with all future childbirths serves to situate painful labour as a 'collective punishment' for Eve's transgression.[122] Coupled with the medical texts that construct the maternal body as both a giver and receiver of pain, I wish now to consider the traumatic event of her first childbirth as a crucial episode in both her life and her *Book* and the way in which it represents the simultaneous making and unmaking of Margery Kempe. Through her near-annihilation and woundedness, and through the dramatic movement of her exclusion from and reunion with Christ, Kempe's melancholic diathesis is tested to the extreme. Liz Herbert McAvoy has recently examined the association of sin and wounds in medieval culture in relation to anchoritic phlebotomy and its

[121] Kempe mentions in passing, later in the book, the fact that she has 'born xiiij childeryn'. (115)
[122] Genesis 3:16: 'To the woman also he said: I will multiply thy sorrows, and thy conceptions: in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, and thou shalt be under thy husband' s power, and he shall have dominion over thee'. See Carole Rawcliffe, 'Women, Childbirth, and Religion in Later Medieval England', in *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), pp. 91-117, at p. 91.

various connections to postpartum bleeding. Developing the connection between blood loss and bathing, she demonstrates the association of 'the curative properties of the blood-bath with a maternal blood sacrifice', and further still with *Christus medicus*, who washes the sins of the world with his own bleeding wounds.[123] As we necessarily turn to the conception of Kempe's traumatic understanding, to the wounds which will weep throughout her life in anamnestic empathy and devotion, deadly childbirth converges with the birth of the *Book* and reveals a painful genesis to Kempe's adult life cycle which will paradoxically gestate into a recognition of Christ's curative power.

So far in Kempe's short life, the course of her social, familial and working journey has taken a conventional path. The *Book* presents her passing through the phases of life as to be expected; 'sche *was* maryed' at twenty, '*was* wyth chylde wyth-in schort tyme, *as kynde wolde*' (my emphases; 6). The simple narrative progression of this passage, *as nature would have it*, illustrates the contented inevitability of Kempe's transition from maidenhood to wifehood and motherhood and marks a measured foreshadowing of the violent illness which follows. As Kim M. Phillips has noted, Margery would have been expected to engage in household tasks during her teenage years, and her marriage would have been considered a promising link between two prominent families: the Brunhams of Lynn, a wealthy elite family – John Brunham was one of the most eminent and active Lynn burgesses of the later fourteenth century – and the Kempes; prosperous merchants and jurats.[124] Marriage occurred at a usual age and stage.[125] Whilst her identity has undergone a rapid shift in status

[123] Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Bathing in Blood: The Medicinal Cures of Anchoritic Devotion', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, pp. 85-102, esp. pp. 95-101.
[124] See Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, pp.48-55 and p. 65-66.
[125] Phillips states that 'At home, Margery would have engaged in tasks similar to those of the female servants, aimed at simultaneously boosting the labour force of the household and preparing her for adulthood and marriage. There is nothing to indicate that youth was a time

during this period, defined by McAvoy as ‘a new bewildering and ambiguous identity’, the transition is a recognisable one rooted in cultural norms and societal expectations.[126] Kempe’s sense of self is thus hitherto socially objectified, and signified through a process of familiar symbols, marked indeed by a *pride* in her newly married state and status: the *Book* makes clear that John is a ‘*worschepful* burgeys’, and even after her conversion she vaingloriously dresses to impress with fancy clothing, driven by an acute awareness of her ‘worthy kenred’ (6,9). Janel M. Mueller considers Kempe’s construction of selfhood, suggesting how she introduces herself minimally, leaving anonymous her husband and father, and styling herself as ‘this creatur’ to downplay her domestic life, emphasising her as a textual *work in progress*, completed by God.[127] Conversely, Sandra J. McEntire has argued that the integration of a woman’s domestic sphere is a vital component of her spiritual journey: ‘union includes all that is homely and earthly as well as the mystic and visionary. It includes her essential nature and the contradictions that have been imposed upon her by her society and culture. Woman integrates it all in one coherent whole and in so doing is complete’.[128] McEntire and Mueller see the process of Kempe’s self-identification as rooted in her social context with variable degrees of importance. In contrast, Richard Lawes has proposed the

primarily of leisure or formal education for teenaged girls’. Also, ‘Margery’s marriage at a little over twenty was not unusual for medieval urban Englishwomen’. From Kim M. Phillips, ‘Margery Kempe and the Ages of Women’ in *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe, pp. 21 and 24.

[126] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 34. On the normalcy of this age of marriage see Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 66.

[127] Mueller considers Kempe’s autobiographical construction to be dependent on the blending of her social and spiritual experiences, particularly in her depiction of Christ’s call for her to take all Christian men, women and children into her soul. Janel M. Mueller, ‘Autobiography of a New ‘Creatur’: Female Spirituality, Selfhood, and Authorship in “The Book of Margery Kempe’, in *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Rose, pp. 60 and 67.

[128] Sandra McEntire, ‘The Journey into Selfhood: Margery Kempe and Feminine Spirituality’ in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. McEntire, pp. 54-55.

retrospective diagnosis of postpartum psychosis in relation to this episode.[129] Similarly, William B. Ober suggests that it is 'an episode that today would be classified as a postpartum depressive psychosis with features of agitation'.[130] And Clarissa Atkinson also suggests that Kempe's condition resembles 'postpartum psychosis'.[131]

I contend that, rather than a diagnosis of psychosis, which deviates from my present purpose of exploring Kempe's *experientia* in its medieval context as opposed to retrospective application, this episode rests upon an acute *spiritual* crisis; a spiritual trauma which she interprets as diabolical and life-threatening. This event is predicated on the acceleration and braking of narrative temporality, from a brisk and linear traverse through the cultural-religious rituals of marriage and childbirth to an aborted confession which interrupts Kempe's passage via a sharp turn into the realm of subjectivity and despair. At this point of disruption, this moment of traumatic synchronicity, Kempe painstakingly reveals to her readers the source of her own wounds, and the lessons that she learns in discovering their panacea. Kempe's postpartum trauma therefore represents a critical example of the fragmentation and deconstruction of her bodily integrity, but it is significant not only because of its childbirth context, but also because of its near-death context. Running in parallel to the narrative of corporeal injury is the narrative of her spiritual injury – in effect, two traumas in one – which reveal the importance of both for the construction of her evolving identity and sense of wholeness. In examining this

[129] In a retrospective diagnosis, Lawes argues that Kempe's despair, hallucination of devils both visually and auditorily, and self harm, indicate 'a depressive psychosis in the puerperium, the most common of the post-natal psychoses'. See Richard Lawes, 'The Madness of Margery Kempe' in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition VI,* p. 153-4.
[130] William B. Ober, 'Margery Kempe: Hysteria and Mysticism Reconciled', p. 28.
[131] Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, p. 209.

episode I will offer an explanation for Kempe's frequent, mournful claims that she is 'brostyn a-sundyr' (68) and 'brostyn for pite' (185). In reiterating this feeling of *undoing*, she draws upon and relives the trauma of her first childbirth, where it is Christ whose eventual appearance makes her whole again, and thus must be Christ whose presence, experienced 'verily' in mystical contemplation, must be retained and internalised in melancholic fixation, in order to heal Kempe's 'open wounds'.

Open Wounds and Enclosed Spaces

Kempe's first experience of motherhood at a little over twenty years of age engenders mortal danger. We are told that 'sche was labowrd wyth grett accessys tyl þe child was born, & þan, what for labowr sche had in chyldyng & for sekenesse goyng beforn, sche dyspered of hyr lyfe, wenyng sche myght not leuyn' (6). That Kempe fears for her life in the final stages of labour is unsurprising after a problematic pregnancy characterised by great *accessys* and *sekenesse*.[132] This multifarious experience of maternal pain is constructed as inevitable in medieval medical texts, which provide a framework for the scientific and cultural association of pain and maternity.[133] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, for example, notes the almost instantaneous correlation of human generation and pain: 'If a woman feels cold and has pain in her legs immediately after coitus with a man, this is a sign that she has conceived'.[134] The author of *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* considers the link so intrinsic that he (or she) rather unsympathetically advises abstinence if pain is to

[132] MED s.v. acces(se): 1.a. An attack of illness characterised by fever; 1.d. Attack or seizure of any disease.
[133] Here, I employ the term 'maternity' as opposed to 'motherhood' in order to focus on Kempe's physiological experience of childbirth rather than her experience of nurturing her children.
[134] De Secretis Mulierum, ed. Lemay, p. 120.

be avoided altogether: ‘But sche þat wol haue no travyll in chyldynge, let kepe here fro þe recevynge of sede of man &, oon my parell, sche schall nevyre drede þe travelynge of chylde’.[135] *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac* outlines the drastic procedures required for difficult childbirths, stillbirths and maternal death.[136] Pain, and the *drede,* or fear of pain, is therefore an unavoidable paradigm for the female of reproductive age.

Kempe’s association of reproduction and pain thus begins during the months of gravidity and culminates during a difficult birth. As she has no prior term of reference or mode of codification for her pain and fear, other than the despair that it causes, the only imaginable trajectory at this moment for her is death: *wenyng sche myght not leuyn*. She thus sends ‘for hyr gostly fadyr’ to be relieved of the ‘thyng in conscyens which sche had neuyr schewyd’ (6). This specific sin, the ‘thing in conscyens’, that hastens her call for the confessor, has been suggested by several critics to be of a sexual nature.[137] I concur with this reading, particularly in the light of Kempe’s apparent shame in not naming it, and the persistent and compulsive sexual thoughts that plague her throughout the *Book*.[138] The sin, however, is never fully confessed: the confessor ‘was a lytyl to hastye & gan scharply to vndernemyn hir er þan sche had fully seyd hir entent’ (7). The apparent intolerance of the male authority who rebukes her before she has finished, and who should, paradoxically, offer a ritual of remedy,

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[135] *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing*, ed. Barratt, ll. 135-38, p. 50.
[136] *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, pp. 530-1.
[137] On Kempe’s sin as sexual and this episode more broadly, see McAvoy, *Authority*, p. 34, Weissman, ‘*Hysterica Compassio*’, p. 207-8, and Ober, ‘Margery Kempe: Hysteria and Mysticism Reconciled’, p. 29. Stephen Medcalf disputes this interpretation, arguing that Kempe’s sin is not sexual but heretical, as she listens to the words of her parish priest, William Sawtre, who was burned for heresy in 1401. See ‘Inner and outer’, p. 116-7.
[138] See pp. 14-15 in the *BMK* when Kempe is tempted by the sin of lechery and agrees to a sexual encounter with a fellow parishioner, only to discover his request was a test. Also pp. 144-6 when Kempe temporarily loses God’s grace and envisions ‘mennys membrys’. Also, the many times that Kempe fears rape and defilement when travelling on pilgrimage, for example, p. 236-7.

initiates a fear in Kempe which replays that which she has just experienced in labour. Like the ineffability of her childbirth pains, she is silenced prematurely because 'sche wold no mor seyn for nowt he myght do' (7), and is once again situated in a liminal site of uncertainty and dread: 'for dreed she had of dampnacyon on þe to side & hys scharp repreuyng on þat oþer syde' (7). That Kempe aligns the confessor's reproving comments with an eternity of damnation is illustrative of the profound fear and *dreed* which he instils in her. Indeed, in some medieval parishes, women who died in childbirth in their postlapsarian state were often refused burial in holy ground.[139] Those who died 'badly', without the correct sequence of rituals and absolution, were thought to be not only sinful, 'pestilent dead', but a danger to the community who might be infected by the contagion of the corpse which was 'sin incarnate'.[140] While the physical presence and moral authority of the 'gostly fadyr' reinforces her hidden understanding of the significance of her sin; the threat of his chastisement on the one hand and the threat of hell on the other thus becomes an ensnarement into damnation from which she can only escape by leaving her*self* instead of the birthing room.

Kempe's intense shame about her sinful past has caused her prior distress. She has endured the diabolic persuasions of 'hyr enmy', convincing her against confessing, so instead she undertook 'penawns be hir-self a-loone', fasting and conducting other 'dedys of almes' (7). Such an internalisation of her sin and shame is antithetic to the Christian *modus operandi* of confession which

[139] Gail McMurray Gibson, 'Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theatre', in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 139-54, (p. 146).
[140] See Stephen Gordon, 'Disease, Sin, and the Walking Dead in Medieval England c.1100-1350: A Note on the Documentary and Archaeological Evidence', in *Medicine, Healing and Performance*, ed. Effie Gemi-Iordanou, Stephen Gordon, Robert Matthew, Ellen McInnes and Rhiannon Petitt (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), pp. 124-58.

facilitates the externalisation and articulation of one's sins in order to receive absolution.[141] This inward accumulation of guilt provides a striking parallel with the opinion of the author of *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, who posits that shame is a central cause of difficulty in childbirth:

> Now wol I tell yow what may lette a woman with chylde of ryȝht delyuerance. may be dystrovbelyd yf sche be angury or *prowde* or *shamfull*, or ellysþat hit be here fyrst chylde'.[142]

This example throws into sharp perspective the interplay between medicine and theology in the Middle Ages, where the sins of pride and shame engender physical effects on the body, thus adversely affecting the physical processes of labour. The *Sekenesse of Wymmen* proposes the female body itself, as well as its afflictions, as a source of shame: 'ther ben manye women that hauen many diuers maladies and sekenesses nygh to þe deth and thei also ben shamefull to shewen' (p. 58). Indeed, Kempe also struggles with pride and materialistic greed after her conversion ('sche wold not leeuyn hir pride ne hir pompows aray', 9), and this is indeed her first experience of childbirth. Kempe therefore fits most of the hindrances to labour laid out in this passage; her unconfessed sin, therefore, a reason for the near-annihilation of her body as well as her soul. It is possible that her confessor was learned in matters of medicine and natural philosophy, as Lemay has suggested. She posits that the late thirteenth-century work *De Secretis Mulierum*, was 'designed to be used within a religious

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[141] An important decree of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 was *Omnis utriusque sexus*, demanding annual confession and communion. See R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c.1215-1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 25-30. The language of the 21st Constitution of the Fourth Lateran Council takes a noticeably medical flavour: 'The priest shall be discerning and prudent, so that like a skilled doctor he may pour wine and oil over the wounds of the injured one. Let him carefully inquire about the circumstances of both the sinner and the sin, so that he may prudently discern what sort of advice he ought to give and what remedy to apply, using various means to heal the sick person'. From The Fourth General Council of the Lateran, 1215 AD. 21: 'On yearly confessions to one's own priest, yearly communion, the confessional seal', in *Papal Encyclicals Online* <http://www.papalencyclicals.net> [accessed 15th February 2016]

[142] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, pp. 60-62.

community as a vehicle for instructing priests in natural philosophy, particularly as it pertains to human generation'.[143] Monica Green has shown that a distinct natural-philosophical tradition of 'the secrets of women' emerged in the fourteenth century which evidenced a growing interest of male physicians in fertility and generation, and which reflected new (and often misogynistic) habits of thinking about the female body.[144] *De Secretis Mulierum*, for example, warns against 'irregular' sexual intercourse because the foetus will not be produced in the 'proper manner' (i.e. without deformity).[145] The commentator deduces that 'From this it appears that there are many sins that are sins not only according to law but also according to nature, because nature intends to perform in a regular manner as it ought to'.[146] That sin is considered here to be simultaneously of religious law and of nature, adds weight to the possibility that Kempe's confessor, perhaps learned of this or similar texts, was 'to hastye' as a result of his anxiousness to castigate her sinful *irregularity* of nature and to asssert his public role as moral warden.[147] To die hastily, in parturience, would be conceived of as a *bad death.*[148] Her personal sin, coupled with the 'collective punishment' of Original Sin and concomitant medieval distaste for the fleshy, unruly female body, creates a polarisation from the pure icon of the Virgin Mary that could not be more pronounced.

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[143] *De Secretis Mulierum,*, p. 58.
[144] Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 205. Though *De Secretis Mulierum* circulated mostly in Germany, with lesser impact in France and Italy, it symbolises a cultural move towards the male readership of medical texts about women, which were available in clerical environs.
[145] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 114. Other risks that the mother posed to her unborn child related to her emotions and her physical movement. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* advises against excessive travelling 'by ouer-mochyll goyng or rydynge' (p. 58).
[146] *De Secretis Mulierum* cites an example of a monstrous child created through irregular coitus (p. 114).
[147] For a discussion of the tradition of natural philosophy and the adaptation of gynaecological texts to male interest, see Monica Green, 'From "Diseases of Women" to "Secrets of Women": The Transformation of Gynaecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30 (2000), 5-39.
[148] See Katharine Park, 'Birth and Death', in *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Medieval Age*, ed. Kalof, pp. 17-38 (p. 35).

Kempe therefore goes ‘owt of hir mende & [is] wondyrlye vexid & labowryd wyth spyritys half ȝer viij wekys & odde days’ (7), not because of a postpartum psychosis, but of a spiritual trauma; a crisis of self which emerges from the mortal danger of childbirth complication. The ensuing period of derangement and distraction of ‘half ȝer viij wekys & odde days’ (7) mirrors the approximate length of a pregnancy, illustrating what McAvoy sees as ‘an apt “punishment” to fit a perceived “sin” of concupiscence’.[149] If Kempe’s physical labour was complicated by feelings of shame, her secondary labour – a trauma of physical and spiritual rupture – is the result of loss: of self and of the Christian cure of confession. Rather than her ‘wholeness’ being restored in ritualistic tradition, Kempe is *unmade* and subject to diabolical ‘steryngys’; visions that are antithetic to spiritual rapture yet still indicative of her melancholic propensity to imaginative perception, to ‘truer dreams’. Some medical texts acceded to the possibility of demonic causes for mental disturbance. Avicenna, for example, concedes that melancholia might sometimes be caused by demons, but he finds the trigger somewhat beside the point: ‘...we say if it does happen by a demon it is enough for us that it has changed the [sick person’s] complexion to black bile, and the black bile is its immediate cause; then the cause of that black bile is a demon or not a demon’.[150] Another strand of medical thought held that demons were not the cause of melancholia or mania, but the symptom. Ishāq ibn Imrān’s *De Melancholia*, translated by Constantine the African, suggests that some melancholics saw ‘before their eyes terrible and frightening black

[149] From McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 36.
[150] Avicenna, *Liber Canonis* (Lyons, 1522) 3.1.4.19, fol. 150r. In Catherine Rider, ‘Demons and Mental Disorder in Late Medieval Medicine’, in *Mental (Dis)Order in Later Medieval Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 47-69, at p. 55.

shapes and similar things'.[151] Catherine Rider thus notes that 'For these physicians, demons were simply hallucinations brought on by the illness'.[152]

Certainly, Kempe is nearly destroyed by this frenzied illness. She imagines violent episodes with diabolic figures who taunt her and torture her, embodying the punishment that she believes necessary for the healing of her body and her soul:

> And in þis tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, deuelys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brenny[n]g lowys of fyr as þei schuld a swalwyd hyr in, sum-tyme *rampyng* at hyr, sum-tyme thretyng her, sum-tym *pullyng* hyr & *halyng* hir boþe nygth & day duryng þe forseyd tyme (7).

The devils' threat to Kempe with their hungry mouths of fire not only signifies traditional depictions of the burning mouth of hell and the eternal pain and punishment that is thereby entailed, but also serves to foreshadow the many threats of burning that she will suffer during the course of her spiritual journey.[153] That she fears that they might have 'swalwyd hyr in' is suggestive of another version of captivity: to be ingested into the devils' bodies, the literal embodiment of evil. In this hallucinatory episode, Kempe perceives the *spyrites* 'sum-tyme rampyng at hyr, sum-tyme thretyng her, sum-tyme pullyng hyr & haling hir boþe nygth & day' (7). To be pawed and threatened and pulled and dragged is to be physically mauled and wounded which is beyond the experience of visionary perspicacity and instead an experience of physical torture, relentless in its containment of her day and night. As 'Þe Myrour Off chastitie' makes clear, when one is tempted by 'dilectacioun' and loses 'vertu of [one's] heeris, aliens shulen take him, þat ben vnclene spiritis, and þey shulen

[151] Rider, 'Demons and Mental Disorder', p. 56.
[152] Ibid, p. 57.
[153] In Canterbury, Kempe is accused of Lollardy by the monks at the monastery, who, when she leaves, cry after her, 'Þow xalt be brent, fals lollare. Her is a cartful of thornys redy for þe & a tonne to bren þe wyth', p. 28. The female mystic, Margaret Porete, was "accused of the Free Spirit heresy and burned in Paris". See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 22-23.

bynde him with *boondis* of dyuerse desiris, & þey shulen *blynde þe iȝen* of his *herte, þat he se not liȝt*'.[154] Such is their diabolic hold over her – a bondage that will soon be physically re-enacted – that she denounces Christianity and all of her family and friends, re-enacting the devils' torturous machinations on her own body in frenzied self-mortification, blind to the light of God and to divine vision:

> Sche wold a fordon hir-self many a tym at her steryngys & ben damnyd wyth hem in Helle, & in-to wytnesse þerof sche bot hir owen hand so violently þat it was seen al hir lyfe aftyr. And also sche roof hir skyn on hir body a-ȝen hir hert wyth hir nayles spetowsly, for sche had noon oþer instrumentys, & wers sche wold a don saf sche was bowndyn & kept wyth strength boþe day & nygth þat sche mygth not haue hir wylle. (8)

Kempe's desire for self-destruction is evident by the way in which she would have 'fordon' herself: a suicide wish to annihilate the body which harbours sin and the pain of the *spyrites*' tortures.[155] Unable to articulate the pain, Kempe multilates herself, deliberately wounding the very body that she sees as guilty, tearing open fissures and wounds in an attempt to carve out an escape route from the torturous locus of the self. In pseudo-stigmatic *imitatio* she bites her hand with such violence that she is permanently scarred 'al hir lyfe aftyr'; a stigmata borne not from a desire to experience the pain of the crucified Christ but to wound the body that is separated from him and bound instead to these diabolical imprisoners.[156] Elaine Scarry describes the verbal utterances made by the person in pain as a form of proto-language, because pain 'actively destroys' language, 'bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to

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[154] *The Pore Caitif*, my emphasis, p. 184. MED s.v. herre, pl. herris: 2(a) One of the four cardinal points of the heavens or the earth; (b) one of the celestial poles; (c) a matter of cardinal importance.
[155] MED s.v. 'fordon'.
[156] See McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 38. On stigmata in the Middle Ages, see especially Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha, The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ, The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 'The Imitation of the Body of Christ', pp. 194-217.

language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned'. The hurling of words into the air represents a 'reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans', but conversely, 'to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself'.[157] Kempe's pain at this moment *has* destroyed language; her attempts at the utterance of confession have gone unheard, and her descent into postpartum trauma marks the point where for her, language has failed in more than one sense.

The 'spetows' 'roof[ing]', or riving (tearing apart) of her skin with her own fingernails, notably around her 'hert' – the violent act of scarification – is not only the non-verbal crescendo of the event, but a way of regaining self-possession. In this sense, Kempe scripts her story in torturous reply, re-writing it onto her body and regaining agency, like Scarry's notion of the birth of language itself. The carving of marks into her flesh, the *making* of open wounds, is an indicator of a returning voice, as editor of her own text and warden of her own fearful enclosure. This riving around her heart is resonant with the medieval devotion to the sacred heart, made popular by twelfth-century Cistercians, especially Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), and later writers such as Gertrude of Helfta (d. 1302), where plentiful imagery of feeding and refuge position the heart as connected to Christ's wounds and as a primary symbol of God's love.[158] The trope of the heart as uterus, where conversion to Christianity was assimilated

[157] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, pp. 4-6.
[158] For discussion of the significance of the heart to medieval devotion, see Caroline Bynum Walker, *Jesus as Mother*: *Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982), especially pp. 192-3. The German Dominican priest, mystic and writer, Henry Suso (1295-1363), is depicted in several iconographic representations as inscribing the IHS Christogram onto his chest. See, for example, Steven Rozenski, 'The Visual, the Textual, and the Auditory, in Henry Suso's *Vita* or *Life of the Servant*', *Mystics Quarterly*, January 2008, 35-72.

with the conception and birth of Christ in the heart, began in late Antiquity and continued into the later Middle Ages. Augustine's *De sancta virginitate* asserts that Mary bore Christ 'more blessedly in her heart than in the flesh'.[159] Some pious women, such as Clare of Montefalco and Margherita of Città di Castello, were documented as literally harbouring relics like crucifixes within their hearts, a discovery made during the post-mortems conducted for the purposes of canonisation. The metaphor was developed by thirteenth and fourteenth century writers who saw Mary's pain at the foot of the cross as representative of a second childbirth, and also in artistic representation, where Mary is portrayed being supported near the cross in a manner identifiable with a labouring woman and midwife.[160] That Simeon tells Mary at the Temple of Jerusalem "And a sword will pierce your heart" only days after her purification heightens the association through the multivalency of Mary's childbirth and the pain she will experience in her heart at the loss of the Christ child.[161] Kempe's stigmatic tearing at the flesh around her heart so soon after childbirth makes open wounds that connect with Christ's, though she has not been purged of the sin that remains, instead of Christ, inside her soul.

Because of this, Kempe's body continues to flail and rive and *labowr*, watched by a silent body of 'kepars' who restrain and bind her to prevent further injury: '& wers sche wold a don saf sche was bowndyn & kept wyth strength boþe day & nygth þat sche mygth not haue hir wylle' (8). The injuries that she inflicts on her anguished postpartum body are, then, limited by the physical

[159] From Alistair Minnis, 'Spiritualizing Marriage: Margery Kempe's allegories of female authority', in *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 112-129, (p.117).
[160] See Katherine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2006), pp. 60-7. Park notes the connection of the heart and uterus. Theories of human generation – that the father's semen 'stamped' form onto the matter of the mother's blood *in utero* – make Kempe's attack around her heart, postpartum, more meaningful still.
[161] Luke 2:35. The significance of Mary's purification will be examined in Chapter Two.

force of her ‘kepars’ and the cords and ties that seek to bind and control her, preventing the actualisation of her suicide threat. Such binding is recommended by medical writers such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus, who regards wounding oneself and crying out as indicative of insanity, and advises that such people ‘should be bound so that they cease to do harm to themselves and to others’.[162] Binding is also recommended for physical afflictions. For postpartum bleeding, *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing* prescribes a cold compress soaked in rose leaves to be applied to various parts of the woman’s body. Then the practitioners should ‘let here be bovnde with wympyls or with othyre softe thyngis’.[163] A later text, which was the first European midwifery treatise to be written and published by a practising midwife – Louise Bourgeois’s *Diverse Observations Concerning Sterility, Miscarriages, Fertility, and Diseases of Women and Newborn Children* – recommends wrapping women who have experienced a difficult labour in the skin of a black sheep that has been flayed alive. A hare, also flayed alive, should be placed on her belly. Strikingly, it states that ‘This counteracts the swellings caused by pregnancy, and the hare’s blood, which is thought to be melancholic, also drives away melancholic and bad blood’. The mother should then be swathed in long clothes across most of her body.[164] This thus illustrates a further connection between the new delivery of a child and melancholia.

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[162] Bartholomaeus Anglicus also states in *On the Properties of Things* (an encyclopedia aimed primarily at preachers and students of scripture but which circulated very widely in the Middle Ages) that an aposteme in the uterus can cause a ‘parafrenzy’, the symptoms of which include biting, scratching and shouting. From Wallis, ed., *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, pp. 253-4.
[163] *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing*, p. 104. The concomitant danger of binding the female body is considered elsewhere in *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind* in relation to the pregnant body and its care. The pregnant woman is to avoid binding her breasts which can impede milk production, ‘for many desesys may fall to a woman for ouer-strait byndyng in þe vij month’ (p. 58).
[164] ‘Louise Bourgeois. *Diverse Observations Concerning Sterility, Miscarriages, Fertility, and Diseases of Women and Newborn Children* (Paris, 1626 edition)’, ed. Alison Klairmont Lingo and trans. Stephanie O’Hara (Toronto: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, forthcoming), Chapter XVIII.

While soft and soothing treatments are suggested for physical postpartum injuries, stiff binds are employed by Kempe's custodians: she is 'kept wyth *strength*' in order to restrict and enclose her flailing body-in-pain.[165] The male observers, who are also assumedly her binders, survey Kempe's agonised performance: 'þat *men* wend sche schuld neuyr *a skapyd ne levyd*' [my emphasis,8].[166] Like her self-diagnosis that the extent of her pain must signal death, these anonymous men regard her condition as an imprisonment from which she will be unable to escape or even continue to live. The men's presence also signifies a violation of the highly gendered childbirth room in contravention of the strict codes of lying-in practices which meant that women (of a high enough status to do so) were confined for the forty days prior to their purification in the churching ceremony, as Gail McMurray Gibson and others have shown.[167] Just as her previous entrapment between the threat of hell *on þe to side* and the confessor's chastisement on *þat oþer syde* represents a punitive captivity, so the ensuing *labowr* of diabolic vision is one in which, her onlookers perceive, she will not be freed. Along with Kempe's enclosure in the birthing room and the binds which now contain and constrict her desperate body from effecting its own annihilation, these multivalent forms of bondage intensify

[165] The practice of binding has ancient precedents. Caelus Aurelianus (5th century A.D.) recommends binding to prevent patients from self-harming. In catalepsy, where noxious humours were believed to ascend to the brain from the body's extremities, the limbs were often more tightly bound to prevent the movement of humours that was thought to cause the condition. See Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, p. 123.

[166] Although the usage of the noun 'men' here might signify 'men' in the sense of mankind, the later distinction between 'hyr maydens & hir kepars' (l. 30, p. 8) during the episode implies the denotation of 'men' and 'kepars' as male.

[167] See Gail McMurray Gibson, 'Scene and Obscene: Seeing and Performing Late Medieval Childbirth', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 29 (1999), 7-24, esp. pp. 8-9. Also Gibson, 'Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theatre'. And Joanne M. Pierce, '"Green Women" and Blood Pollution: Some Medieval Rituals for the Churching of Women after Childbirth', *Studia Liturgica*, 29:2 (1999), 191-215. For a discussion of childbirth practices in relation to Margery Kempe, see Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth, 'A Very Maternal Mysticism: Images of Childbirth and Its Rituals in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 43-60.

the trauma to the point that Kempe must evacuate her *self*; go 'owt of hir mende', in order to escape the incarceration of unconfessed sin and pain. This containment is resonant with the phlebotomy recommended for anchoritic women in the *Ancrene Wisse*, as Kempe, still in the aftermath of postpartum bleeding, experiences the inversion of prayerful enclosure.[168] Likewise, the trauma of this episode is the antithesis of the private birthing experience and traditional lying-in period when mothers were attended extensively by midwives and other women.[169] Women, especially those of reasonable status, were often bestowed with brooches, pendants and books depicting icons of healing saints as well as jewelled girdles from statues of female saints, in order to facilitate their confinement.[170] Some birthing rooms contained prayer rolls and amulets, evidencing the healing power of the written word.[171] It seems probable that in this instance, Kempe is excluded from many of the religious and comforting tokens of a good birth; instead, she is manacled and quashed by her keepers as a threatening locus of disorder: an increased affront when we consider that Kempe's namesake is Saint Margaret, the patron saint of childbirth.[172]

The medical and philosophical notion of the womb as wild and uncontrollable, wandering around the body like a bestial creature generates the

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[168] See McAvoy, 'Bathing in Blood', p. 95.
[169] For discussion of male and female roles in birthing practices and women's healthcare generally, see Monica H. Green, 'Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe', in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West,* I, pp. 39-78*.* Also Angela Florschuetz, 'Women's Secrets: Childbirth, Pollution, and Purification in Northern Octavian', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, Vol. 30 (2008), pp. 235-68. Here, Florschuetz argues that the lying-in room held significance for the retention of female secrets, both somatically and culturally, and that the intrusion of male presence in this space was a defilement of these special boundaries.
[170] Archaeological excavations in King's Lynn have unearthed pilgrim badges depicting the Virgin's girdle. It is therefore very probable that Kempe was familiar with birth girdles and their apotropaic power. See Mary Morse, '"This moche more ys oure lady mary longe": Takamiya 56 and the English Birth Girdle Tradition', in *Middle English Texts in Transition: A Festschrift dedicated to Toshiyuki Takamiya on his 70th birthday* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer for York Medieval Press, 2014), pp. 199-219, p. 200).
[171] Rawcliffe, 'Childbirth and Religion', pp. 101 and 107.
[172] The lying-in period was so proscriptive that it encompassed several different stages of transition. See Pierce, 'Green Women', pp. 210-11.

pejorative subtext of the post-labour woman as an extension of her unruly womb: uncontrollable and feral. The postpartum uterus was viewed as disordered, as *On Treatments for Women* exemplifies: 'The womb, as though it were a wild beast of the forest, because of the sudden evacuation falls this way and that, as if it were wandering. Whence vehement pain is caused'.[173] The literal manifestation of this idea, when the womb actually exits the body after childbirth, is a severe injury treated matter of factly by the writer of the same text.[174] Once the uterus has been (agonisingly) reinserted, the woman is to be bound with bandages and anointed; the practitioner is told to ensure that she lies still for a subsequent 'nine days, and more if necessary, and do not let her move herself unless for reason of necessity'.[175] Kempe's eight months of trauma, therefore, is a tormenting blend of physical and mental woundedness, the medical treatments for which are strikingly alike.

Kempe is finally healed when she envisions Christ in the likeness of a man 'wyth so blyssyd a chere þat sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyritys' and she is 'stabelyd in hir wyttys & in hir reson as wel as euyr sche was beforn' (8). Not only does the beauteousness of Christ's visage effect instant stabilisation and wholeness, but the verisimilitude of the vision is illustrative of her melancholic receptivity as she perceives the very air through which Christ is shown and then concealed: 'sche saw *veryly* how þe eyr openyd as brygth as ony levyn [lightning][176], & he stey up in-to þe eyr, not rygth hastyli & qwykly, but

[173] 'On Treatments for Women', in *The Trotula*, pp. 119-21.
[174] Monica Green has established that 'most if not all of the other later medieval translations [of the *Trotula*] were intended for male readers'. However, seven of the twenty-two known medieval translations of the text are addressed directly to female readers, one going so far as to warn men from reading it lest he uses it to slander women (*Trotula*: Introduction, p. 61). Green's concluding argument, however, is that male practitioners had overall control over the practice of gynaecology, and so we can infer that more complex births would have involved male management.
[175] 'On Treatments for Women', in *The Trotula*, p. 159.
[176] MED s.v. leven.

fayr & esly þat sche mygth wel be-holdyn hym in þe eyr tyl it was closyd a-geyn' (8). The torn and ruptured skin on her chest is replaced by the hairshirt which Christ ordains in her heart. Instead of the eating of meat – a vice that she inadvisedly 'louyst best in þis world' – Christ requests that she will ingest his body and blood every Sunday through the Sacrament, salvific blood which will replace the lost and sullied blood of her own sinful wounds (17). And, replacing the dismissive confessor of her postpartum desperation is Christ himself, to whom she will have the oral freedom to 'sey what [she] wyld' at six o'clock each day (17). This is the divine medicine by which she is healed, and through which she is reborn, authorised a direct passage to God at the same time as a re-connection with the Christian liturgy and rites from which she was excluded. In her severing from the private birthing space, Kempe's female secrets are exposed; she is humiliated, shackled, reduced to mere animal, and then remade. Only when 'sche lay a-loone and hir kepars wer fro hir' (8), does that space become receptive to Christ's appearance; the salvific vision a holy and private replacement for the lost female sanctuary: a new 'secret'. From now on, since Christ is the signifier of cure for her ruptured and wounded body, of Kempe's very process of self-identification, the loss of that divine-object will forevermore signify a simultaneous loss of self and of existence and a re-opening and bleeding of the wounds which symbolise that state of mourning, in traumatic repetition.

It is little wonder therefore, that Kempe's prior dismay at the notification of her latest pregnancy is assimilated with *gret peyn & gret dysese*. By the end of her reproductive life, Kempe has 'born xiiij childeryn' (115), and spent the greater part of twenty years in near-continual pregnancy.[177] The visuality of her

[177] Laura L. Howes has argued that Kempe was pregnant when she left England on her pilgrimage to Jerusalem – after her agreement with her husband of a chaste marriage. She

pregnant body would serve to identify her, regardless of her complicity, as a mother, associated with the earthliness of domesticity and generation, as opposed to the spiritual edification that she will increasingly desire. McEntire suggests that this 'rejection of childbirth' and 'reproof of paternal authority over her sin... cement her sense of despair over the value of her life, her sense of nothingness and marginality'.[178] She comes to associate 'þe drawt of owyr Lord' with postpartum illness and maternal pain, perhaps explaining her reluctance to include many details about her children in the *Book* because of this trauma; the fear of death.[179] Perhaps this is a central reason for her special place of devotion at the Gesine [childbed] Chapel in her parish church at Lynn.[180] The memory of this first childbirth impresses an indelible mark on her selfhood, impossible to separate from somatically but possible to edit out through a deliberate redaction in her *Boke.*

The traumatic event of childbirth thus signifies a passage not only into adulthood – from young wife to mother – but into mystical experience. Kempe is *unmade* through clerical exclusion, the injury of sin and bodily disintegration, to be *remade* as Christ's privileged disciple. It is an event which functions as a centrefuge from which her future spiritual development will emanate; a perpetual reminder of the threat of annihilation when her physician, Christ, is lost. Wounded and saved through this painful understanding, Kempe fulfils her melancholic teleology by weeping those wounds that will now seep through her

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calculates that Kempe would have been pregnant for a total of 126 months out of 240 months, 'or just over half of the time between her twentieth and fortieth birthdays'. From 'On the Birth of Margery Kempe's Last Child', in *Modern Philology*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Nov., 1992), p. 224. Liz Herbert McAvoy contests this view in 'Margery's Last Child', in *Notes and Queries* (1999) 46 (2): 181-183.

[178] From McEntire, 'Journey into Selfhood: Margery Kempe and Feminine Spirituality', p. 57.

[179] Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* considers the affliction of fear and its causes, including the possibility of future disgrace, death, emotions such as guilt, and fear itself. From Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, p. 79.

[180] See Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, p. 64.

life and her text. Weissman regards Kempe's tears as reflections of the late medieval Compassion, as her 'self-cure'; her 'superior piety'.[181] Beyond her identification with Angela of Foligno and Marie d'Oignies, however, who weep and sorrow in *imitatio mariae*, Kempe's mourning is predicated on the near-death experience of childbirth and, I argue, the multivalency of melancholia and loss, where the injuries of body and soul collide. As such, the stigmata of her wounded hand and heart, and her bleeding tears, are exteriorised reminders not only of her legitimacy as an apprentice holy woman, but as tokens of the sins for which she weeps. It is those sins, particularly those of her past concupiscence, which will besiege her beyond the door of her childbirth room, and serve as powerful motivation for her quest for a chaste marriage, as we shall see in Chapter Two. In beholding and gaining the Christic figure in all his 'blyssyd a chere', Kempe receives a salve for her melancholia, in spite of the 'open wounds' which painfully remain, and which will serve as bleeding passageways for the rest of her spiritual journey.

This, is the woundedness of melancholia; a boundless state in which Kempe is immersed and her identity inextricably bound up. For if her tears cease to exist then so must she; and so must the Christ whose own wounded body she retains through her weeping. For Kempe, therefore, to relinquish productivity in crying for the world's sins as a sorrowing intercessor, to dry up the 'open wounds' – in Freud's words – that weep for the lost Christ, is to be annihilated. Without tears, she is nothing but mutilated flesh: 'ȝyf if wer thy wille, Lord, I wolde for þi lofe & for magnifying of þi name ben hewyn as small as

[181] Weissman, *Hysterica Compassio*, p. 207.

flesch to þe potte' (142).[182] In crying her infinitely bleeding tears of lamentation she fulfils the trajectory of her existence by retaining that 'violent object' of Burton's imagining through a cycle of traumatic repetition. It is thus safe to contend that Kempe's melancholia and the way in which it facilitates visionary perception is a central feature in her route towards union with the Christic body, and a powerful way of understanding mystical experience. Her weeping allows us to read her *Book* not as the embodiment of pathological disorder, but as a teleology – of Margery Kempe herself – the way in which, in tearful understanding, she was ordained, and how she must always be.

[182] It is notable that similar lexis is employed by the man whom Kempe propositions in Chapter Four of the book in order to show disgust and corporeal annihilation: 'And he sayd he ne wold for al þe good in þis world; he had leuar ben hewyn as small as flesch to þe pott' (15).

Chapter Two: 'Þe mukke' of Marriage: Painful Chastity and the Sexual Paradox

> The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband. And in like manner the husband also hath not power of his own body, but the wife.
>
> I Corinthians 7.4

> ...þe dette of matrimony was so abhominabyl to hir þat sche had leuar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn þe wose, *þe mukke* in þe chanel, þan to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng saf only for obedyens (*BMK*, 11-12, my emphasis).

At around the age of thirty six or thirty seven, Kempe, whilst lying in bed with her husband John, hears 'a sownd of melodye so swet & delectable, hir þowt, as sche had ben in Paradyse' (11).[1] Such is the sublime quality of the music that upon hearing any subsequent melody or auditory 'myrth', she crumbles to plenteous weeping and sighing, conscious now of the meaning of heaven; perceiving its sensory *truth*. As she begins to share this revelation with her acquaintances, disclosing how 'It is ful mery in Hevyn', Kempe is met with wrath as the people challenge the audacity of a woman who claims to know about a place to which she has not been: 'Why speke ȝe so of þe myrth þat is in Heuyn; ȝe haue not be þer no mor þan we' (11). This audacious talk, where Kempe attempts to bring forth into her earthly world the knowledge and experience of the divine, illustrates not only the experiential polarisation of Kempe from her community, but the mystical receptivity which simultaneously bridges the divide between heaven and earth, which dissolves those borders between body and soul, and which evidences the porousness of her *experientia*, as we saw in

[1] My estimation of Kempe's age is based upon Hope Emily Allen's calculation that Margery and John Kempe's vow of chastity occurs in June 1413, when Margery Kempe is about forty years old. The book tells us in Chapter 3 that she asks John to live chaste after perceiving this heavenly music, and that he agrees 'iij or iiij ȝer aftyr' (12). This places the episode around the year 1399 or 1400.

Chapter One. Kempe's new understanding of the cosmos gives her claim to a metaphysical wisdom that marks the transference of all her desires to a heavenly trajectory: 'sche desyryd no-thyng so mech as Heuyn (13). In Kempe's cognition, therefore, she *has* 'be þer'.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that Kempe juxtaposes this moment of ecstatic discernment with the concomitant revulsion that ensues when she is faced with the prospect of a sexual encounter with John:

> And aftyr þis tyme sche had neuyr desyr to komown fleschly wyth hyre husbonde, for þe dette of matrimony was so abhominabyl to hir þat sche had leuar, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn þe wose, *þe mukke* in þe chanel, þan to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng saf only for obedyens (11-12).

Such abhorrence towards sexual intercourse is described through imagery of the ingestion of glutinous, oozing and dirty matter; the 'wose' and 'mukke' represent the most base and contaminating of substances: the mud and sewage of the channel; 'wose' also having a further denoted meaning of digestive juices.[2] This digestive allusion has the subtext of the muck's foul and physical consumption, highlighting Kempe's view of sexual contact being more polluting and repulsive than the most repugnant of matter: she would rather be violated by this poison than by the sinful contagion of her husband's body. Caroline Walker Bynum has written comprehensively on the significance of food to medieval religious women, arguing that curing and healing with food is a form of *imitatio Christi,* because in 'merg[ing] their own humiliating and painful flesh with that flesh whose agony, espoused by choice, was salvation'. Angela of Foligno 'found the taste of pus "as sweet as communion"'; similar to Kempe's

[2] MED s.v. wose (n.2): 3.a. The substance produced by the action of digestive juices on food, the product of the first stage of digestion.

preference for foul ingestion in its physical connection to the Christic body through punishing her weak and human flesh.[3]

Unfortunately for Kempe, John imposes his entitlement to marital 'obedyens' and 'wold haue hys wylle, & sche obeyd wyth greet wepyng & sorwyng for þat sche myght not levyn chast' (12).[4] Her pain is articulated by tearful laments; attempts at objection that neither relieve her suffering nor 'spar[e]' her from John's 'vsyng' via the marriage contract. Such quasi-masochism comes into greater focus when God tests her resolve with a series of sexual temptations. Though she presumes that 'all fleschly lust had al hol ben qwenchyd in hir... sche [is] temptyd wyth þe syn of letchory for owt þat sche cowd do' (14). So intense is her sexual temptation towards a local man who subsequently propositions her, that Kempe 'labowrd' greatly. The term 'labowrd' is repeated severally within this passage, denoting the painful travail of her struggle against sexual temptation and the potential subtext of gendered toil.[5] Though the temptation does not end well for Kempe, and she is rejected by the man in what materialises as a prank, she maintains an iron-cast resolve in her continued refusal to exact the marriage debt as a legitimate means of 'qwenchy[ng]' that 'fleschly lust'. Despite agonies of temptation elsewhere, 'in al þis tyme sche had no lust to comown wyth hir husbond, [as] it was very peynful & horrybyl vn-to hir' (14). Even when Kempe is in spatial and doctrinal safety – in the marriage bed – she cannot bear to have intercourse with John: 'Sche lay be hir husbond, & for to comown wyth hym it was so abhomynabyl on-to hir þat sche mygth not duren it, & ȝet was it leful on-to hir in leful tyme yf sche had

[3] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 246.
[4] There were strict codes applicable to the sex lives of married couples. See Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1983), esp. pp. 57-74.
[5] On the Middle English meaning of labouring, ee Chapter 1, p. 96, n. 77.

wold' (15).[6] Kempe accepts that such an act would be permissible at this 'tyme' in the Christian calendar.[7] But the doctrinal legitimacy of the potential encounter does not negate its repugnancy, and she is unable to 'duren' the possibility. Though Jerome had established three grades of chastity – virginity, widowhood and marriage – that placed marriage at the bottom,[8] Kempe was probably aware of the lives of married saints like Hedwig of Silesia (d.1243), Dauphine of Languedoc (d.1360), and Dorothy of Montau (d.1394), who were praised for the purity of their marriages, which were based not upon lust but 'faith, fertility, and sacrament'.[9] Bridget of Sweden was known to have had a pious marriage, developing the ascetic practices of prayer, fasting and sleep-deprivation over its duration; even instructing her husband Ulf to study and read devoutly.[10] 'Þe Myroure Off chastite' tells us that the Virgin Mary 'dispise[s] lusti filþes', and that St. Lucy, 'spouse of crist…hatid filþis of þis world'.[11] With such influences, and the feeling that her own marriage was comparatively inadequate, the inescapable pain of sexual marriage for Kempe thus perpetuates in a quasi-

[6] MED s.v. lefful (adj.2), a) permissible, allowed b) permitted by civil law, legal c) permitted or *sanctioned by religious law*.
[7] Medieval penitentials forbade marital sex on fast days, feast days, before communion, and after receiving the sacrament, during Lent, Advent, and Whitsuntide, on certain days of each week, during menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation. The primary purpose of these prohibitions was to avoid ritual pollution. See James Brundage, '"Allas! That Evere Love Was Synne": Sex and Medieval Canon Law', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 72, (1986), 1-13, p. 10). Also Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) pp. 150-151.
[8] Connor McCarthy, 'Marital Sex', in *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature and Practice* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), pp. 107-25, (p. 108).
[9] Michael Goodich, 'Sexuality, Family, and the Supernatural in the Fourteenth Century', in *Medieval Families: Perspectives on Marriage, Household, and Children*, ed. Carol Neel (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 302-28. Kempe may have known the *vita* of Dorothy of Montau, although she does not mention her by name. David Wallace connects the revived cult of Dorothea in the 1930s with the discovery of Kempe's *Boke* in *Strong Women*, p. 61. See also Ute Stargardt, 'The Beguines of Belgium, the Dominican Nuns of Germany, and Margery Kempe', pp. 277-313.
[10] Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, esp. pp. 42-63.
[11] *The Pore Caitif*, p. 178 and p. 193 respectively.

masochistic cycle where the desire for *Heuyn*, though ultimately rewarding, has an agonisingly high price tag for her on earth.[12]

To intensify this suffering further, medieval medical texts paradoxically make clear that sexual abstinence is inconducive to health, causing pain and affliction. Thus, despite the potential advantage of Kempe's mystically-privileged quest for marital sexual abstinence and the seemingly fruitful end of her reproductive capacity, there is a tension in what I have termed the *pain paradox* of chaste marriage, on which basis this chapter resides. Scholarly attention has been paid to the theological difficulties inherent in the negotiation of this new interpretation of marriage.[13] But no work has been conducted on the conflict between the theological and medical advice which constructs a paradigm through which it is impossible to manoeuvre painlessly. Medieval medical theory, in its proposition of celibacy as physically damaging, stands in opposition to the doctrine that upholds virginity as the highest state, thus creating a pain imperative from which Kempe is ultimately unable to escape. She is, I argue, therefore trapped within an imprisoning hermeneutic faced with the uncomfortable choice of spiritual or physical pain.[14]

Paul's sanction, quoted at the start of this chapter, dictates the dispossession of corporeal autonomy in marriage: the Christian tradition of the

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[12] On female virginity in late antiquity see Elizabeth Castelli, 'Virginity and its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2, (1986), 61-88.

[13] See Jo Ann McNamara, 'Chaste Marriage and Clerical Celibacy' in *Sexual Practices in the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Prometheus, 1982), pp. 22-33; Penny S. Gold, 'The Marriage of Mary and Joseph in the Twelfth-Century Ideology of Marriage', in *Sexual Practices in the Medieval Church*, pp. 102-117. See also Elizabeth M. Makowski, 'The conjugal debt and medieval canon law', *Journal of Medieval History*, (1977) 99-114.

[14] On gendered pain in scholastic thought, especially Eve's legacy, see Donald Mowbray, Chapter Two, 'Gendering Pain: Theological Ideas about Male and Female Suffering', in *Pain and Suffering in Medieval Theology*, pp. 43-60, especially, on Eve, pp. 51-9. Mowbray suggests that theologians like Aquinas saw women as experiencing three types of suffering: carrying the foetus and giving birth, hardship and suffering in conception (due to the sin of sexual pleasure), and subjection to male hegemony (pp. 55-6).

conjugal debt which poses a strategic problem for Kempe, and other holy married women who sought a spiritual life.[15] Like the ambivalence of the teachings of the church fathers, whose elevation of virginity had the effect of creating the possibility of spiritualised marriage, thus compromising its original procreative function, there is complexity in Kempe's conflicting ambition to gain spiritual edification whilst upholding her commitment to Christian wedlock. In order to progress one pathway, she must necessarily denigrate the other. Paul's echo of Genesis whereby '...a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh' (Genesis 2: 24) serves to emphasise the clear somatic role of the marriage institution as a site of concession where sexual activity takes place (albeit preferably for the purpose of reproduction) in a sin-free context. However, where the institution liberated spouses in this respect, it simultaneously constrained them, as payment for sexual license required the relinquishing of one's own corporeal autonomy. A similar dichotomy of the contradiction of spirit and flesh and the internal battle which it generates is acknowledged by Paul: 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit; and the spirit against the flesh. For these are contrary one to another; so that you do not the things that you would' (Galatians 5: 17). Writers such as Jerome (ca. 347-419) and Augustine (354-430) questioned whether sex was even a part of God's creation. Furthermore, that the church fathers identified Original Sin as the first sexually transmitted disease illustrates an early association with female transgression and somatic malady, establishing an inescapable synthesis of

[15] Other, married women religious included Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373), Angela of Foligno (d.1309), Dorothea of Montau (d. 1394), Marie of Oignies (d.1213) and Elizabeth of Hungary (d.1231). See, for example, Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*, pp. 157-194.

spirit and body that renders female spiritual progression as inherently problematic.[16]

The opportunity of chaste marriage as a remedy, which became popular from the time of the early Church, however, was similarly fraught.[17] Dyan Elliott regards it as 'somewhat of an anomaly because it occasions a blurring of what were widely perceived as two discrete groups: the continent and the married'.[18] There is further equivalence between Paul's removal of bodily autonomy in marriage and Kempe's reclaiming of authority exemplified by her resistance of prescribed social roles. As Elliott posits,

> …the emergence of spiritual marriage as a frequently chaotic and unregulated practice could be construed as a spontaneous and complex reaction against society's expectations: a revolt against the reproductive imperative and a pious rebellion against the prevailing view that the call to a higher level of spirituality implied the separation of women and men.[19]

In short, the retrieval of bodily authority via chaste marriage appeared to be justified through a claim to a higher spiritual force than biblical doctrine alone – the claim to a superior piety – and this, importantly and paradoxically, I argue, is most easily accessed through mystical privilege. Married female mystics may be regarded as ideal candidates for the fulfilment of chaste marriage because of their esoteric and direct dialogue with Christ, circumventing Christian dogma with pseudo-priestly power as the intercessory requirement of the priest is to an extent rendered unnecessary. Furthermore, as scholars have identified, the manner in which chastity in marriage transcends gender distinctions has the

[16] Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (Longmans: London, 1927), pp. 226-231.
[17] After the imposition of celibacy upon the clergy in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the support for chaste marriage dwindled and it was thereafter discouraged among the laity. See Jo Ann McNamara, 'Chaste Marriage and Clerical Celibacy', in *Sexual Practices*, ed. Bullough and Brundage, pp. 22-33, (pp. 22-3).
[18] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 17.
[19] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, pp. 4-5.

effect of a female empowerment that has the distinct possibility of disrupting the hegemonic equilibrium.[20] Indeed, the 'reproductive imperative' to which Elliott refers is necessarily immobilised after a vow of chastity has taken place. Chastity and virginity could be interchangeable in medieval terminology, whereby the terms *castitas* and *virginitas* might refer to physical intactness, or to a commitment to a celibate life, or even to sexual faithfulness in a monogamous marriage.[21] Aquinas connected Christ's relationship to humanity as 'a kind of spiritual marriage'.[22] The attainment of a chaste marriage thus marks an important juncture in Kempe's life in its close link to the state of virginity, to Mary and to Christ, and as a symbolic relinquishment of childbearing, which coincide in a movement towards the spiritual life that she seeks.

This chapter therefore elucidates a series of complex dichotomies. It will examine the medical texts that warn of the *physical* dangers of chastity to the female body, the opposing *spiritual* pain that Kempe experiences in maintaining a sexual marriage, and the ways in which she attempts to overcome the problem through the deliberate bringing forth of pain into her earthly life as an ascetic substitute for the eternal pain of damnation: 'sche dred no devylle in Helle, for sche dede so gret bodyly penawnce' (13). This is Margery Kempe's own modification of the mystical affectivity popularised by the continental women whose lives she has been shown to be influenced by.[23] I will therefore

[20] Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church' in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Wipf and Stock, 1974), pp. 150-183.
[21] Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie, 'Introduction: The Epistemology of Virginity', in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp. 15-25, (pp. 16-7).
[22] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Allen, Texas: Christian Classics, 1989), vol. 51:30.1, p. 516.
[23] Wolfgang Riehle, 'Margery Kempe', in *The Secret Within*, pp. 246-281. See also Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim,* esp. pp. 157-94; Alexandra Barratt, 'Margery Kempe and the

argue that her eventual marriage to the Godhead signifies the antithesis of marital 'mukke', brought about by a passage towards wholeness and purification. Like the slurry that she is prepared to endure having thrown at her naked body for God's love ('I wolde, Lord, for þi lofe be leyd nakyd on an hyrdill, alle men to wonderyn on me for þi lofe, so it wer no perel to her sowlys, & þei to castyn slory & slugge on me' [184]), Kempe selects her 'muck' in a different way. In a chapter that seeks an exegesis of Margery Kempe's marriage(s), then, I will examine the pain paradox of celibacy, the strategies of asceticism and purification that she employs to seek a remedy, and the climactic event of mystical marriage, as an analgesic resolution to the problem of her earthly one.

The Painful Problem of Celibacy

In the theological and medical texts of the Middle Ages, celibacy is constructed as inescapably painful, through the *pain paradox* that I argued for above. To procreate in marriage, for example, elevates marriage and motherhood for St. Paul: 'Yet she shall be saved through childbearing; if she continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety' (1 Timothy 2:15). Yet this tenet marks a curious re-evaluation of the legacy of Eve's curse and its universal application to women who are told that 'in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children' (Genesis 3:16). Despite the transgression as being undeniably gendered,[24] it is the same 'sorrowful' childbearing that can facilitate salvation, albeit with the conditional obedience and sober modification required by Christian motherhood.[25] If,

King's Daughter of Hungary' in McEntire, ed., *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, pp. 189-201, and Alexandra Barratt, 'Continental Women Mystics and English Readers', in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Dinshaw and Wallace, pp 240-55. Also Susan Dickman, 'Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England,* 1984, ed. Glasscoe*,* pp. 150-68.

[24] 'And Adam was not seduced; but the woman being seduced, was in the transgression' (1 Timothy 2:14).

[25] On Holy Kinship, the emphasis of the female line in depictions of Christ's family, and the salvific possibilities for married women and mothers, see Pamela Sheingorn, 'Appropriating the

biblically, motherhood is set up as an edifying route for female salvation, then the notion of chaste marriage and its inherent denial of procreative functionality is clearly problematic. Dichotomous attitudes towards female reproductive capacity – as a sanctifying route or a vile truth symbolic of an unclean, fleshy state, as upheld by the Gnostic tradition – nevertheless foreground maternal capability as primary.[26] The anxiety of the clerics over the increasing popularity of lay chastity in the high and late Middle Ages was partly borne from the need for the elevation of the celibate cleric for his continued authority over the laity. Furthermore, the equality of intramarital chastity (at least in theory) posed a threat to societal and Christian structures of male superiority. In response, the impossible model of the spiritual marriage of Mary and Joseph became a vehicle through which canonists could distance lay and theological ideals of marriage.[27] The emergence of pastoral manuals and canonistic sources thus sought to emphasise what Elliott posits as 'the dramatic reassertion of the centrality of sexual intercourse in marriage'.[28] In fact, David d'Avray has argued that there is a scholarly misconception that the medieval church 'tolerated sex only grudgingly... Medieval religious writers were indeed ambiguous about pleasure as a *motive* for sex, but in the thirteenth century and after, pleasure

Holy Kinship: Gender and Family History', in *Medieval Families*, ed. Neel, pp. 273-301, esp. p. 283.

[26] Second-century Gnostics regarded maternity as 'a grim mechanism by which "true" creation, which was spiritual, was entrapped in diabolic matter. The female element was identified with false material creation; the male with the pristine, spiritual realm'. See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, pp. 25-26. Such thinking is echoed in Aristotelian theory where the female is not only the passive agent in the reproductive process, providing only the matter (blood) onto which the male spirit moulds its form, but the production of female offspring is regarded as a failure. See Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 21-26.

[27] Penny S. Gold, 'The Marriage of Mary and Joseph in the Twelfth-Century Ideology of Marriage', in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Bullough and Brundage, pp. 102-117. See also Jo Ann McNamara, 'Chaste Marriage and Clerical Celibacy', p. 28 in the same volume.

[28] See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p.141 and pp. 140-142 for the medieval theoretical argument against marital chastity.

was deemed legitimate as an *effect* of marital sex'.[29] The writer of 'Þe Myroure Off chastite' underlines how, in marrying, 'þou hast not synned', however, to remain 'vnweddid & maiden' causes a woman to 'þenthiþ þilke þingis þat ben of þe lord', rather than the worldly concerns of pleasing her husband.[30]

However, the concomitant influx of medical and scientific texts which underscored women's pronounced sexual appetite (as will be examined below) and established sexual abstinence as physically damaging and pain-inflicting constructed an encompassing hermeneutic that maintained chastity in marriage as inadvisable. Kempe's growing fervour for a vow of chastity is therefore deeply entangled in dichotomies of pollution and pain, scripture and science, domesticity and biology, and serves to complicate her trajectory towards a life religious.

The *Trotula* text 'On Treatments for Women' establishes the notion of celibacy as a physical problem causing pain:

> There are some women to whom carnal intercourse is not permitted, sometimes because they are bound by a vow, sometimes because they are bound by religion, sometimes because they are widows, because to some women it is not permitted to take fruitful vows. These women, when they have desire to copulate and do not do so, incur grave illness.[31]

The author of this passage accepts unquestioningly the necessity of celibacy for some women. It also accepts the accompanying pain as a given, homologising theological and physiological 'truths' and reinforcing the pain imperative of chastity. An indomitable female sexual appetite is assumed ('que cum uoluntatem habeant coeundi' [*when* they have desire]), despite the obvious fact

[29] David d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. p. 170. For the twelfth century precedents, see Christopher Brooke, 'The Cult of Celibacy in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 61-92.
[30] *The Pore Caitif*, p. 187.
[31] 'On Treatments for Women', in *The Trotula*, p. 121.

that such women have clearly chosen – with the exception of the widow – to live celibate.[32] The suggested remedy of a cotton plug, soaked in oil and placed into the vagina, underlines the tension between physical and spiritual health; the female body, imprisoned by its scriptural and reproductive function, should simply be soothed and controlled 'to dissipate the desire and dull the pain'.[33] A sense of inevitability is therefore shaped whereby the occludent symbolism and pacifying nature of the plug render the treatment of symptoms subordinate to the immutable reality of the pain.

Pain is gendered in this sense because of its rootedness in sexual activity and consequent reproductive capacity. Whilst contraceptives are mentioned in medical texts, there is often a conditionality hinged on mortal danger: the 'Book on the Conditions of Women' asserts how 'Galen says that women who have narrow vaginas and constricted wombs ought not to have sexual relations with men lest they conceive and die. But all such women are not able to abstain, and so they need our assistance'.[34] Again, the pain imperative is unquestioned despite the marriage debt being in some cases a potentially fatal causational factor. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* similarly accedes that 'sche þat wol haue no travyll in chyldynge, let kepe here fro þe recevynge of sede of man &, oon my parell, sche schall nevyre drede þe travelynge of chylde'.[35] In other words, one should *expect* to become pregnant if engaging in sexual activity. To abstain prevents the pains of childbirth, but not all women are 'able' to abstain; and those that do, will suffer the 'grave illness' associated with celibate living.

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, p. 97.
[35] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 50.

According to the French doctor and medical professor Bernard of Gordon (fl. 1270-1330), women are more damaged by sexual abstinence than men because they take less exercise.[36] The reason for their more sedentary lives is connected to a multifarious framework of inadequacy: a lack of heat to produce semen leads to a lack of energy, which in turn leads to a lack of physical activity that, as Joan Cadden acknowledges, suggests a subsequent 'aura of incapacity'.[37] She suggests that the failure of medieval authors to distinguish between behavioural habits as being the source of the medical condition or the medical condition as the source of the behaviour 'demonstrates the extent to which medical and scientific ideas about sex were integrated with gender constructs and also of the cultural assumption that the integration was appropriate, requiring no explanation or justification'.[38] This notion, I suggest, is also applicable to medical writers' benign acceptance of the unfortunate fact of pain in both celibate *and* sexualised lifestyles for women. Moreover, the medical belief in the conflation of character and constitution is reinforced by the association of women as cold, moist and phlegmatic: phlegmatics and melancholics (both cool temperaments) are described as inactive and sedentary.[39] As a melancholic, as was argued in Chapter One, Kempe is therefore put at an increased physical risk in a celibate role within the paradigm described here.

Kempe's risk of pain is similarly heightened by the tendency for chaste women, who were once sexually active, to experience a suffocation of the womb (the symptoms of which were examined in Chapter One). The 'Book on

[36] Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, p. 172.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p. 173.
[39] Cadden, p. 184. See also Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy and Art*, p. 379.

the Conditions of Women' makes clear that this is a disease of the celibate: 'This happens to those women who do not use men, especially to widows who were accustomed to carnal commerce'.[40] The writer's synthesis of medical disorder and the 'carnal commerce' of the marriage debt replays Cadden's observation of the assumed appropriateness of such a cultural-medical amalgam.[41] However, let us focus here on the severity of the illness in newly-chaste women, like Margery Kempe. The text of *De Secretis Mulierum* states that 'This sickness [suffocation] happens in women because they are full of corrupt and poisonous menses'.[42] Commentator A on this text expands thus:

> This affliction happens most often to widows, women whose husbands are no longer with them, and so their menses become corrupted in the womb and thick humours are generated, which in turn produce weakness in the heart. Coitus is exceedingly beneficial to these women.[43]

Menstrual retention, where 'corrupt' menses in the womb are left to fester when the heat of the male is not used to draw them out, is often connected to uterine suffocation in medieval medical texts. The further connection between religious women and menstrual retention, however, is striking because it adds weight to the claim of this chapter for Kempe's amplified risk of pain. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* lists the women who might experience amenorrhoea [absent menses], including:

> ...tho þat syngvn & wake mekyll, as do þes religios, for of her wakynge & travelynge in syngynge here blode wastyth & defyet well here repast.[44]

[40] The 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, p. 85.
[41] Cf. previous page.
[42] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 132.
[43] Ibid., p. 134.
[44] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 48.

The increased expenditure of energy required for the religious practices of singing, waking and labouring, is suggested as responsible for the menstrual retention that in turn is concomitant with the perils of uterine suffocation. It would appear, then, that Kempe's situation is somewhat hopeless if she wishes to avoid pain. That she experiences 'travelynge', or labouring, in singing and waking, connects the multiple activities of religious practice, pain and childbearing that this chapter is focused on.[45] The interrelation of her melancholic temperament, and the risk of uterine suffocation through the binary causes of menstrual retention and religious praxis is a painful equation which more than challenges the spiritual pain that Kempe experiences in rendering the marriage debt, as will be shown. The assimilation of biology and behaviour is marked in its inextricable convergence in these medical texts. The medieval female body thus becomes characterised by its porousness – a susceptibility to cultural modification – and subject to infinite and ill-defined borders which, as Karmen MacKendrick has lucidly argued, are characterised by multiplicity: 'the premodern sense of the spirited body is... far less unified, orderly, singular or stable [than the modern]'. The notion of identity is threatened when conceived within an 'ill-bounded flux', and MacKendrick sees this flux as amplified in the Middle Ages owing to the 'exuberant excesses of premodern flesh'.[46] Indeed, there is a dramatic shift in the social structure of Kempe's life after her negotiated vow of chastity, as will be examined below, which has somatic repercussions that reflect the fluidity of such boundaries. As will emerge, the

[45] MED s.v. travailen, *ppl.* travailinge; 1(b) to perform hard physical labour, toil; 1(c) to labour in the service of God; work for divine approval; 4(a) To suffer pain or physical torments; undergo maltreatment or punishment; (b) to suffer from disease or injury, be afflicted with an illness or debilitating condition, be or become unwell; (e) to suffer the pain of childbearing, be in labour, give birth.
[46] Karmen MacKendrick, 'The Multipliable Body', *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 1, (2010), 108–114.

dialogue between medical theory and theology fashions an uncomfortable female body where the pain imperative continues to exist but from where Kempe will find new modes of modification.

Ascetic Pain Substitution

In a transformative process, Margery Kempe adopts a broader strategy of pain substitution that she constructs in an attempt to transpose, or even replace, the sin (and therefore the pain) of sex, even in marriage, onto individual acts of bodily penance. Such attempts at a form of self-medication of sorts construct Kempe as simultaneous producer and reliever of pain: another pain paradox perhaps, and a means of negating the church fathers' view of Original Sin as a sexually transmitted disease. The approach that she employs in her persuasions to John for chaste living centre around the notion of abstinence as a form of punishment in itself: that in denying bodily lust they are in effect chastised, offering reparations to God whom they had 'dysplesyd'. Kempe decides that 'now it wer good þat þei schuld be her boþins wylle & consentyng of hem bothyn punschyn & chastysyn hem-self wilfully be absteynyng fro her lust of her bodys' (12), establishing a willing acceptance to substitute one form of pain for another. As her husband is unprepared as yet to forgo the conjugal debt, Kempe 'dede gret bodyly penawnce' in the same manner as described in *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, above.

> Sche was schreuyn sum-tyme twyes or thryes on þe day... Sche ȝaf hir to gret fastyng & to gret wakyng; sche roos at ij or iij of þe clok & went to cherch & was þer in hir prayers on-to tyme of noon and also al þe aftyrnoon (12).

The self-imposed discomfort of sleep deprivation and fasting illustrates Kempe's determination to be punished corporeally for the similarly physical defilement

that she perceives in sexual activity. Like her preparedness to ingest 'wose', the polar penance of fasting not only denotes the use of food, or absence of food, to *control* the self, but rather than evidence of self-loathing, fasting represents a method of gaining power through meaning because, as Bynum puts it, 'The point was pain because the pain was Christ's'.[47] This pain substitution is intensified through Kempe's wearing of a hairshirt which thereafter she wears daily – a constant trigger for the recall of her sins and a symbol of marital division. Not only is John unaware of his wife's uncomfortable attire, but the fact that Kempe bears children in that time is indicative of a symbolic remove between them (and that 'chylderyn' is pluralised denotes the length of time that this particular act of penance lasted). Though their sexual marriage continues, the hidden haircloth is an esoteric statement, much like her internal discernment of God's words, and there is significance in the punishment of a body that continues in its biologically maternal function:

> Þan sche gat hir an hayr of a kylne swech as men dryen on malt & leyd it in hir kyrtylle as sotyllych & preuylich as sche mygth þat hir husbond xuld not aspye it, ne no mor he dede, & ȝet sche lay be hym euery nygth in his bedde, & weryd þe hayr euery day, & bar chylderyn in þe tyme (12).

In distancing her body from her husband, symbolically at least, Kempe becomes closer to God both through their shared communication and the secrecy that she emphasises in her wearing of the haircloth. Furthermore, the constant discomfort of the coarse fibres against her skin is a private and intimate manifestation of pain (MED s.v. privelie: 2(a) intimately), in sharp juxtaposition with the 'enforced' intimacy of her marital encounters: her intimacy with Christ supersedes that with John. That this form of penance is a hidden one gives

[47] Bynum has identified how food formed the social context of women's world and was thus a more apposite ascetic tool for women than men. See, here, Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* p. 212.

Kempe a privileged access to God through an esoteric pain substitution that only she can decipher. Imprisoned within the 'carnal commerce' of the marriage union, she determinedly adapts this imprisonment to one of self-imposed enclosure, the haircloth as a private interpretation of the anchorite whose isolation from the world is a necessary route to God. Unable to live chastely, Kempe punishes the body that continues to act as a maternal hermeneutic despite the punitive and dangerous potential that it offers. The wearing of a hairshirt was a common practice amongst holy ascetics. After the death of Bridget of Sweden's husband, she 'weer nere next hir bare skyn a corde of hempe with many knottes harde bounden to hir & in lyke wyse about euery of hir legges vnder hir knees'.[48] That Kempe does not wait until she is a widow to don such a shirt evidences her urgency to hasten her trajectory towards her hagiographical role models.[49]

Liz Herbert McAvoy and Alexandra Barratt have written persuasively on the interplay of wombs and tombs in this context, by examining imagery of the womb as a metaphor in medieval texts.[50] Barratt claims that 'true enclosure was… a state of mind', by examining Gertrude of Helfta's ability to 'achieve the effect of enclosure by other means: specifically, by sickness or physical weakness, which would isolate her from her sisters'.[51] McAvoy, however, argues for Kempe's more literal undertaking of anchoritic performances – the *Boke's* 'insistent discourses of enclosure' – regarding Kempe as having moved innovatively towards Pepwell's description of her as a 'deuote ancres of

[48] Thomas Gascoigne, 'Lyfe of seynt Birgette', in *The Myroure of oure Ladye*, p. lii.
[49] The male version of the hairshirt was the *lorica*, used in military and monastic life to emphasise spiritual suffering and merit, playing on the idea of fighting, both in military and spiritual terms. See, for example, Katherine Allen Smith, *War and the Making of Monastic Culture*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), esp. pp. 190-94.
[50] Alexandra Barratt, 'Context: Some Reflections on Wombs and Tombs and Inclusive Language' in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, p. 27-38.
[51] Barratt, 'Context', p. 36.

Lynne'.[52] Such modified notions of enclosure have ramifications for a study of Kempe, as societal and domestic restrictions limit her ability to commit entirely to a life of asceticism. Kempe must act innovatively in her intimate acts of enclosure. Hagiographers have argued that fasting women were admired because their bodies ceased to excrete. Similarly, medical theory acknowledges that fasting suppresses menstruation – another 'ordinary' bodily function which is far-removed from Christ's *extra*ordinary body and thus an undesired effluvium.[53] Therefore, in its shielding function, the haircloth represents Kempe's own interpretation of enclosure: a painful secret where the generative possibilities of the hidden womb are encased in an outer layer of punishment and protection, from where the secrets of the violated birthing room can be reclaimed, and from where that same oppressive maternity can be transformed.

Importantly, Christ echoes the efficacy of this interiorised penance in bestowing Kempe with a metaphorical haircloth in her heart: 'And, dowtyr, þu hast an hayr vp-on þi bakke. I wyl þu do it a-way, & I schal ȝiue þe an hayr in þin hert þat schal lyke me mych bettyr þan alle þe hayres in þe world' (17). This transference alludes to the medieval equivalence of the heart and womb, as was discussed in Chapter One of this study, and thus carries with it the subtext of a replacement maternity. Like the concept of the pain paradox, Kempe's maternal identification is seemingly inescapable in this wider context. Furthermore, whilst she is in some ways freed physically by Christ's gift, she is simultaneously further constrained. Implicit in the heart's haircloth is Christ's *validation* of Kempe's need for perpetual punishment, and that this should be made permanent and internalised forever. Though she is appropriated with

[52] McAvoy, '"Closyd in an hows of ston": Discourses of Anchoritism and *The Book of Margery Kempe*' in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs*, pp. 182-94 (p. 192).
[53] On fasting to control bodily functions see *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 211-214. This topic will be considered in Chapter Three.

heavenly perspicacity, the legacy of Eve's transgression and subsequent stain on the female soul is another internal scar that she must, apparently, suffer.

Liz Herbert McAvoy regards this episode as entirely liberating for Kempe; that 'Following this endorsement by Christ... Kempe is "reborn" to herself and to God and, in effect, emerges from her own rent and fissured body into the arms of her loving father and spouse – Christ'.[54] Whilst I concur with McAvoy's assertion of Kempe's furthered connection with Christ at this point, I would add that this is at a cost; that Kempe's rebirth is one that is paradoxically dependent on the tainted maternal body within which she is painfully enclosed. Indeed, Christ's offer of the redemptive and internal haircloth is echoed shortly after by the monk at Canterbury whose hegemonic anxiety over Kempe's authoritative discourse leads him to wish her to be entirely contained in a different way: 'I wold þow wer closyd in an hows of ston þat þer schuld no man speke wyth þe' (27).

Such clerical concern over female penitential practice increased when acts of asceticism threatened the exaction of the marriage debt. Elliott notes that 'While neither spouse was, in theory, permitted to undertake so rigid a program of asceticism that it would impede ready payment of the debt, the husband was permitted to interfere with his wife's pious practices (be they prayers, fasts, vigils, or other forms of devotion), whilst the reverse was not true'.[55] The *Glossa ordinaria* states that a wife's scandalous vow of chastity is equivalent to 'lying in a thin nightshirt, fasting while the husband dines, or attending matins'.[56] Nonetheless, Elliott sees some ground to be gained through

[54] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 40.
[55] Citing the *Glossa ordinaria*, Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 154.
[56] Ibid., p. 187.

female acts of penance, albeit whilst maintaining the appearance of the husband's control, lest traditional dynamics become threatened:

> ...they [the clergy] forged a furtive coalition with them [female penitents] that was necessitated by the husband's control over the wife's person and was based on the woman's delicate balance between the hidden and the manifest, between the tacit and the expressed, between the inner and the outer, between the internal and external fora. Ultimately the confessional fostered a subtle subversion of masculine authority.[57]

Rigid female asceticism and vows of chastity were thus contentious because of their potential to undermine the husband's authority. Kempe's pain substitution via a penitential conduit, in exchange for her desired vow, thus demonstrates her resolute trajectory towards a purer channel to God, circumventing spousal authority. Despite the danger of wifely insubordination, she drives forwards in her conviction that earthly pain will facilitate an eternity of spiritual health. Such determination denotes a spiritual conviction but also feeds into the medieval fear of the female body as dangerous and polluted, beholden of an inherent capacity for pain which renders women powerful and, potentially, deadly agents, as I will now explore.

Deadly Touching: Towards a Protective Vow

How might such a medieval construction of 'female danger' be seen to operate in Kempe's quest for chastity? And how might this ideology have a paradoxically positive outcome for her *experientia*? In this section, I argue that Kempe exploits cultural constructions of the female body as dangerous, especially towards men. According to the 'Book on the Conditions of Women', pious, married women like Kempe who are reluctant to pay the marriage debt regularly, suffer from the retention of corrupt semen which 'Nature' requires to

[57] Ibid., p. 187.

be ‘drawn out’ by the male: ‘From this superabundant and corrupt semen, a certain cold fumosity is released and it ascends to the organs’.[58] The corruption of female vapours is exaggerated further in *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing*, where a linguistic field of malignancy serves to emphasise menstruation as both polluting and scriptural in origin:

> But nature, þat hatyth euery corrupcion & voydyth afthyre hys povere all þynge þat is [noyant] to body of man, enforsyth euery monyth onys to purge & *clense þe body of euyll humorys* & corrupte. And so þis *purgacyon ys ordende* to women & ys clepid menstrual be-cause hit commyth euery monyth onys [my emphasis].[59]

Medieval medical texts thus hold women as *naturally* contaminated; this intrinsic ‘euyll’ requiring ‘ordende’ purgation. Charles T. Wood has explored the tension between Eve’s ‘curse’ and the purity of the Virgin Mary, and the way in which this posed problems for a medieval interpretation of the female body.[60] Scientific and religious doctrine is fused in an interaction where moral codes are inscribed on a dyscrasic female body. Bynum has shown how many religious women’s internalisation of such a paradigm resulted in an anxiety over even pious touching.[61] Fernando Salmón suggests that touch is not only the territory of sexuality, but of self:

> ... the historicity of touch does not allow us to pigeonhole this sense in a narrow history of sexuality and of the body but forces us to place it as the ground for a rather more neglected history of the self. In this history, touch should emerge as the necessary condition of the self and as the natural domain of two deep subjective experiences, that of pain and pleasure. The intellectual difficulties posed in dealing with this sense within the Christian framework provided by scholasticism

[58] ‘Book on the Conditions of Women’, in *The Trotula*, p. 85.
[59] *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing*, p. 54.
[60] Charles T. Wood, ‘The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought’, *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 710-727.
[61] Bynum cites holy women such as Bridget of Sweden, Clare of Montefalco and Douceline of Marseilles, whose reticence towards ‘touch’ indicates a reflection of ancient notions about the polluted female. Lutgard of Aywières, for instance, ‘panicked at an abbot’s insistence on giving her the kiss of peace’. See *Holy Feast*, pp. 212-213.

> were not linked to its connection with sexuality but with its role in the definition of the self and its boundaries.[62]

The sense of touch is problematic, then, because, as Salmón asserts, 'touch left the self in a territory that only existed through the practice of relating to other beings and objects'.[63] The touch of the 'contaminated' female, therefore, was loaded with meaning, both for the toucher and the touched, as this meaning was located precisely in the moment of physical connection between subject and object: the dangerous female and her prey.[64] In fact, the author of 'Þe Myroure Off chastite' sees touch as the very cause of the Fall of Man, as, in beholding what was forbidden, 'eue [would] hadde not *touched* þe forbodun tre'.[65] It also employs the story of the martyred virgin St. Agnes who the 'hooli doctour', St. Ambrose prescribed for the 'edificacioun of maidens'. When led to a brothel, naked, to be 'spuylid' for her faith, the 'iustice' who would rape her 'feldoun to his face: & was stranglid of þe deuel', '*bifore he shulde touche hir*'.[66] And the example of Delilah is held up as the cause of Samson's downfall, with her 'wanton & vnchastisid fals fleish, þat in a fewe daies shal be stynkinge erþe & filþe'.[67]

The danger of the polluting threat of the female touch is largely focused on the risk to the 'object', usually the male but often the unborn child as well, as I shall argue below. The medieval female body was associated more generally with contaminating impurity, with menstrual blood in particular being thought to

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[62] Fernando Salmón, 'A Medieval Territory for Touch', in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History: Sexuality and Culture in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (New York: AMS Press, 2005), p. 60.
[63] Ibid., p.68.
[64] For a full length study of the anthropological ideas of pollution and contamination, see Mary Douglas, *Collected Works Volume II: Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Purity and Danger* (London and New York: Routledge, 1966), 2003 reprint.
[65] My emphasis; *The Pore Caitif*, p. 179.
[66] My emphasis; *The Pore Caitif*, pp. 192-3.
[67] *The Pore Caitif*, p. 183.

produce leprosy, elephantiasis and epilepsy in the newborn infant. *De Secretis Mulierum* constructs the female reproductive body as posing a risk to men through sexual contact and by contamination from the air that menstruating women pollute:

> When men go near these women they are made hoarse, so that they cannot speak well. This is because the venomous humours from the woman's body infect the air by her breath, and the infected air travels to the man's vocal chords and arteries causing him to become hoarse. It is harmful for men to have sexual intercourse with menstruating women because should conception take place the foetus would be leprous. This also frequently causes cancer in the male member.[68]

Women's humours are regarded by this writer as imbued with the power to transmit atmospherically: her 'venom' able to infect and injure in a pejorative form of the porousness that Margery Kempe has been shown in this chapter to embody. In describing women's bodies as imperceptible, with airborne potency, such examples evidence the fear of those bodies as powerful and esoteric; themselves products of the moral diathesis with which they are held to infect in others.

Just as the maternal body was susceptible to the dangers of childbirth, the very fact of reproductive capacity, and with it, menstruation, was therefore viewed as a dangerous force to the wider community, and more specifically, men. Whilst many medical writers and natural philosophers emphasised the positive function of menstruation through its purgative effects, according to Joan Cadden, 'the misogynistic possibilities of menstruation did not go unexploited'.[69] Naturalists like Isidore of Seville in the sixth century held that women of childbearing age possessed a *super*natural, alchemical quality whilst menstruating, which could affect nature: 'crops do not germinate, wine sours,

[68] Commentator B on *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 130.
[69] Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, p. 175.

grass dies, trees lose their fruit, and iron rusts'.[70] Such sentiments recur throughout the medical texts of the Middle Ages, with those dangers capable of being transferred to the unborn child. The *Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* states how the female can pose a danger to the unborn child during the ninth month of pregnancy through sexual activity: '& þat in þat tyme sche entermet hyre not with no disport of [deduyt] & namly ny here tyme, for with suche puttynge þe secundynne might brek & so þe chylde be abortyffe and stroyde for euyre'.[71] Similarly, *De Secretis Mulierum* considers the Galenic notion of the *monstrous imagination* – the mother as able to literally *imagine* her unborn baby into a monster – as he considers the danger of the mother to the foetus: 'A monster of this type can also be caused by a special action of the imaginative power of a woman who is having coitus. It is possible that when such a figure springs to mind the foetus will be disposed in accordance with it'.[72] Sarah Alison Miller notes how, according to this text, 'monsters shed light on the secrets of women; teratology illuminates gynaecology'.[73] The medieval notion of the 'Maternal Impression' held that the mother's emotional, spiritual and psychological state was capable of being transferred to the foetus, often in the guise of physical deformity.[74] William F. MacLehose suggests that 'The power of [the mother's] imagination began a physiological process'.[75] Commentator A on the text cites 'the venerable Hippocrates' in *On the Nature of Man* in a

[70] Isidorus, *Etymologiae*, bk. XI, ch. 1, in Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, p. 175.
[71] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 60.
[72] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 116.
[73] Sarah Alison Miller, *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 86.
[74] See Katherine Park, 'Impressed Images: Reproducing Wonders', in *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 254-271.
[75] William F. MacLehose, 'Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child', in *Medieval Mothering* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993), pp. 3-24, at p. 8. See also Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

pledge to strengthen the gravity of the risk, stating how men should 'not go near a menstruating woman, because from this foulness the air is corrupted, and the insides of a man are brought to disorder'.[76] Women are therefore constructed as dangerous both to their unborn children and to the men around them in causing sickness and deformity. The potency of this female toxicity permeates the air – the very atmosphere of human existence – suggesting a malign force which is at once inferior and powerfully dangerous.

Despite this perceived threat of female flesh, the paradox of the chastity paradigm meant that from the high Middle Ages, the marriage debt overtook previously sacrosanct doctrine on traditional periods of abstinence. Gratian (359-383) had listed the penitential periods and then posited them as optional, stating that they 'should be observed if the wife wishes to furnish consent; but without her consent, continence should not be observed for the sake of prayer'.[77] Surprisingly, in contradiction to the advice of many medical treatises, the exacting of the debt during menstruation or childbirth became permissible and less sinful, even when that exaction threatened the health of the woman. Elliott asserts that 'Rendering the debt during pregnancy was deemed licit by Dominican authorities provided that the foetus was not imperilled'.[78] Risks to the female, however, seem to be less important. Thomas of Chobham in c.1215, argued that the sin and contamination is the woman's problem alone:

> ... [he] believed that women who permitted their husbands to know them after childbirth sinned mortally. He suggests a way in which such sin could be expeditiously avoided, however. If the husband were to exact the debt, the wife should go instantly to the church and seek

[76] Ibid., pp. 88-89.
[77] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 150. See also James A. Brundage, 'Sexual Equality in Medieval Canon Law', in *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 66-79.
[78] Ibid., p. 150.

> purification so that she could accommodate him – a painful and even dangerous solution for the woman.[79]

As Thomas' position denotes, even the physical health and well-being of the wife was subordinate to the right of the husband to exact the debt freely. High medieval canonists emphasised sexual intercourse as central to the marriage contract in order to maintain male domestic supremacy and to distinguish between lay and clerical authority. The focus of scientific texts on female sexual appetite thus grew, and converged with theological aims of protecting the purpose of marriage as site of procreation and permitted sexual activity.[80] As such, the wife became increasingly more available whilst also posing a menacing threat to herself and her spouse. There existed a dichotomy wherein the male fear of defiled female flesh was juxtaposed with a concomitant requirement for, and dislike of, female penitential redemption.

I therefore contend that Kempe utilises this discourse of female danger and untouchability as a strategic move towards a chaste vow. In the *Boke*, John's disquiet over her fasting practices shows his resignation that her purified flesh is unavailable, whilst her growing alliance with God paradoxically intensifies the mortal danger that she represents to her husband. Eventually, she achieves a divine compact that protects her from John's carnal advances:

> Anoþer tyme, as þis creatur prayd to God þat sche myt leuyn chast be leue of hir husbond, Cryst seyd to hir mende, 'Þow must fastyn þe Fryday boþen fro mete & drynke, and þow schalt haue þi desyr er Whitsonday, for I schal sodeynly sle þin husbonde'. Þan on þe Wednysday in Estern Woke, aftyr hyr husbond wold haue had knowlach of hir as he was wone be-for, & whan he gan neygh hir, sche seyd, 'Ihesus, help me', & he had no power to towche hir at þat tyme in þat wyse, ne neuyr aftyr wyth no fleschly knowyng (21).

[79] Ibid., p. 151.
[80] Ibid., p. 141.

Fasting is a powerful enough penance in this episode to satisfy the God of the Old Testament, who is willing to 'sle' John on Kempe's behalf. Her invocation of the Name of Jesus, which mysteriously incapacitates her husband to touch his wife, perhaps renders him impotent. Medieval devotions to The Holy Name of Jesus were popular methods of piety, promoted by Anselm of Canterbury (d.1109) and Bernard of Clairvaux (d.1153). Richard Rolle was well-known for such devotion, instigated by a diabolic vision that he experienced which was obliterated after his prayer, 'O Jesus, how precious is your blood'.[81] Kempe's invisible fortification, generated through such a call to Jesus, serves to enclose Kempe, like the secret haircloth as anchoritic symbol, appropriating her with a divinely-sanctioned weapon and suggesting her inherent complicity with God's grim plan for John. From the pain of fasting she has thus benefited twofold. Firstly, fasting purifies and cleanses the flesh, and, as pseudo-Athanasius suggests, 'purifies the mind, drying up bodily humours and putting impure thoughts to flight'.[82] In balancing the excess of tears and moisture that define Kempe's constitution, as was explored in Chapter One, fasting thus instils a regulated corpus as well as a symbolic purity. Secondly, the collegiality with God that results from this renewed cleanness accords her with a dangerous mystical power that has the potential to replace her own penitential pain with that of her husband's via his sudden annihilation.

Kempe's willingness to sacrifice her husband is repeated shortly after, when his hypothetical question receives an undesired response:

[81] *Richard Rolle: The English Writings*, ed. Allen p. 16 and p. 40. Kempe is familiar with Rolle's works. See Chapter One, p. 106 and p. 107, n.103. See also R. Lutton, 'The Name of Jesus, Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, and Christocentric devotion in late Medieval England', in I. Johnson and A.F. Westphall, eds., *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: exploring the Middle English Tradition* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 19-53.
[82] See *Holy Feast*, p. 216.

> ... he [John] asked his wyfe þis qwestyon, 'Margery, yf her come a man wyth a swerd & wold smyte of myn hed les þan I schulde comown kindly wyth ȝow as I haue do be-for, seyth me trewth of ȝowr consciens – for ȝe sey ȝe wyl not lye – wheþer wold ȝe suffyr myn hed to be smet of er ellys suffyr me to medele wyth ȝow a-ȝen as I dede sumtyme?' 'Alas, ser,' sche seyd, 'why meue ȝe þis mater & haue we ben chast þis viij wekys?' 'For I wyl wete þe trewth of ȝowr hert'. And þan sche seyd wyth gret sorwe, 'For-soþe I had leuar se ȝow be slayn þan we schuld turne a-ȝen to owyr vnclennesse' (23).

Not only has the divine fortification that we saw Kempe secure above proved efficacious, illustrated by these eight weeks of chaste living, but a sexualised life is for her now more painful than the death of her husband. John can, as such, no longer regard his wife as an indebted spouse, but rather as a fond companion (she does, at least, wish his death with 'sorwe'!), who nevertheless would sacrifice his life for her own salvation. His retort is heavy with the burden of social expectation – 'ȝe arn no good wyfe'. Kempe is not swayed, however, and reiterates God's promise to her that he will take John's life: 'for I teld ȝow ner iij ȝer sythen þat ȝe schuld be slayn sodeynly, & now is þe thryd ȝer, & ȝet I hope I schal han my desyr' (23). Yet the metaphysical power of John's avoidance of the debt of marriage is revealed when Kempe asks him why he has not 'medelyd' with her for the past eight weeks. His answer confirms both the fear he has developed for his lethal wife, and the concurrent power of the realm of touch, whose primary function of enveloping an otherwise 'internal [medieval] body of fluid characteristics' left the authenticity of the self entirely dependent on the Other. .[83] John responds that 'he was so *made a-ferde whan he wold a towchyd hir* þat he durst no mor don' [my emphasis]. Kempe's acute awareness of her threatening body, along with Jesus' protection of it, has indeed been utilised forcefully to construct it as an untouchable site. Such intangibility illustrates her successful employment of painful asceticism –

[83] Salmón, 'A Medieval Territory of Touch', p. 68.

transforming her body to an elevated purity – her awareness of discourses of the female body, and also her spiritual progression as a ministering agent of God. Sarah Salih sees John as the 'virgin martyr' of the *Book* through his use of the decapitation topos.[84] Though his life has been saved thus far, the absence, now, of physical touch and the medieval understanding of mutual contact as being a required performance for existence, marks his metaphorical death and his wife's status as pseudo-pain-giver. Writes Salmón: 'The inability to grasp these stimuli, that is, the loss of the sense of touch, was equated with the death of the individual'.[85] Kempe has engineered multiple fortifications – her haircloth, her fasting, her dangerous body, her call to Jesus – which have rendered her finally untouchable.

Societal and theological conventions meant that a decision by John to undertake a solemn vow of chastity was both irrevocable and potentially emasculating. A solemn vow differed from a 'simple' vow, which, whilst also requiring mutual consent, was not a public and official pronouncement.[86] The solemn vow that Kempe desires would be made in front of a church official, and was thus enforceable by the church.[87] She is clear that it is the binding agreement alone that will satisfy her: 'I pray ȝow, suffer me to make a vow of chastyte in what bysshopys hand þat God wele' (24). Her husband is acutely aware of the multiple ramifications. Socially, a wife who gained moral superiority over her husband by preceding him in chastity, threatened male authority in marriage, making her yet more dangerous.[88] Indeed, women who committed to

[84] Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 200.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Makowski, 'The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law', pp. 109-10.
[87] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, pp. 158-9.
[88] An Augustinian sermon, for example, suggested that this undermines masculine leadership. Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, pp. 158-9.

chaste living in marriage were often referred to as widows; a significant and symbolic label which is ironic in the light of Kempe's latent threat of John's death, and reinforces further the reduced status of the husband whose wife has metaphorically signalled his demise.[89] Doctrinally, the risk of annihilation is equally real, because, as Elliott asserts, 'One who failed to fulfil a vow of chastity was, arguably, committing spiritual suicide'.[90] John is thus forced to choose between the pain of damnation if he were to break a vow, or the risk of sudden death from a vengeful God. He states, 'Nay... þat wyl I not grawnt ȝow, for now may I vsyn ȝow wyth-owtyn *dedly synne* & þan myght I not so' (my emphasis; 24). Kempe's inescapable pain has in some ways been projected onto her husband through her shrewd strategy of multiple and mortal threats. In wishing to create for herself a form of self-inflicted widowhood, she is able to achieve agency over her (albeit contaminated) body and therefore an increased autonomy in the social and spiritual arena. The transformation of her wifely body out of the realm of sexual marriage is Kempe's subscription of her own virginity, paving the way for the renegotiation of the social and religious categories into which she will now fit.

The Somatic Trade and the Politics of Bodily Exchange

In exploring the chaste vow that Kempe and her husband will take, the question of negotiation must be addressed, and its interplay with medical and theological writings. The 'carnal commerce' that the 'Book on the Conditions of Women' identifies as conjugal debt is echoed in religious doctrine, suggesting a cultural

[89] Gratian tackles the problem by citing the plight of Ecdicia, 'who, associating freedom from the debt with the restoration of autonomy, began to dress like a widow and manage her property independently. Probably to ensure that other husbands do not blindly let go of the reins by vowing continence, Gratian then assures couples that mental continence and a pious rendering of the debt are perfectly acceptable, although virginity is undoubtedly superior'. See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage,* p. 158.
[90] Ibid., pp. 158-9.

internalisation of the idea of the debt as a trade of commodities in which there is intrinsic value.[91] As matrimonial theory was being shaped during the twelfth century, it became expedient to separate sex and marriage, the idea of which Hugh of St Victor (1096-1141), for example, promoted. His reference to 'carnal commerce' is in the context of its legitimate absence in a chaste marriage, whereby the greater sacrament of the compact of love has more value over the more corporeal trading of sexual debt.[92] Employing the same terminology in his explication of uterine suffocation, Constantine the African posits that an absence of 'carnal commerce' is the cause.[93] This commercial emphasis on the debt of marriage is heightened by the extreme value that is placed on virginity, a point which is evidenced by the scientific texts that provide specific guidance about the detection of virginity in a woman. Albertus the Great (d.1280), in *De Animalibus*, for example, notes that prior to 'corruption', there exist 'membranes made of a tissue of veins and extremely loose ligaments which are, once seen, the proven signs of virginity'.[94] The skills of 'verification' that such treatises enabled resulted in the production of medical texts which offered detailed advice on the methods of counterfeiting virginity. 'On Treatments for Women' provides at least five different recipes for 'a constrictive for the vagina so that they may appear as if they were virgins'. It furthermore advises the use of leeches placed into the vagina (including the disclaimer that such leeches should not be allowed to go in too far!) 'so that blood comes out and is converted into a little clot. And thus the man will be deceived by the effusion of blood'.[95]

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[91] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, p. 85.
[92] From Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 137-8.
[93] Jaquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, p. 174.
[94] Jaquart and Thomasset, p. 44.
[95] 'On Treatments for Women', in *The Trotula*, pp. 145-6. The author of the *Breviarum Practice* elucidates the misleading behaviour of young Neapolitan wives who feigned virginity by

It is no surprise, therefore, that the negotiations between Kempe and John over a formally canonised pledge of chastity take a similar bargaining pattern. In a poignant recollection when Margery and John walk home on a hot summer's evening carrying beer and cake, John finally offers a transaction, despite (or because of) Kempe's deadly warnings:

> Margery, grawnt me my desyr, & I schal grawnt ȝow ȝowr desyr. My fyrst desyr is þat we xal lyn stylle to-gedyr in o bed as we han do be-for; þe secunde þat ȝe schal pay my dettys er ȝe go to Iherusalem; & þe thrydde þat ȝe schal etyn & drynkyn wyth me on þe Fryday as ȝe wer wont to don (24).

Despite the recent devastating acknowledgement that she would sacrifice John's life, and his reasonable requests in exchange, Kempe is resolute and unprepared to compromise her ascetic fasting: 'Nay ser', she retorts, 'to breke þe Fryday I wyl neuyr grawnt ȝow whyl I leue' (24). Kempe's transition from John's wife to Christ's bride has clearly already begun: she regards God's commands as paramount, relinquishing her subservience in earthly marriage by obeying God unwaveringly. As such, she opts for the 'gret peyne' in her heart caused by the continuation of carnal commerce, rather than the pain of disobeying God: 'But, blyssyd Lord, þow knowyst I wyl not contraryen þi wyl, and mekyl now is my sorwe les þan I fynde comfort in þe' (24). God, as divine mediator and marriage counsellor of sorts, releases Kempe from her commitment to fasting in order to be free of the binds of conjugal debt. As he commands that 'I wyl no lengar þow fast, þerfor I byd þe in the name of Ihesu ete & drynk as thyn husbond doth' (24-5), not only is the superficial normality of domestic enactment maintained for the sake of John's dignity, but, as ultimate securer of the transaction, Christ represents Kempe's replacement patriarch

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applying leeches prior to the consummation of the marriage. See Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, p. 153.

and healer of the pain of the sexual imperative and the ascetic fasting practices that have tormented her for so long.

Margery and John Kempe's vow of chastity in the presence of Philip Repyngdon, the Bishop of Lincoln, therefore marks the culmination of a protracted negotiation. The Bishop's agreement that 'I wyl fulffyllen ȝowr desyr ȝyf ȝowr husbond wyl consentyn þerto' (34) is answered with the symbolic meeting of hands between husband, wife, and cleric; an ironic physical touching that, through its weighted meaning, sanctions the subsequent and total *absence* of touch, at least in the carnal sense. The private agreement of chastity between Kempe and John is thought to have occurred in June 1413, and their meeting with the Bishop shortly after.[96] This would make Kempe approximately forty years old, approaching the final stages of her natural reproductive life and at a point in the medieval life cycle where a progression to chastity was considered an almost natural step.[97] That Kempe answers the Bishop and his clerks so 'redyly & pregnawntly' after the vow, and during what can only be described as a clerical interrogation of her revelations, implies a linguistic fecundity that symbolically replaces her reproductive capacity through this relinquishment of marital conjugality.[98]

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[96] Hope Emily Allen calculates that, owing to their marriage occurring after 1393, and the production of fourteen children, the agreement could not have been made before 1405 and would have been prior to Archbishop Arundel's death in 1414. Because the only year between 1405 and 1414 in which Midsummer Even was on a Friday was 1413, Allen surmises that the vow was most likely to have occurred on 23rd June, 1413. See *BMK*, p. 269. Barry Windeatt concurs with this dating. See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Windeatt, p. 104.

[97] The church fathers tended to suppose that 'chastity in the context of marriage not only would but should follow a period of normal sexual activity, a period that corresponds with the couple's youth. The transition to marital chastity was not intended to be abrupt or violent but to correspond with the individual's life cycle'. See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 41. See also Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988), esp. pp. 69-82, pp. 149-50 and p. 378.

[98] MED s.v. pregnaunt: (a) With child, pregnant; (b) imaginative, quick, discerning; (c) of a prophecy, vision, pageant: highly significant; having hidden meaning; (d) of evidence, an argument, etc.: cogent, convincing, compelling. Although the intention is likely to have been to emphasise Kempe's cogency in this episode, the MED illustrates how the concomitant Middle English meanings of generation, imagination and vision are in fact primary.

In fact, 'long befor þis tyme' (38), God freed her from the constraints of childbirth.[99] Though she was weak from a postpartum state (she was 'beryng chylder & sche was newly delyueryd of a chyld' [38]), God instructed her to go to Norwich to disclose her revelations to the Vicar of St. Stephens. Her maternity was instantly revoked in return for this new role as God's messenger: 'owyr Lord Cryst Ihesu seyd to hir sche xuld no mor children beryn' (38). It is therefore possible that the terminus of Kempe's reproductive life was sanctioned spiritually, by God, some time before the ecclesiastical and spousal authorisation of the chaste vow occurred. Of course, we do not know if the delivery of her last child was indeed a *long tyme* before the vow, but nevertheless, this alternative, spiritual transaction signals a further, private 'pact' with God which has been to the exclusion of her husband and the Church: another fortification around which she has surrounded her body. As Sarah Salih suggests, Kempe refuses to 'make her natural motherhood relevant to her sanctity and to sanctify the identity of "mother"'.[100] Indeed, Kempe 'reformulat[es] the self as virginal... the physical loss of virginity is not insuperable... individual efforts can remake the body'.[101] Like her remaking of self, following her postpartum illness, she makes use again of the non-absolute categories of sexuality, according to the medieval imaginary. Part of this identity refashioning is her emphasis in the *Boke* on the mechanisms of female purification which offered a liturgical path towards a metamorphosis of purity

[99] Since we are told in Chapter 43 that the vicar of St. Stephen's in Norwich was Richard of Caister, who was vicar there from 1402 until his death in 1420, Kempe must have visited him between 1402 and 1413, when the vow of chastity takes place. This visit occurs after delivering what is implied as her last child, because of God's revelation that 'sche xuld no mor children beryn' from that point. See *BMK*, p. 276, n. 38/12, and Windeatt, *BMK*, p. 113.
[100] Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 232.
[101] Ibid., p. 181.

and a remedy for pain, despite the paradox of its 'mucky' subtext. It is towards such notions to which I will now turn.

The Prophylactic Power of Purification

Marina Warner, on writing about the Virgin Mary's ubiquitous influence in Christendom, has suggested that 'Mary's purificatory fire had supreme prophylactic powers: purity prevailed against impurity'.[102] Kempe's *Boke* emphasises her meditation on the purification rites of Candlemas and the churching of women after childbirth, illustrating her reliance on the Marian model of identification and also another means by which she can address the polluted body with which she is faced. Such a strategy, I suggest, symbolises an alternative method of Kempe's pain-modification, as her contemplation of the ritual cleansing of mothers – ceremonies in which she may have partaken fourteen times – offers a mechanism for the reaffirmation of female salvation and thus the productive value of maternal pain. Gail McMurray Gibson has written on the incongruity of the seemingly misogynistic ritual of churching and its enduring popularity as a ceremony of import.[103] Women's complicity, she argues, must be based upon 'simple and urgent necessity; childbirth until the most recent time was as perilous as it was ordinary'. As Gibson points out, the churching ritual 'existed to acknowledge [that] women passed through great pain and risk of death in bearing children'.[104]

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[102] Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Vintage, 2000 [reprint of 1976 original text]), p. 67.
[103] Gail McMurray Gibson, 'Blessing from Sun and Moon'. See also Angela Florschuetz, 'Women's Secrets: Childbirth, Pollution and Purification in Northern Octavian', esp. pp. 253-8. For an online resource by Natalie Knödel, see http://users.ox.ac.uk/~mikef/church.html.
[104] Gibson, 'Blessing from Sun and Moon', p. 146.

As a Christian ritual that recognises the painful journey of motherhood, I suggest that Kempe derives comfort from her meditation on the ceremony of purification in its mystical and earthly manifestations. In her ruminations about the 'mukke' of her marriage, the church liturgy and performance offers a resolution for the painful pollution of the marriage debt. This idea can be elucidated through her vision of the Virgin Mary's purification on Candlemas Day. According to Mosaic Law, a mother who had given birth to a boy was considered unclean for seven days. She was not permitted to enter a church or to receive the Sacrament for thirty-three days after the birth of a son (and sixty six days for a daughter, emphasising the late medieval anxiety over the impure female, even from birth).[105] The ritual of churching was therefore undertaken, whereby the woman was purified and allowed re-entry into the Christian community. Wearing a veil, she would be brought to the church door where she would be given a lighted candle, blessed by the priest. These candles had talismanic power, and so the parishioners took them away after the service to be lit during storms, times of sickness, and to be placed in the hands of the dying.[106] Such a secondary usage of these candles, which symbolised the Virgin's chaste and redeeming body, is significant not only in its subsidiary power in healing the sick, but that they were offered to the dying as a sign of hope and faith illustrates a striking synchronicity in terms of the life cycle where the moment of birth sits in salvific resonance with the moment of death. The priest's blessing symbolically purified the new mother who was thus allowed re-entry to the church, in a position of complete prostration, whilst the congregation sang the Mass.[107] In fact, the woman was allowed into the chancel; the most

[105] The Jewish ritual of purification is described in Leviticus 12: 4-6.
[106] Eamon Duffy in Gibson, 'Blessing from Sun and Moon', p. 141
[107] Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe*, p. 146. See also Gibson, 'Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theatre'. For a detailed history of the ritual and a

sacred space of the church and not usually accessible to the laity.[108] The total and physical surrender of the postpartum woman to her priestly absolution could easily be interpreted in terms of the misogynistic hegemony of the Church. However, the churching ceremony was considered a social and celebratory occasion; an opportunity for thanksgiving attended by various people including midwives, godmothers, neighbours and relatives.[109] It stood as the locus of symbolic reintegration where female postpartum recovery could occur spiritually as well as physically, marked by the sprinkling of holy water by the priest over the woman. As Yoshikawa remarks, 'The priest's act of casting holy water is as efficacious as baptismal cleansing in that it eliminates her sexual sins and endows her with spiritual purity'.[110] This cleansing of the physical and metaphorical stains of sexual intercourse is echoed in medical treatises such as 'On Treatments for Women', which advises cleansing the genital area after intercourse to prevent the uterus from becoming infected with 'semen retained inside and congealed'.[111] Women thus have the dual stains of intercourse and childbirth to purge; it is little wonder then that religious women like Kempe conceptualised purification as doubly significant. Yoshikawa also notes that 'Purification is...psychologically and spiritually therapeutic for Kempe'.[112] Kempe's beatific perception of the Virgin Mary's purification underlines its significance to her as rite of recovery and return to wholeness.

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discussion of the medieval rites, see Joanne M. Pierce, '"Green Women" and Blood Pollution: Some Medieval Rituals for the Churching of Women after Childbirth', *Studia Liturgica*, 29:2 (1999), 191-215. For a study on the later, post-Reformation period, see David Cressy, 'Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England', *Past & Present*, 141 (1993), 106-146.

[108] See Laura Varnam, 'Church' in Marion Turner, ed., *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 299-314 (pp. 304-305).

[109] Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe*, p. 146. See also Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, pp. 104-111.

[110] Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 109.

[111] 'On Treatments for Women' in *The Trotula*, p. 137.

[112] Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 105.

She is overcome by the fervour she experiences in the sight of the Christ-child being presented, and of the verisimilitude of her presence in the vision:

> ... hir mende was raueschyd in-to beholdyng of owr Lady offering hyr blissful Sone owr Sauyowr to þe preyst Simeon in þe Tempyl, as verily to hir gostly vnderstondyng as ȝyf sche had be þer in hir bodily presens for to an offeryd wyth owr Ladys owyn persone. Þan was sche so comfortyd be þe contemplacyon in hir sowle þat sche had in þe beholdyng of owr Lord Ihesu Crist & of hys blissyd Modyr, of Simeon þe preyste, of Ioseph, & of oþer personys þat þer weryn whan owr Lady was purifyid, & of þe heuynly songys þat hir thowt sche herd whan owr blissful Lord was offeryd up to Symeon þat sche myth ful euyn beryn vp hir owyn candel to þe preyst, as oþer folke dedyn at þe tyme of offering, but went waueryng on eche syde as it had ben a dronkyn woman, wepyng & sobbyng so sor þat vn-ethe sche myth stondyn on hir feet for þe fervowr of lofe & deuocyon þat God putte in hir sowle thorw hy contemplacyon. (198)

The intensity of Kempe's contemplation on the ceremony is made possible through her reverent participation – privileged, alongside the inimitable figure of the Virgin Mary – as joint presenter of the incarnate Christ. The comfort she receives at the witnessing of Mary's purification represents Kempe's veneration of the Virgin, the security she gains in recalling her own Churching and with it, the emulation of the Virgin Mother whose purity she so desires.[113] As Yoshikawa states, 'in participating in the Candlemas, women would recall their own sacramental cleansing in the Blessing after Childbirth and increase their hope for spiritual purity celebrated in the Purification'.[114] Yet the irony of Mary's Purification did not go unnoticed, as most medieval Christians believed, as did the Church Fathers, that Mary remained virginal *in partu* and *post partum*, and the reward for this was giving birth to Christ painlessly. The Book of Isaiah states that 'Before she was in labour, she brought forth; before her time came to

[113] Luke informs us that the Virgin Mary partook in the custom: 'And after the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord' (Luke 2: 22).
[114] Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, p. 109.

be delivered, she brought forth a man child', indicating that Mary's birthing of Jesus occurred prior to any labour, or pain (the implication is, of course, that Mary's pain is yet to come).[115] Thomas Aquinas affirmed this stance, citing Augustine: 'On the contrary, Augustine says...addressing himself to the Virgin-Mother: "In conceiving thou wast all pure, in giving birth thou wast without pain"'.[116] Ambrose (Bishop of Milan, 340-97), concedes that Mary's parthenogenesis was 'contrary to the course of nature', but views this as empowering the Virgin as subject of 'a new form of generating', maintaining focus on Mary as unpolluted and sealed.[117] Untouched by male seed and impregnated instead by the Holy Spirit, Mary's virginity was situated both as an abstruse model and symbol of imitation by earthly mothers, who could, in some ways, emulate a version of her purity. Though it appears paradoxical that Mary would therefore require the rite of Purification, that the ceremony of Presentation went with it concomitantly, and that Mary would have been all too aware that the Presentation of the Christ-child was irrefutably to be the most profound of all – notwithstanding traditional representations of Mary and Joseph as an obedient and humble couple – meant that as well as a perpetual virgin,

[115] Isaiah 66:7. Also, 'And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that, out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed', Luke 2:35.

[116] Aquinas states, 'I answer that, The pains of childbirth are caused by the infant opening the passage from the womb. Now it has been said above, that Christ came forth from the closed womb of His Mother, and, consequently, without opening the passage. Consequently there was no pain in that birth, as neither was there any corruption; on the contrary, there was much joy therein for that God-Man "was born into the world", according to Is. 35:1,2: "Like the lily, it shall bud forth and blossom, and shall rejoice with joy and praise"'. From Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 52, *The Childhood of Christ*, trans. Roland Potter (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972), pp. 101-3: 35.6.

[117] From 'The Sacraments of the Incarnation of Our Lord', in Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*, (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 27. Ambrose was also approving of Mary's signification as a sealed figure; a gateway to God's kingdom, which originated with Ezekiel's prophecy: 'And he brought me back to the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary, which looked towards the east: and it was shut. And the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it: because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut for the prince' (Ezekiel 44: 1-3). Ambrose states: 'Is not Mary the gate through which the Redeemer entered this world?' from Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 432.

Mary was also an ambassador for the efficacy of religious ritual. The popularity of Marian feast days in the west meant that for a time, the date coincided with the pagan feast of lights. On this occasion, torches and candles were carried at night-time to exorcise the spirits of plague, famine and natural disaster, which emanated from the darkness of the underworld.[118] The notion of de-contamination therefore became associated with healing and the return to wholeness. As Marina Warner asserts, 'Mary's holiness, her incandescent purity, is the source of this power over darkness'.[119] Sue Niebrzydowski similarly states that 'What medieval women took from the Virgin was not only protection in their hour of greatest need, while in labour, but also power by association'.[120] Thus, the churching rite transformed a Judaic custom which emphasised female contamination, to a 'Christian encomium to the power of purity over evil'.[121] I contend that the power of the Virgin's parthenogenesis – her transcendent purity – conversely instills other religious mothers with the possibility of chaste redemption. Through her 'disembodied' maternity, Mary fashions a route upon which worshippers like Kempe can tread, where purification is emancipating because a divinely-sanctioned (re)production of self is possible. The *Boke's* emphasis on purification rituals therefore opens up a new channel through which Kempe can be empowered by the reorientation of painful experience: through it, she is remade out of the pain of motherhood and marriage, even as the inimitable Mother of God shows how pain can transform and emerge at unexpected stages of the life cycle.

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[118] Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 67.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Sue Niebrzydowski, '*Asperges me, Domine, hyssopo*: male voices, female interpretation and the medieval English purification of women after childbirth ceremony', in *Early Music*, 39 (2011), 327-334, at p. 6.
[121] Warner, *Alone of all her Sex*, p. 67.

The Analgesia of Mystical Marriage

On 9th November 1414, the feast of the dedication to St. John Lateran, whilst in the Church of the Apostles at Rome, Margery Kempe is married to the Godhead.[122] God discloses that 'I wil han þe weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn þe my preuyteys & my counselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-outyn ende' (86). This mystical union occurs less than eighteen months after Margery and John negotiate their vow, when Margery Kempe is approximately forty-one years old. As a spiritual zenith, it is preceded by her marriage to the Manhood, which she communicates through the wearing of a ring that she commissioned on the 'byddyng of God' (78). The direct revelation of God's request to wear the ring, and its importance as a visual symbol of union following her physical *disunity* with her husband after their vow, denotes a juncture in Kempe's spiritual progression that paradoxically combines this private merging with God, with the public declaration of her revised socio-religious status. The ring, which 'owyr Lord had comawndyd hir to do makyn whil she was at hom in Inglond', has upon it engraved, 'Ihesus est amor meus' (78), much like the brooch worn by Chaucer's Prioress, inscribed with '*Amor vincit omnia*'.[123] In adopting the ring and the mantle, which she first requests on the occasion of the vow, Kempe signifies her change in status to that of widow, although, as Mary Erler has indicated, 'strictly speaking, the clothing which accompanied this vow – not only the mantle and ring, but also the veil and the wimple – did not signal widowhood, or even vowed widowhood, as many

[122] Hope Emily Allen calculates the year as 1414 because of Kempe's previous record that she had left Richard, a broken-backed man, in Rome two years prior to this marriage. As this was 1417, and Kempe would have spent only one winter in Rome, Allen concludes that she must have been in Assisi on Lammas Day of 1414. See *BMK*, pp. 298-9.
[123] *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, p. 26.

commentators have suggested, but vowed chastity in a lay state'.[124] The profundity of Kempe's betrothal is illustrated when she temporarily loses the ring later in Rome and forcefully articulates its recondite meaning to the Italian landlady who, incredibly and notwithstanding a language divide, 'vndirstond[s] what sche ment' (78). The ring thus accords Kempe with a further mystical perspicacity, transcending the division between materiality and spiritual erudition, and paving the way for the superior state of wife of the Godhead.

While she sits in the Church of the Apostles, God reveals his pleasure with her, in her belief in the sacraments, her faithful longevity and, 'specialy', for her belief in the 'manhode of [His] Sone & for þe gret compassion þat þu hast of hys bittyr Passyon' (86). That God foregrounds Kempe's meditative focus on Christ's Passion is illustrative of the primacy of pain throughout her life experience so far, its 'bittyr[ness]', or severity, in its private or substitutional guise, and in its function as a conduit for ultimate mystical union.[125] Whilst this point in her narrative undoubtedly marks the spiritual goal to which she has been aspiring for many years, the extent of its analgesic effect on her earthly passage and the internalised reassurance to be gained from such an espousal is complex and unsettled. For although Kempe craves a spiritual oneness with God, the manifestation of this oneness must be via the Christic body, to which, as she confesses, she is profoundly attached: 'al hir lofe & al hir affeccyon was set in þe manhode of Crist & þerof cowde sche good skylle & sche wolde for no-thyng a partyd þerfro' (86). Like her meditations on the Passion of Christ, which form the basis of Kempe's devotion and of God's pleasure in her, she is

[124] Mary Erler, 'Margery Kempe's white clothes', *Medium Aevum*, 62 (1993), 78-83, (p. 78). See also Hope Emily Allen in *BMK* p. 274, n.34/10-12. Also Gunnel Cleve, 'Semantic Dimensions in Margery Kempe's "Whyght Clothys"', *Mystics Quarterly*, 12, (1986),162-170, at p. 164.
[125] MED s.v. bitter: 2(a) Of suffering; grievous, *severe*. Kempe's meditation on the Passion will be examined further in Chapter Five.

inextricably bound to the cultural significance appropriated to flesh and to embodiment. It is God incarnate with whom she feels affinity and yearning, and mystical union in the text is necessarily based on the physicality that she understands and on the flawed and fleshy pain that she cannot avoid.

Kempe's silence at God's declaration speaks volumes. She is so 'ful sor aferd of þe Godhed' that she 'kept sylens in hir sowle & answeryd not þerto' (86), maintaining the sealed boundaries of self and enclosure lest Christ incarnate be removed from her soul. Appropriately, it is Jesus Christ, 'þe Secunde Persone in Trinite' who answers on her behalf, his emphasis on her relative spiritual immaturity and inexperience reminiscent of the nervous young bride on her wedding day: '"Fadyr, haue hir excused, for sche is ȝet but ȝong & not fully lernyd how sche xulde answeryn"' (87). When God '[takes] hir be þe hand in hir sowle be-fore þe Sone & þe Holy Gost & þe Modyr of Ihesu', his words echo the traditional Christian marriage ceremony and legitimise the metaphysical rite not only as doctrinally valid, but as concrete as the earthly referents with which Kempe is familiar:

> I take þe, Kempe, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so þat þu be buxom & bonyr to do what I byd þe do. For, dowtyr, þer was neuyr childe so buxom to þe modyr as I xal be to þe boþe in wel & in wo, - to help þe and comfort þe (87).

God's use of the mother-child dynamic as metaphor for the unconditional love that will underpin their union is made problematic by the painful signification that Kempe's maternity – and the sexual activation that it symbolises – has represented thus far, although, of course, such fusion of family relationships is biblically-rooted and conventional in medieval culture.[126] Despite this tension, however, there is an acute sense of blessing in the *Boke's* account; Kempe

[126] 'For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother': Matthew 12:50. On this tradition in the Middle Ages see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, esp. pp. 110-66.

continues to feel unworthy, but she does gain comfort and grace: ‘felyng ryth vnworthy to any swech grace as sche felt, for sche felt many gret comfortys, boþe gostly comfortys & bodily comfortys’ (87). Beyond this, spiritual wedlock appears to replace sexual productivity with a heightened sensory fecundity that in some ways fills the void created by the relinquishment of her sexual and reproductive self. Kempe’s sensory experiences are simultaneously physical and heavenly; sensed via the body’s faculties yet transcendent in their celestial essence:

> Sum-tyme sche *felt swet smellys* wyth hir nose; it wer swettar, hir thowt, þan euyr was ony swet erdly thyng þat sche smellyd be-forn, ne sche myth neuyr tellyn how swet it wern, for hir thowt sche myth a leuyd þerby ȝyf they wolde a lestyd. Sum-tyme sche herd wyth hir *bodily erys* sweche sowndys & melodijs þat sche myth *not wel heryn what a man seyd to hir* in þat tyme les he spoke þe lowder. (my emphases; 77-8)

Such rapturous and synaesthetic discernments over a period of twenty-five years bestow Kempe with joy and grace, appropriating her with the intensified receptiveness to visionary stimulation that was examined in Chapter One of this study. She *feels* smells, she *tastes* them as ‘swet’; her ‘bodily erys’ are so transcended by heavenly melody that they block out people’s speech. She is also gifted other auditory ‘tokenys’ by the third person of the Trinity; the Holy Ghost: the sound of blowing bellows and the songs of doves and robins (90-1). She sees ‘white thyngys’ flying around her like motes in the sunlight, explained by God as betokening angels all around her (and symbolising a heavenly replacement of the devils whose torturous actions plagued her at the beginning of her earthly marriage and childbirth [88]). Indeed, she is told that ‘þu xalt heryn þat þu neuyr herdist, & þu xalt se þat þu neuyr sey, & þu xalt felyn þat þu neuyr feltist’ (89). Spiritual wedlock has, therefore, unlocked in Kempe a capacity for elevated delectation that could potentially act as a powerful analgesic in

counteracting her earthly pains in illness, public scorn and pious grief.[127] It also serves to undermine Wolfgang Riehle's recent assessment that Kempe is lacking in joy.[128] In this new phenomenology of sensory experience, she is authorised as a receiver of extra-earthly perception beyond that which her natural melancholic disposition allows. By shaking off the bonds of sexual marriage to John, Kempe has opened up a new access to God.

The concept of sensory stimulation for healing purposes was a popular cure in the Middle Ages: medical treatises regularly advised olfactory fumigations as a means to thwart physiological disorder. The Hippocratic idea of uterine displacement, for instance, which was explicated in the previous chapter, was known from the high Middle Ages, particularly through the *De Mulierum Affectibus*, which showed the relationship between the senses and physiological regularity:

> Because of this displacement [the womb's movement upwards], the womb came into sympathy with the upper parts of the body; this explained suffocation and sensory disturbances, and justified the use of fumigations: to push the womb downwards, one made the patient inhale through the nose foetid-smelling substances, while aromatic fumigations were applied to the vagina.[129]

Sounds, sights, and smells thus also resonate as spiritual and medical healing agents and position Kempe as a privileged receiver of divinely-ordained prophylactics which serve to further transcend the borders of body and mind.[130] Kempe has developed an intuitive and sensory discernment that appears to

[127] That we are told that Kempe has heard these sounds and melodies for the past twenty-five years up until the book was written (see pp. 88 and 90 respectively) corroborates the dating of the vow of chastity and marriage to the Godhead in 1413 and 1414, if we take the writing of the book to be around 1438.
[128] Wolfgang Riehle, *Inner Lives,* p. 257 and p. 280.
[129] Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, p. 174.
[130] See Chapter One of this study for the medieval overlap between body and mind. Also see Simon Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, p. 114.

have emerged from a pivotal juncture in her religious trajectory – mystical union – and situates her as pointedly receptive to somatic adaptation.

Christ tells Kempe that this transcendent physicality is possible also through the literal site of the marriage bed, where husband and wife, regardless of status, 'must ly to-gedir & rest to-gedir in joy & pes' (90). After reassuring her of her cleanness following his total forgiveness, he resolves that he must be 'homly wyth þe & lyn in þi bed wyth þe'. The interaction must be intimate and tender: 'þy mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi sowle & kyssen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete as swetly as thow wylt' (90). The eroticism of this encounter not only illustrates Kempe's progression towards an ultimate amalgamation of her flesh with Christ's, but also the way in which her spiritual sagacity continues to remain in the terms of a language of domesticity and earthliness. Though mystical marriage might facilitate a rejection of the sordid matter of the world, the physicality of this image is striking in its insistence on embodiment, even of transcendent union. The rapture that Kempe feels when partaking in Eucharistic consumption denotes her conformity to the particular significance placed on the Christic body by medieval religious women, as has been shown comprehensively by Caroline Walker Bynum.[131] Also like Nicholas Love in *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, Kempe frequently enunciates the bliss that accompanies her receiving of the Eucharist. Love describes the sacrament as acting to 'kyndele mannus soule & enflawme it al holy'.[132] He also describes a devout acquaintance who, on taking the sacrament of the

[131] See, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, especially pp. 59-6. Bynum states: '...reception of Christ's body and blood was a substitute for ecstasy – a union that anyone, properly prepared by confession or contrition, could achieve. To receive was to become Christ – by eating, by devouring and being devoured'. From Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 126. See also pp.119-50 in the same volume.
[132] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), Capitulum xxxix, p. 149.

Eucharist, ‘alle þe membres of þe body bene enflaumede of so deletable & ioyful a hete þat him þenkeþ sensibly alle þe body as it were meltyng for ioy as waxe doþ anentes þe hote fire’.[133] ‘Þe Myroure Off chastite’ author relates St. Katherine as being ‘moued of feruent will & brennyng loue as hir maister crist was moued.’[134] He also compares Christ to a red rose, ‘brennynge in charite’.[135] In Kempe’s cognisance, the all-encompassing love that she experiences is unbearable in its total absorption into her soul: ‘sche myth not *beryn* þe habundawns of lofe þat sche felt in þe precyows Sacrament, which sche stedfastly beleuyd was very God & Man in þe forme of breed’ (my emphasis;138). Because it is the very body of Christ that she is appropriated to consume in the sacrament, that body cannot be removed when it is the divine embodying of Christ on which the entire possibility and hope for salvation is based. Whilst spiritual marriage has afforded Kempe a sensory medication that is doubtless efficacious, her reluctance to conceptualise beyond the dimension of the physical consummation of Christ’s body, and the relentless self-doubt that sees her self-construction as ‘vn-worthy wrech’ (90), limits the effects of the analgesic resolution of mystical marriage to the Godhead, and with it, perpetuates her fear that in her future trajectory she might yet encounter pain.

Kempe’s struggle to conceptualise a complete spiritual construction of self by continuing to focus largely on the Manhood as opposed to the Godhead, is also evident when Christ assures her of a widow’s status. Like the metaphorical ‘death’ of her husband after their vow of chastity and the public recognition of such a shift, Christ reinforces the profundity of her newly chaste position. It is unsurprising that Kempe struggles to fully reconcile her chaste

[133] Love, *Mirror*, p. 152.
[134] *The Pore Caitif*, p. 195.
[135] *The Pore Caitif*, p. 197.

status because public slander in her community is the eventual cause of her living separately from John after their vow. When at first they remained in co-habitation, 'þan þe pepil slawndryd hem & seyd þei vsyd her lust & her liking as þe dedyn be-forn her vow making' (179-80). The church's role as enforcer of a solemn vow of chastity meant that a couple continuing to live together was more than problematic. Bernard of Clairvaux states in a sermon of 1144 that 'the Church forbids men and women who have taken a vow of chastity to live together'.[136] Christ clarifies Kempe's status thus:

> & ȝet þu hast an-oþer gret cawse to louyn me, for þu hast þie wil of chastite as þu wer a widow, thyn husbond leuyng in good hele. Dowtyr, I haue drawe þe lofe of þin hert fro alle mennys hertys in-to myn hert. Sum-tyme, dowtyr, þu thowtyst it had ben in a maner vnpossybyl for to ben so, & þat tyme suffyrdyst þu ful gret peyne in þin hert wyth fleschly affeccyons. & þan cowdyst þu wel cryen to me, seying, 'Lord, for alle þi wowndys smert, drawe al þe lofe of myn hert in-to thyn hert'. Dowtyr, for alle þes cawsys & many oþer cawsys & benefetys which I haue schewyd for þe on þis half þe see & on ȝon half þe see, þu hast gret cawse to louyn me (161).

The 'peyne in [her] hert' that was produced by the 'fleschly affeccyons' of the conjugal debt is acknowledged by Christ, as indeed is Kempe's oftentimes lack of faith in the fulfilment of his promise: 'þu thowtyst it had ben in a maner vnpossybyl for to ben so'. Indeed, earlier in the narrative, Kempe is told that she is a virgin in her soul and therefore also to God:

> ...for-as-mech as þu art a mayden in þi sowle, I xal take þe be þe on hand in Hevyn & my Modyr be þe oþer hand, & so xalt þu dawnsyn in Hevyn wyth oþer holy maydens & virgynes, for I may clepyn þe dere a-bowte & myn owyn derworthy derlyng (52).

The divinely-ordained role of virgin-widow is thus precariously and problematically productive. It allows Kempe the freedom to operate as a cleansed woman, emancipated from the ties of patriarchal laws and reborn out of the burdensome postlapsarian state. However, as medical treatises like the

[136] Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 65, c.4. From Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 140.

Trotula texts have illuminated, medieval widowhood carried with it the concomitant risk of uterine suffocation and the perpetuation of a cold, moist constitution, which lacked the male heat of sexual union. *De Secretis Mulierum* also confirms the inescapability of pain: 'This affliction happens most often to widows'.[137] Not only is Kempe now more susceptible to the painful conditions associated with chastity, but the melancholic disposition for which I argued in Chapter One, and its symptoms of tears and mourning, may also be exacerbated by the reduced heat of the chaste body. As seen above, Gower regards the melancholic as the worst of temperaments, displaying traits of suspicion, wrath and anxiety.[138] Suspicion and anxiety are clearly not conducive to faithful devotion; thus Kempe's modified status is at once the ultimate spiritual privilege and remedy and also a catalyst for pain and compromised faith in God's espoused protection: to an extent, she still thinks that it is 'in a maner vnpossybyl for to ben so' (161).

Fear and anxiety in relation to Kempe's sexual continence is apparent even towards the end of Kempe's narrative, when her advanced years and marriage to the Godhead do not obviate her acute fear of rape and defilement whilst on pilgrimage between Wilsnack and Aachen.[139] She beseeches the

[137] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 134.
[138] See Chapter One, p. 80, n. 26.
[139] On rape in the Middle Ages, see Albrecht Classen, *Sexual Violence and Rape in the Middle Ages: A Critical Discourse in Premodern German and European Literature* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2011); Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose, eds., *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Kim Phillips, 'Written on the Body: Reading Rape from the 12th – 15th Centuries', in *Medieval Women and the Law*, ed. Noel James Menuge (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000), pp. 125-144; Marjorie Curry Woods, 'Rape and the Pedagogical Rhetoric of Sexual Violence', in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages, ed. Rita Copeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 56-86. *The Knowing of Women's Kind in Childing* states that rape cannot result in conception, marking the belief that non-consensual sexual intercourse was thought to over-ride the body's natural mechanisms for reproduction (p. 106). Such an over-turning of the status quo is evident also in law, whereby the 1382 *Statute of Rapes* allowed the over-riding of rape allegations when the woman's consent was obtained retrospectively. This possibility would hang over the victim until her death. Rape was also conflated with the marriage institution, as extra-marital rape was seen as an offence as much against the husband as the woman, whose 'property' she was. See

landlady of one boarding house to provide her with ‘maydenys’ as chaperones for the night, yet still ‘durst sche not slepyn for dred of defilyng’ (236-7). Likewise, en route to Calais, she reiterates a powerful fear of defilement. This not only articulates a mistrust in God’s assurances, but reveals a continued preoccupation with her sexual self and the value of her chastity:

> And on nyghtys had sche most dreed oftyn-tymes, & perauentur it was of hir gostly enmy, for sche was euyr a-ferd to a be rauischyd er defilyd. Sche durst trustyn on no man; whedir sche had cawse er non, sche was euyr a-ferd. Sche durst ful euyl slepyn any nyth, for sche wend men wolde a defylyd hir. Þerfor sche went to bedde gladlich no nyth les þan sche had a woman er tweyn wyth hir. (241)

Even Kempe’s sleep is invaded by ‘euyl’ as her fear of being raped usurps her consciousness. She concedes that her fear was sometimes regardless of any literal threat, which undermines the faith of a Christic bride – she has, after all, been assured by Christ that ‘I xal kepe þe fro alle wykked mennys power’ (32) – and resonates instead with her inculcated past trauma. In the same way that Kempe’s continued pregnancies represented the agonising potential for injury or death in childbirth, so the threat of sexual defilement, after the arduous process of vow negotiation, purification and mystical union, signifies a pain-potential that is, to Kempe, horrifically unthinkable.

Some medieval religious women went to violent lengths to preserve their virginity, created by a climate for the extreme protection of chastity by patristic writings. Such was the value placed on female virginity, or total *integritas*, that St. Jerome (ca. 340-419) even condoned suicide as a legitimate means of rape-prevention: ‘In persecutions it is not lawful to commit suicide *except when one’s*

Suzanne Edwards, ‘The Rhetoric of Rape and the Politics of Gender in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* and the *1382 Statute of Rapes*’, *Exemplaria*, 23, No. 1 (2011), 3-26.

chastity is jeapordised'.[140] St. Ambrose concurred, whilst St. Augustine emphasised the role of conscience in determining the existence of sin via female violation: there may still be shame because defilement may have been 'accompanied by a consent of the mind'.[141] As Jane Tibbets Schulenburg states, Augustine 'underscores the inevitable relationship which exists between the soul and body, and that corruption of the soul necessarily precedes corruption of the body'.[142]

Kempe's prior mental trauma concerning her unconfessed (probably sexual) sin, her fixation on achieving a vow of chastity with John, and the accompanying sexual temptation over which she wrangles (and would have succumbed to) during this period, are therefore obstacles overcome, emphasising the value of her re-made virginity (it is unsurprising that she is content to pay John's monetary debts in return for a vow, the value of which is minute in comparison). But the 'peyne in [her] hert' during her sexual lifespan, a suffering which is recognised and approved of by God, creates a heightened fear of carnality as dangerous, and thus explains Kempe's paranoiac behaviour. In continuing to self-conceive as a sexual being – a state that Salih does not regard as incompatible with reclaimed virginity – still, I think, compromises her mystical marriage, rendering her transformation perilously incomplete.[143]

In addition to the monastic and patristic writings on the preservation of virginity which Kempe would have doubtless internalised via church sermons and conversations with her confessors, she would also have known of

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[140] My emphasis. From Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation', in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (U.S.A: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 29-72 (p. 34).
[141] S. Augustine, *City of God*, ed. David Knowles, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972). From Schulenburg, *The Heroics of Virginity*, p. 35.
[142] Schulenburg, *The Heroics of Virginity*, p. 35.
[143] Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, p. 225. Tara Williams argues that Kempe's enduring focus on her sexuality is a necessary route to a relationship with Christ and *imitatio Mariae* in 'Manipulating Mary: Maternal, Sexual, and Textual Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*'.

hagiographies that described the extreme extents to which saintly women mutilated their bodies. The holy abbess St. Ebba (c.870) cut off her nose and upper lip to dissuade male attackers (along with her entire convent of nuns), and St. Ulphia (d. 8th c.) ran about in frenzy, feigning madness, to reduce her appeal to the 'carnally panting'. Oda of Hainault (d. 1158), in defiance of the marriage arranged for her by her parents, cut off her nose with a sword. And St. Margaret of Hungary (d.1270) responded to the news that the pope was dispatching a marriage arrangement for her by stating that 'sooner would she cut off her nose and lips and tear out her eyes than consent to marriage'.[144] The holy woman thus had the power to retain her treasured chastity only via the paradoxical mutilation and destruction of the very body that she wished to sanctify, like Kempe's postpartum tearing of fingernails through flesh.[145] Such didactic tales serve to elevate the power of chastity, but also to emphasise the responsibility for its preservation to the woman who wishes for its continuation. It would be too simplistic to suggest that Kempe purposefully re-enacts her postpartum frenzy through persistently sobbing and writhing in order to construct a similar preventative like that of St. Ulphia as a further layer of enclosure and fortification from external threat. But it is hard to ignore the repellence that her behaviour causes in the community and the way in which she annoys and angers people and is removed and marginalised from company.[146] The models of such holy women in their resistance to hegemonic threat may well influence Kempe's determination to modify her ravaged body towards a hermeneutic that is finally worthy of the mystical marriage into which

[144] From Schulenburg, 'The Heroics of Virginity', pp. 46-52.
[145] See also Patricia Skinner, 'Marking the Face, Curing the Soul? Reading the Disfigurement of Women in the Middle Ages', in Yoshikawa, ed., *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, pp. 181-202.
[146] See for example *BMK*, p. 62.

she has entered. However, though the mystical nexus gives her satisfaction, her repeated articulation of chaste vulnerability denotes a spiritual pilgrimage yet to be completed.

Kempe's spiritual immaturity is paradoxically illustrated further by the white clothes that she adopts. Often read by critics such as Mary Erler as symbolising virginity, Sarah Salih contests such a reading, in regarding them as more complex in denotation, and worn in many different contexts.[147] Kempe is instructed by Christ that '[he] wyl þat [she] were clothys of whyte & non oþer colowr, for [she] xal ben arayd aftyr [his] wyl' (32). Yet, rather than perceiving an inherent subtext of virginity in his request, she worries about dressing in an '*oþer* maner' to chaste women, which not only implies that most chaste women do *not* wear white, but emphasises the symbolic value of *otherness* that is at once a mechanism of alienation and redolent of power in its mark of difference (32; my emphasis). After some oscillation in the adoption of these clothes, she prays while in Norwich in c.1415 for a 'tokne of leuyn [lightning], thundyr, & reyn' from God to ascertain whether she should resume such attire (103).[148] As the betokened storm appears within the three days of God's declaration, Kempe finds the means of securing a white 'gowne... an hood, a kyrtyl, & a cloke' (104) from a good local man, an ensemble that signifies the total sartorial encompassment of her white costume as well as the prophetic power with which it is imbued. Not only are the clothes stark in their articulation of the peculiar, but that they are ordained through a thunderous revelation suggests

[147] Mary Erler, 'Margery Kempe's white clothes', p. 79. Salih notes, 'The use of white is not limited to virgins, but to people in carefully defined moments of transition, which are sometimes, in practice, moments of virginity, as in the case of the bride or the novice'. *Versions of Virginity*, p. 220.

[148] Barry Windeatt has calculated that the Friday of the storm was probably 24th May 1415. See Windeatt, *BMK*, p. 217, n. 3423. Mary Erler notes that the period of four years where the white clothes were variously worn and removed are an inherent part of her important life-transition. See 'Margery Kempe's White Clothes', p. 81.

their potency as a fortification not only of chastity, but of untouchability. Like the mantle and ring of the vowess, they are, because of their bold declaration of otherness, identifiers of difference; of a woman religious who is not yet at her final destination and who must stand out in symbolic transition as well as rarefied potentiality. Alastair Minnis notes Kempe's difference in relation to her status as chaste and married: 'she has been set apart from other wives'.[149] When the Archbishop of York demands to know 'Why gost þu in white? Art þu a mayden?', Kempe retorts, 'Nay, ser, I am no mayden; I am a wife' (124). She identifies still as a wife, recognising the incongruity of her garb (reassured through privileged revelation that she is 'a mayden in [her] sowle' [52]), yet insisting on its legitimacy as a sign of holy individuation – of her status of *electa*. As she kneels in fear in front of the archbishop, threatened with fetters and accused as a 'fals heretyke', the clothes fulfil their shielding potential as she hides her shaking hands beneath, thus being successfully empowered in constancy and authority and able to progress in this new fortification of enclosure.

Though Kempe is slandered for the wearing of white ('sithen hath sche sufferyd meche despyte & meche schame' [104]), the clothes construct a public wariness and unease that creates an efficacious shield not unlike the private hairshirt and the metaphysical fortress that prevented John's carnal touch. In identifying her as Other, Kempe's white clothes therefore effect another fortification which stresses her liminality and also renders her conveniently untouchable. Chastity and pain therefore continue to run concurrently, but the pain of public slander, born from the ambiguity of her audacious exteriority, is a worthwhile sacrifice in retaining herself for God alone. Gunnel Cleve regards the

[149] Alastair Minnis, *Translations of Authority*, p. 128.

white clothes as ‘instrumental in bringing about some of the qualities that are considered essential in mystics’ because wearing them has made her a subject of ridicule and taught her obedience and submission to God’s will.[150] While no doubt true, Cleve’s assessment seems something of a truism given that Kempe must already ‘be’ a mystic since she has received divine command to wear the clothes in the first place.

Chastity, and thus the relinquishment of reproductive potential and its concomitant pains, do not, then, accord Kempe with a completely anaesthetised body, shielded by its avowed metamorphosis. Medical theory maintains the paradigm of pain through the essential deficiencies caused by chaste living. This interaction between the body and socio-religious and scientific culture reflects the claim made by Karmen MacKendrick that the medieval body is an unstable, less ordered or unified site, and more receptive to radicalised modifications of body and behaviour.[151] Kempe’s white clothes symbolise an identity fraught with ambiguity and a body of pain, but they also provide her with a means of such radicalisation, from where she can ‘gost’ in daring difference. This punctuates Kempe’s dynamic progression in painful cognition: from the pain of the conjugal debt to the pain of physical abstinence, from ascetic pain substitution to analgesic purification and finally towards an understanding of Christ’s pain as his bride and disciple. Having relinquished her childbearing potential through a vow of chastity, Kempe’s salvation will now be assured during the next phase of her life cycle when that painful childbearing is reactivated with spiritual efficacy through a process of pain surrogacy, the focus of the third chapter of this study, and when she is finally ‘redemyd fro euyr-lestyng peyne’ (246). That medieval culture insists upon the private experience

[150] Cleve, ‘Semantic Dimensions in Margery Kempe’s “Whyght Clothys”’, p. 167.
[151] MacKendrick, *The Multipliable Body*, p. 109.

and imperative of female pain as a necessary route towards *imitatio Christi*, it remains, therefore, as a fruitfully inescapable prerequisite for spiritual ascension.

Chapter Three: Lost Blood of the Middle Age: Pain Surrogacy and a New Fecundity

> Unto this day *it dooth myn herte boote*
> *That I have had my world as in my tyme*.
> But age, allas, that al wole envenyme,
> Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
> Lat go. Farewel! The devel go therwith!
> The flour is goon; ther is namoore to telle;
> The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;
> But yet to be right myrie wole I fonde.[1]

The self-serving agenda that underlies the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* is, of course, oppositional to the increasingly spiritually-rooted focus of Kempe's life plan. Alisoun's delight, however, in having had agency over her 'world' and her 'tyme', her willingness to bid farewell to the refined and desirable 'flour' of youth in favour of the more essential, coarse, but enriched 'bren' of age, is a significant metaphor. Unlike Kempe's maturing knowledge of divine wisdom, Alisoun's specialism is marriage, about which she claims to be 'an expert in al myn age' (l.174).[2] The fruit of this marital expertise is noted by the Pardoner, whose impatience to hear her tale prompts his call to 'teche us yonge men of your praktike' (l. 187). It is impossible to ignore the salacious subtext of his request, yet Alisoun's apparent ascent to the role of teacher and sage is not only an affront to St. Paul's infamous ruling, but an acknowledgement that, in

[1] 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue', in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, ll. 472-9. From *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 111 (my emphases).
[2] For studies that offer a comparison of Margery Kempe and The Wife of Bath, see M.C. Bodden, 'Take all my Wealth and let my Body go', in *Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 33-49. Also Sheila Delany, 'Sexual Economics, Chaucer's Wife of Bath and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Feminist Readings*, ed. Evans and Johnson, pp. 72-87. Also William Provost, 'Margery Kempe and her Calling', in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. McEntire, pp. 3-15 and Janet Wilson, 'Margery and Alison: Women on Top', in the same volume, pp. 223-237.

her own words, ‘Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynough for me’ (ll. 1-2).[3]

The preceding chapter of this study concluded at a significant turning point in Kempe’s life trajectory: her transition, at the age of forty, to a life of chastity and spiritual focus, and an increasing detachment from domestic constraint. This chapter will concern what I will suggest to be a further, pivotal moment in her life cycle: the peri-menopausal, menopausal and post-menopausal stages, and Kempe’s transformation into an older agent of ministry and surrogacy. The term ‘menopause’, employed only from the nineteenth century, derives from the Greek *men* (‘month’) and *pausis* (‘a cessation; a pause’). The broader term ‘climacteric’, which signifies the wider physiological event through pre to post menopause, was employed from c.1600, originating from the Latin *climactericus*, itself from the Greek *klimakterikos*, meaning ‘of a critical period’, and *klimakter* ‘rung of a ladder’.[4] It denotes a critical stage in human life, a period especially liable to change. The image of the ladder is especially striking in its resonance with the use of ladders as symbols of contemplative progression in mystical texts.[5] Thus, rather than a phase to be overlooked as an inevitable stage in the aging process, I argue that this moment in the life cycle is critical, and unique, because it symbolises a site of transition between youth and old age, and between the biological states of fecundity and sterility. The absence of a precise medieval term for menopause explains, perhaps, the lack of scholarly attention that has been accorded to medieval

[3] In his Epistle to Timothy, Paul declares that ‘...I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence’ (I Timothy 2:12).
[4] OED s.v. climacteric: From Latin *clīmactēricus*; relating to a critical point or period. 2: *Physiol.* and *Med.* Of, relating to, or designating a period of physical (and, often, psychological) change occurring in middle age and believed to indicate the onset of senescence; *spec.* menopausal.
[5] I am grateful to Laura Varnam for this observation. See, for example, Bridget of Sweden’s vision of a monk on a high rung of a ladder in Book V of *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 2: Liber Caelestis, Books IV-V*, trans. Denis Searby, ed. Bridget Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 271-325.

women of this life juncture (the medieval texts themselves address only the symptoms of menopause without any conceptual formulation of the phase as meaningful for female health or status). The exceptions, for example, are Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Sue Niebrzydowski's volumes on middle aged women in their 'prime', and wives.[6] This chapter aims to redress this void via a foregrounding of the biological changes that, rather than signalling the somatic failure that is often homologised with menopause – the 'functionlessness' that Emily Martin has highlighted as a central anxiety – signal an emergent re-capacity.[7] As medieval medical texts will demonstrate below, I argue that the cooling and drying of the female body in the mid to later years - the effective *making male* of the menopausal woman – prior to any onset of physical and mental failure towards the very end of life, facilitates a powerful process of re-identification whereby Kempe is able to achieve authority in voice, text and painful understanding.

In the later stages of Kempe's narrative, we learn of the birth of a grandchild (perhaps, but not necessarily, her first): her son's wife 'had a childe, a fayr mayde-child' (223). She is anxious to see her family, who live in

[6] See Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *The Prime of their Lives: Wise Old Women in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leuven, Paris and Dudley: Peeters, 2004); Sue Niebrzydowski, *Middle Aged Women in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011); and Sue Niebrzydowski, *Bonoure and Buxom: A Study of Wives in Late Medieval English Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006). See also Deborah Youngs, Ch. 6, 'Adulthood', in *The Life Cycle in Western Europe*, pp. 126-162. Also Cordelia Beattie, 'The Life Cycle: The Ages of Medieval Women', esp. p. 21.

[7] Even modern medical discourse often employs unfavourable language when discussing menopause. As Martin has shown, medical textbooks describe a breakdown in the female body during the menopausal phase, using terms such as 'fail', 'decline', 'atrophy', 'wither' and 'senile'. In 1981, the World Health Organisation defined menopause as an oestrogen-deficiency *disease*. Martin cites one text that more optimistically sees menopause as 'protective in nature'. Whilst levels of oestrogen drop, they remain 'satisfactory for *maintenance* of *support* tissues', protecting the female from 'undesirable reproduction and the associated growth stimuli' (my emphasis). Emily Martin, 'Medical Metaphors of Women's Bodies: Menstruation and Menopause', *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 15-41. On modern biological theories of menopause see Thomas B. L. Kirkwood and Daryl P. Shanley, 'The connections between general and reproductive senescence and the evolutionary basis of menopause', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1204 (2010), 21-9.

Germany, before she dies, 'sche xulde seen hem alle er þan sche deyid' (223), despite the physical challenge of crossing the sea, the travail of which she had deemed hitherto untenable: 'neuyr purposing to passyn þe see whil sche leuyd' (223). Not only does she achieve her aim, but Kempe's status as capable matriarch is later compounded by her daughter-in-law's references to her as 'eldmodyr' (225), a term of address that seals her elevation to a respected and authoritative (grand)mother-figure, and which, crucially, corresponds with Kempe's metaphysical growth and marriage to the Godhead.[8] Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, writing on 'the age of discretion' of medieval women of forty and beyond, notes the priestly role of older, wise women, who in late Antiquity, acted as intermediaries between women and the male clergy.[9] Such a socio-religious permutation continued into the Middle Ages, engendering a spiritual metamorphosis that is quite striking:

> Pre-conquest English society knew older matrons as the counterparts of the male priests. They were called *nonna*, after the Roman word for 'grandmother'. We discover here a spiritualised transformation of the biological grandmother. In later centuries the *nonna* evolved into the *nonna* we know, that is the nun in a cloister.[10]

Like the pseudo-anchoritic enclosure that was discussed in Chapter Two, this evolution of *eldmodyr* to nun, or *nonna*, underlies Kempe's transfiguration in her mid to later years. This, I will suggest, is an innovative route into a spiritual life which would be otherwise unattainable for a woman whose prior experience was an earthly one of wifely and motherly duties, and which is characterised not

[8] OED s.v. eldmother: 1.) a grandmother 2a.) a mother-in-law 2b.) a stepmother. *BMK* ed. Meech and Allen glosses 'eldmodyr' as stepmother (396). *BMK* ed. Windeatt glosses 'eldmodyr' as mother-in-law (391). However, the prefix *eld* denotes clear gerontological meanings, such as *senilis, veteranus* and *longenus*. Since the OED lists the first denotation as grandmother, the term *eldmodyr* must have had senescent connotations as well as domestic ones; a mode of address that encompassed not only a familial relationship but which also acknowledged women's status and age.

[9] From Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, 'The Age of Discretion: Women at Forty and Beyond', in *Middle Aged Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Niebryzdowski, pp. 15-24, at p. 23.

[10] Mulder-Bakker, 'The Age of Discretion', p. 24.

in spite of her female biology, but, through the removal of reproductive function in menopause, because of it.

Like Chaucer's caricature portrayal of the Wife of Bath, medieval literary representations of the ageing female are largely pejorative, signifying malicious crones or spent figures whose reproductive lives have ended and with them their efficacy in the world. Kempe, I argue, deviates from these designated routes by replacing her lost fecundity with a new fruitfulness and flourishing; a spiritual didacticism and a willingness to be a surrogate to others' pain. For the pain to which Kempe refers in the latter parts of her narrative, belongs largely to others – both mortal and divine – indicating in her both a mature understanding of painful experience, and a desire, through spiritual strength, to undertake a process of what I have termed *pain surrogacy*: that is, the willing receipt and support of pain that does not originate in the self. This deviates from the popular medieval aspiration of *imitatio Christi* because it is a paradigm which, by its very nature, is rooted in the mature female body, and which takes as its subject both divine and earthly sufferers. Rather than the rarefied desire to experience Christ's anguish singularly, I contend that pain surrogacy is a necessarily maternal activity legitimised through the female mystic's physiology and capacity to (re)experience productive and physical pain. This chapter therefore aims to address particular questions. What is the significance of *menopause* for female ageing and experience in the Middle Ages? What is its impact on the pain paradigm that Kempe's life has hitherto exemplified? What are the implications for the menopausal woman who, in a culture in which blood has multivalent meanings, loses the blood that has given her those meanings? And how do various forms of surrogacy – wetnursing, godparenting, fostering, image-substitution and pain-bearing – enable Kempe to *re*produce her lost

maternity?[11] The first half of the chapter will consider the implications of the masculinisation of the ageing female along with the symbolic ramifications of the lost blood of menopause. The second half will provide a critical exegesis of Margery Kempe's mid-life *experientia* in relation to such questions. I thus look to the *opportunities* to be derived from the post-menopausal state as a site of experience and corporeal temperateness as opposed to its signifying the degeneration of female experience, and in so doing, will offer a re-evaluation of the senescence of Margery Kempe.

Menopause as Making Male

When Katharina Tucher, a wealthy and educated Bavarian woman in the fourteenth century, was negotiating her new life as an independent widow at the age of forty, she was told to 'behave like a man'.[12] Christine de Pizan, writing in her fortieth year, describes a dream where Fortune 'touched me all over my body... I felt myself completely transformed... I found my heart strong and bold, which surprised me, but I felt I had become a true man'.[13] She explained that in publishing this work, she moved from being female to becoming male: *de*

[11] Mary McLaughlin identifies '[t]he fostering role of churchmen as pastors and preachers, reformers and surrogates'. On surrogacy, and especially the common fostering out to monasteries of noble children who were unsuitable for early marriage or the military, see McLaughlin, 'Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries', in *Medieval Families*, ed. Carol Neel, pp. 20-124 (p. 65). John Eastburn Boswell notes that popularity of 'abandoning' or 'donating' noble, and, later, poor children to the Church ('Oblation'), is 'at least partly responsible for the idealization in the High Middle Ages of "foster" relationships and the use of expressions like "foster-brother" and "foster-father" to express a lofty, even transcendant degree of commitment and concern rather than a makeshift or second-rate arrangement'. See Boswell, 'The Abandonment of Children and the Ancient and Medieval Family', in *Medieval Families*, pp. 234-72 (p. 252). On Godparents and spiritual kinship, see Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Didier Lett argue that 'The term "*fostermoder*", found very frequently in Anglo-Saxon literature from the High Middle Ages, undoubtedly refers more to a surrogate mother than to a wet nurse'. See Alexandre-Bidon and Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages: Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Jody Gladding (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), esp. pp. 18-20.

[12] Mulder-Bakker, 'The Age of Discretion', pp. 15-8.

[13] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Fortune's Transformation*, from Mulder-Bakker, 'Introduction', in *The Prime of their Lives*, pp. xviii-xix.

femelle devins masle. Fortune had made her *en homme naturel parfaict* [into a perfect and natural man].[14] After menopause, medieval women were considered freer, to have a more legitimised voice, to be in some ways *de-feminised* or more male. Some scholarship is emerging on this notion, preceded by Lynn Staley who, writing on female authorship, regards a woman's change at menopause as a trigger for writing; that the end of the childbearing years carries with it a shift in authority and didactic validity which is manifested, as Kempe demonstrates, in an alternative form of production: the text.[15] In her important book, Staley anticipates the work of scholars like Mulder-Bakker and Niebrzydowski, who develop thinking about mature holy women. Some years prior, Nikki Stiller, writing on medieval mothers and daughters, argued that the desired status of virginity for holy women hinged on an overriding paradox: 'in order to be virtuous and yet potent in one's own right, according to the Church Fathers and the medieval schoolmen, a woman had to become like a man, yet in doing so she had to deny both biological truth and natural sexual affiliation'.[16] Such work, however, focuses primarily on the state of virginity as a means of losing femininity and gaining *maleness* as opposed to the state of menopause; a space that I aim to address here. It is necessary, first, to establish the

[14] Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la mutacion de Fortune*, from Mulder-Bakker, 'Introduction', *The Prime of their Lives*, p. xix.
[15] Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 36.
[16] Nikki Stiller, *Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature* (Conneticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 8. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – c. 50 CE) saw 'progress' for women as becoming male: 'Philo defined the female as inferior to the male since the female represented sense perception, the created world, while the male represented the rational soul. Progress meant giving up the female gender, that is, the passive corporeal and sense perception, for the male gender, that is, the active incorporeal and rational thought'. See Vern L. Bullough, 'Marriage in the Middle Ages: Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women', *Viator*, 4, (1973), 485-501, p. 497. See also Schulenburg, 'The Heroics of Virginity, p. 32.

rationale for the physiological masculinisation of the older woman and the gender fluidity inherent within such a process.

Women were generally considered to be colder and moister than men during their reproductive years, before succumbing to the cooling and drying that characterises senescence. However, not all ancient authorities subscribed to value judgements surrounding male and female temperature: Hippocrates, favouring balance in the body's constituents and moderation in one's lifestyle, depicted women in *Diseases of Women* I*,* as hotter than men, 'because of the loose and porous quality of their flesh'.[17] For Galen, the antithesis is the case: females are less warm than males, and this creates in them an imperfection and justification for the perpetuation of an overall thesis of female inferiority. He acknowledged, nevertheless, the appropriateness of a more moderate body temperature for the gestation of a foetus; 'she is warm enough to concoct the extra nutriment necessary, but not so warm that it is rendered inaccessible to the foetus'.[18] Not only does Galen's theory assume the primary function of female temperature for the efficient reproduction of the species, but also her inherent reproductive capacity as heralding imperfection: maternity, in this sense, required inferiority. Aristotle saw the female as not only cooler than the male, but as a result, less able to refine nutriments, producing therefore not the superior fluid of semen, but that of menstrual blood, which merely nourishes the foetus as opposed to shaping its form.[19] Both theories reinforced the female's role in reproduction, and simultaneously suggest that her biology, whilst efficacious for its 'purpose', is ultimately inferior to the male constitution.

[17] Hippocrates, *Diseases of Women I* (Littré, vol. 8, pp. 12-13), cited from Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, p. 17.
[18] Galen, *Use of Parts XIV*, vi. From Cadden, p. 33.
[19] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, I, 2 and 17-23; II, 1-3. From Cadden, p. 23.

It follows, then, that the physiological changes that occur around menopause provoke a physical and cultural shift in the perception of women aged forty and beyond. Though senescent cooling occurs in both the male and the female, the accompanying drying is assumedly more marked in the female, since she is characterised as moist throughout her many reproductive years, as Hildegard of Bingen (d.1179) suggests: 'From her fiftieth, or sometimes from her sixtieth year, a woman feels some irritation and dries out around the windowlike sites of her body'.[20] As such, the older female – perhaps in 'middle age', as will be considered below – in cooling and drying, not only relinquishes the physiological maternal function to which she has hitherto been bound (and which, according to Galen, forces her mediocrity), but becomes drier and therefore, more 'male', in the process.[21] The political ramifications of such a claim, of course, cannot be overlooked, as an increase in female agency that comes about because of a growing identification with the male body is inherently undermined. However, in the cultural climate of the Middle Ages, with its rigid patriarchal structures, fissures of opportunity prevail into which some women, their physiology modified in their middle age, can slip. Furthermore, the concurrent cooling of the *male* body in senescence – the equity of both males and females in the symptoms of ageing – produces a parity whereby male bodies, in losing the heat of male vigour, are perhaps feminised in the same way that female bodies become drier and more masculinised.

[20] Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Cause et Cure*, trans. Margret Berger (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), p. 82.
[21] Note the correlation with the state of virginity, considered to be an elevated modification of human sexuality. An espousal of virginity was valued in the Middle Ages with the 'highest patristic compliment: they were praised for becoming "male" or "virile"'. See Schulenburg, 'The Heroics of Virginity', p. 32. See also R. R. Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 150-83. Also Jo Ann McNamara, 'Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought', *Feminist Studies*, 3, (1976),152-54.

The accepted age of menopause in the Middle Ages is a subject to which it is necessary to turn in order to establish its relevance for Margery Kempe's operation within the life cycle. Amundsen and Diers' survey of medieval sources has led to the conclusion that the most frequently cited age for menopause is fifty years, with variations from thirty-five to seventy-five.[22] The Salertian physician Copho, living in the second half of the eleventh century, includes in *Egritudines Tocius Corporis*, that '[the menses] are not present naturally before the twelfth year or after the fiftieth'. Hildegard of Bingen states in Book II of *Causae et Curae,* that 'in women the menses are lacking after the fiftieth year, except in those who are entirely healthy and strong, as in those the menses continue clear up to the seventieth year'.[23] The encyclopaedic work, *De Natura Rerum*, compiled by Thomas of Cantimpré between 1228 and 1244, asserts that 'a woman conceives clear up to the fiftieth year'.[24] Gilbertus Anglicus' *Compendium Medicinae* (c.1230-40), the translation of which, the *Sekeness of Wymmen,* was widely disseminated in England, concurs, as does Bartholomaeus Anglicus, whose *De Rerum Proprietatibus* (c.1240) attests that the menses occur between 'the fourteenth up to the fiftieth year'.[25]

The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' states that menstruation 'lasts until the fiftieth year if she is thin, sometimes until the sixtieth or sixty-fifth year if she is moist. In the moderately fat, it lasts until the thirty-fifth year'.[26] Interestingly, the variations in the age of menopause here are dependent on the individual female's physical shape and constitution (her weight, her moisture levels); evidence, perhaps, of the precise observation of women for the

[22] Darrel W. Amundsen and Carol Jean Diers, 'The Age of Menopause in Medieval Europe', *Human Biology*, 45 (1973), 605-612.
[23] Amundsen and Diers, 'The Age of Menopause in Medieval Europe', p. 607.
[24] Ibid., p. 609.
[25] Ibid.
[26] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, p.72-3.

purposes of medical texts, and of the recognition, founded by the ancient arguments of Aristotle and Galen, that the body represented a unique composition of humours and elements, in or out of balance. The implications of this for medieval women of menopausal age would seem to create a corporeal site of liberating individuation: while 'imperfect', according to classical theories, women's progress through the life stages was, according to medieval sources, varied, and could even be susceptible to active processes of intervention in the way of lifestyle and environment, and the prevention of disease and degeneration via an awareness of the six non-naturals.[27]

Notwithstanding certain variations, the most typically perceived age of menopause is around fifty. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* regards menstruation to occur 'fro xv yere till sche be fifty wyntyr olde'; the reason for the onset of menopause being securely linked to symptoms of cooling and drying: 'Ne þe women of [fifty] yere [of] age be-cause they be so dryed þat þe hote of þe blode is distroyde þat no superhabundant humvre may ryse in hem ne passe'.[28] The *Sekeness of Wymmen* also considers the duration of the menstruating years to be 'into þe age of fyfty wynter'.[29] It makes clear the overarching contingency of temperature and moisture for the retention of the menses, which occurs because 'of hete ether of colde of þe moder (uterus); other of hete oþer of colde of þe humours þat be enclosed withynforth in þe moder; other of gret drynesse of her complexion'.[30] However, Monica Green

[27] Medical texts stressed the individuality of each person, who had his or her own complexion and humoural balance, which rendered a personal life span. Aristotelian thinking held that the end of reproductive capacity occurs earlier in women than in men equates to proof that women cool and age faster than men and therefore have shorter life spans. Since childbirth was a drying process in women, they would age more quickly if they had more children. Certain lifestyle adaptations: environment, air, exercise, food and drink, could affect the process of ageing to an extent. On the non-naturals, see Peregrine Horden, 'A Non-natural Environment'. See also Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe,* pp. 19-20.
[28] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, ed. Alexandra Barratt, p. 48.
[29] The *Sekeness of Wymmen*, p. 58.
[30] Ibid., p. 60.

advises a note of caution in regarding such ages as 'formulaic and...[not] historically reliable', possibly reflecting 'ancient numerological beliefs rather than empirical observation', perhaps evidenced by the 'convenient' use of round numbers in these texts.[31]

De Secretis Mulierum is concerned primarily with the poisonous effects of the menstruating female's gaze. It informs its reader not only of the existence of a peri-menopausal state, where menstruation may be sporadic, but also equates this state with *old* women: 'It should be noted that old women who still have their monthly flow, and some who do not menstruate, poison the eyes of children lying in their cradles by their glance'.[32] The cultural vituperation of the hazardous older woman and its ramifications for Kempe will be examined below. Here, the alignment of peri-menopause with *old* age marks the medieval predilection for the textual suppression of what might be considered to be *middle* age. Sue Niebrzydowski has identified this void, using Chaucer's Januarie to exemplify:

> His attitude is revealing of the young woman / old woman binary that operated in medieval culture, a binary in which there was, apparently, no place for the middle-aged woman: one was either young or old, and beauty was the preserve of the former.[33]

Robert Magnan has concurred, arguing that the most common categorisation of human age was the dichotomy of *juventus* and *senectus*:

> *Juventus* was a time of folly, of idleness, of passions and pleasures, hot and moist, Sanguine, under the influence of Venus. *Senectus*, in contrast, was a time of reason, of gravity and repentance, of social and moral responsibility, cold and generally dry, melancholy and phlegmatic, under the influence of Saturn.[34]

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[31] The ages proposed by the author of 'The Book on the Conditions of Women', for example, replicate those found in its source text, the *Viaticum*, which can be traced to late antique Byzantine texts which derive from ancient Greek sources. Green thus emphasises the complexity of ascertaining a reliable 'age' for menopause. See Monica Green, *The Trotula*, p. 215, n. 85.

[32] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 129.

[33] Niebrzydowski, ed., *Middle Aged Women*, p. 1.

[34] Robert Magnan, 'Sex and Senescence in Medieval Literature', in *Aging in Literature*, ed. Laurel Porter and Laurence M Porter (Troy: International Book Publishers, 1984), p. 16-19.

The age of menopause was thought to occur around the age of fifty, as we have seen. According to Magnan, senescence, however, appears to begin much earlier in medieval representations: the literary texts of Deschamps and Chaucer that Magnan examines portray women's loss of beauty and youthfulness from the age of thirty, and, he argues, 'most medieval writers do not attempt to deal with the problematic, hazy area of the first signs of aging'.[35] The medieval disinterest in the *process* of ageing, that we might consider middle age, would suggest a culturally perceived insignificance: those of 'middle' age might be reasonably expected to be established, perhaps unremarkably, in their community, work and domestic environment, and thus pose little noteworthy material for the purposes of literary design. For Magnan, the depiction of ageing as a sudden and distinct stage is a reaction to the looming reality of one's mortality; 'a time at which one's thoughts turn away from the world and toward death, either simply as an escape from the growing misfortunes of life or also as a beginning of eternal life'.[36] In explaining this anomaly so briefly, in the light of his argument that *senectus* is regularly presented from thirty or even earlier, means that Magnan in some ways dismisses the process of ageing itself in the same way as the medieval writers about which he comments, and overlooks what I argue to be a wholly *distinctive* interval in women's lives in the Middle Ages.

While the accepted view has been that senescence began at the age of forty or fifty (leaving little space for the maturing years themselves), Shulamith Shahar has shown that in fact, *old* age was more commonly regarded as between the ages of sixty and seventy.[37] The Middle English translation of the

[35] Ibid., p. 21.
[36] Magnan, 'Sex and Senscence', p. 23.
[37] Shulamith Shahar, 'Who were Old in the Middle Ages?', *Social History of Medicine*, 6, (1993), 313-34. See also J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought.*

pseudo-Baconian *De retardatione accidentum senectutis*, 'On Tarrying the Accidents of Age', suggests the optimal age or prime of life to be between forty and fifty: 'after that natural heete bigynnyth to mynush of necessite, and that tyme bigynneth after xlv or l yeere generaly'.[38] What appears to be more important to our understanding of the medieval perception of ageing, Shahar suggests, is the functional capacity of people's lives, as opposed to strict chronological age.[39] Saint Augustine (d.430) considered sixty as the onset of old age.[40] Isidore of Seville (d.636) probably influenced the subsequent predilection of medieval writers to divide life into several stages. His Latin dictionary, the *Etymologiarum,* divided life into six stages: *infantia* (up to age seven), *pueritia* (up to age fourteen), *adolescentia* (up to age twenty-eight), *iunventus* (up to fifty), *aetus senioris* or *gravitas* (up to seventy) and *senectus* (until death).[41] Bernard of Gordon, in the thirteenth-century *De Conservatione Vitae Humanae seu De Regimine Sanitatis,* is less optimistic, categorising the ages of thirty-five until the end of life as *aetas senectutis*: a long period of senescence indeed.[42] Aldobrandino of Siena's *Régime du corps* discusses four life stages, the third of which, *senectus*, is characterised by a cold, dry, constitution, and refers to the ages of forty or forty-five until sixty.[43] For Vincent

[38] 'On Tarrying the Accidents of Age' (*De retardatione accidentium senectutis*), ed. Carol A. Everest and M. Teresa Tavormina, in *Sex, Aging, and Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium: Trinity College Cambridge MS R. 14. 52, Its Texts, Language, and Scribe*, Volume 1, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp. 133-247 (p. 157).
[39] 'Individuals who managed to survive until an older age were able to enjoy a period of rest and recreation. Physical functionality was crucial to the efficacy of this life stage', in Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Retirement and the Life Cycle in 15th-Century England', in *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe: Selected Papers from the Annual Conference of the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, held 25-26 February and 11-12 November 1983*, ed. Michael M. Sheehan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), pp. 173-88.
[40] Shahar, 'Who were Old in the Middle Ages?', p. 315.
[41] *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi. Etymologiarum sive originum,* vol. 2, from Youngs, p. 20.
[42] Shahar, 'Who were Old in the Middle Ages?', p. 316.
[43] *Le régime du corps de Maître Aldebrandin de Sienne*, trans. Faith Wallis, in *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, ed. Wallis, p. 499. For information on the ownership of the *Le régime du corps* in MSS in England, see Introduction, p. 12, n. 28.

of Beauvais (d.1264?), it is the female menopause which marks the end of the fourth stage, *juventus*, referring to the 'inability of women to give birth after fifty as the indicator of the end of this stage'.[44] Although *juventus* ends at menopause in Vincent's six stage taxonomy, he also proposes a four stage model to include *aetas diminuendi* – age 35 or 40 to 60.[45] This model does acknowledge a more gradual maturing in contrast to the dichotomy of youth versus old age. Indeed, Shahar identifies that not all authors appropriate the same meaning to the term *senectus*, which is sometimes employed to mean 'early' old age (middle age, perhaps) and old age, whilst *senium* often denotes extreme old age.[46]

The notion of *senectus* must therefore be appropriated with caution. While medieval writers are clear that the (varied) ages of *senectus* mark the cooling and drying of a maturing individual, the existence of an often long period of *senium* thereafter, suggests that medieval 'old' age is what modern categorisation might label 'middle' age (notwithstanding the many variations in the placement of such categories). Magnan's study of the polarisation of youth and old age in medieval literature brings into focus the absence of age*ing* people in literary texts, yet fails to examine why this category is overlooked or indeed whether such categories are useful in furthering our understanding of life experience in the Middle Ages. Joel T. Rosenthal has addressed such a point, identifying the apparent dread of old age in the Middle Ages as a reflection of literary tropes: 'Cultural dissonance took many forms. One was manifested in the self-dramatising tendency to emphasise the early approach of old age.

[44] Shahar, 'Who were Old in the Middle Ages?', p. 320.
[45] Shahar, 'Who were Old in the Middle Ages?', p. 318.
[46] Ibid., p. 319.

Many saw its frosty touch by age 30 or 35, few argued to postpone it until 50 or much beyond'.[47]

Cultural assumptions about ageing (including the dismissal of the post-menopausal woman as *dys*functional; as a marker of the 'old') can shape self-perception, transcending the boundaries of categorisation set out by the theologians and thinkers of the period. As Shahar attests, 'chronological age...is a convenient marker for the classification of individuals within the social space, but the significance of age is a dependent rather than an independent variable'.[48] The 'age taxonomy' of humans, in other words, provides a useful language with which to attempt to objectively describe female life stages, but it is within the location of experience itself that authentic meaning, subjectively *un*classifiable, is situated.

Hildegard of Bingen employs a language of fecundity when describing the ageing, and probably menopausal, woman, which not only underlies the *re*productivity that I suggest to be characteristic of this life stage, but also its great significance as a powerful and distinctive moment.

> The soul reveals her capabilities according to the capabilities of the body, so that in childhood she brings forth simplicity, in youth strength, and in the fullness of age, when all the veins of the human being are full, she brings forth her greatest strength in wisdom. In the same way a tree in its first growth brings forth tender shoots, goes on then to bear fruit and finally ripens that fruit to the fullness of utility.[49]

During what Hildegard sees as 'the fullness of age', or the maturing years, the feminised 'soul' works in harmony with the body to nurture and extrapolate its

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[47] Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Retirement and the Life Cycle in 15th-Century England', in *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, ed. Sheehan, pp. 173-74. See also Albrect Classen, 'Old Age in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Also an Introduction', in *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 1-84.
[48] Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, p. 314.
[49] Hildegard von Bingen, *Scivias*, I, 4.17, in Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, trans. Mark Atherton (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 6.

wise potential; to produce the fruit of knowledge instead of the womb. This imagery of flowering and fruitfulness is striking when compared with the writer of 'The Book on the Conditions of Women', who notes that 'The common people call the menses "the flowers", because just as trees do not bring forth fruit without flowers, so women without their flowers are cheated of their ability to conceive'.[50] Hildegard employs similar terminology in relation to the menses:

> The bleeding at the time of menstruation is a sign for a woman of her power to beget life and to bloom. For she blooms in her children. Just as a tree blooms because of its life force and brings forth leaves and fruit, in the same way, in the fruit of her body, the woman brings forth blood and foliage out of the life force of her monthly flow. Just as a tree without its life force is named an infertile stump, in the same way, a woman in her prime who has no life force for her further blooming is called infertile.[51]

St. Ambrose offers a similar analogy, seeing ageing as 'a time of moral behaviour, like the palm tree which only bears fruit as it ages, not in its youth'.[52] Such images of abundance and fertility have resonance with biblical passages, where 'Israel shall spring as the lily, and his root shall shoot forth...they shall blossom as a vine' (Hosea 14:3-7), '...they of the city shall flourish like the grass of the earth' (Psalm 71:16), and 'I the Lord have brought down the high tree, and exalted the low tree: and have dried up the green tree, and have caused the dry tree to flourish' (Ezechiel 17:24). In her challenge of the use of masculine metaphors in Christian theology, Grace Jantzen defines the emphasis on death and salvation as a 'necrophilic imaginary' which overpowers the maternal and the natal.[53] Jantzen calls for an alternative doctrine of salvation which situtates the notion of flourishing as primary, allowing for

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[50] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, p. 72-3.
[51] Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et* curae, in *Holistic Healing*, Pawlik and Madigan, pp. 93-4.
[52] Ambrose, *Wisdom* 4.9. From Classen, 'Old Age in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Also an Introduction', p. 40.
[53] Grace Jantzen, 'They shall flourish as a garden', in *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 156-70.

common fruitfulness and nurturing in a social environment, as opposed to the 'competitive individualism' of personal salvation, where 'the rest of the world goes up in flames'.[54] Liz Herbert McAvoy has developed this idea by illustrating how medieval women writers like Hildegard, Mechtild of Hackeborn (d. ca. 1299) and the female author of *A Revelation of Purgatory*, in employing a theology of flourishing, do just what Jantzen requests in 'recovering a lost garden' where female growth can take place.[55] Through a process of ultimate spiritual enlightenment, the author of *The Pore Caitif* sees the five martyrs, Agnes, Lucy, Agatha, Cecilia and Katherine, as 'fyue rede rosis for martyrdom: & white lilies for clene chastite'. With these flowers, along with the roses of Christ and his four apostles, the reader can also be edified if they 'make þou a gay garland & were it vpon þi heed of þi soule, þat is on þe principal resoun: þese flouris mai neuere faile ne fade…for…crist [is] þe briȝtest roos & spouse of oure soules'.[56] In developing this hermeneutic, I shall turn now to a discussion of the ontological significance of the lost blood of menopause, and argue for the ways in which its symbolic absence affords ageing women an alternative trajectory towards this new fecundity.

Losing Blood

In the medieval imaginary, menopause is formulated as the absence, or cessation, of menstruation. Medical texts do not mention the state of menopause in itself, but refer, meaningfully, to the existence, or lack, of the menses.[57] As such, the vast symbolic value of an event that marks an escape

[54] Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 165.
[55] Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"Flourish like a Garden": Pain, Purgatory and Salvation in the Writing of Medieval Religious Women', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 50 (2014), 33-60, at p. 60.
[56] *The Pore Caitif*, p. 197.
[57] From the Early Modern era, medical writers began to write more specifically about menopause, largely to pathologise it. See Michael Stolberg, 'A Woman's Hell? Medical

from the postlapsarian legacy of Eve's transgression holds equal importance to the physical effects created by menopause on the body. Menstruation, for example, was considered by theologians to be a 'sickness' or 'infirmity'. Much scholarship exists on the 'stain' of menstruation, its signification of female imperfection as a gendered mark of the Fall, as we saw in Chapter Two. However, no work appears to exist on the ways in which menopause is in some sense a *cure* for the female blemish in the Middle Ages; a window into an interval in life where, emancipated from the 'brand' of menstruation, the mature woman was freer and, perhaps, purer; permitted to minister and to heal.

It would be germane to establish here the preoccupation with blood in the late Middle Ages – about which much has been written in recent years – given that it is the *cessation* of Kempe's monthly bleeding and the ramifications thereof that is my present focus. Blood infuses diverse aspects of medieval culture, not least science, medicine, theology, iconography and art, and is weighted, in many ways, as the root of life's meaning; as a life source both spiritually and corporeally. Medieval medical texts frequently rely on blood as an indicator of sickness or health, or the 'answer' to causes of illness, according to Bettina Bildhauer, in her insightful study, *Medieval Blood*.[58] Bildhauer considers the *Bartholomäus*, the most widely used German medical handbook in the thirteenth century, a compilation of recipes from various Latin sources, which promises to reveal certain proven medical truths, the foundation of which materialises as blood. Sickness is caused by 'an excess of blood, an excess of blood foam or so much blood that it has turned black [in the urine]. Health… depends on the 'right strength' of blood. So the text builds itself up as a bearer

Perceptions of Menopause in Preindustrial Europe', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 73 (1999), 404-28.

[58] Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006).

of secrets and then reveals that this arcane medical knowledge is, at root, knowledge of blood'.[59] The correct *amount* of blood in the body is also emphasised in many medical texts, like Ortolf von Baierland's *Arzneibuch*, which advises readers to 'note whether this [illness] is caused by surplus blood… [if so] you should let his blood at once, before his essence and strength leave him'.[60] Blood is thus the carrier of life, yet its superfluity within the body can paradoxically be the cause of pain and illness, creating imbalance, excess heat and bodily disorder.

Caroline Walker Bynum's study of blood piety in northern Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries interrogates the 'blood frenzy' that engulfed devotional art and poetry, iconography and vision; the significance of blood *outside* the body, as visualised and envisioned. Bynum assesses the popular devotion to the five wounds of Christ in the fourteenth century, marked, for example, by the evolution of the Man of Sorrows image: 'The so-called *imago pietatis* or Man of Sorrows, first represented as an apparently dead figure upright in his tomb peacefully displaying wounded hands and side, became increasingly a bold and living man, spouting cascades of blood'.[61] Whilst thirteenth century visions often depicted the infant Christ in a comfortingly sensory manner, by the fifteenth century, they became more 'sinister and macabre'.[62] Colette of Corbie (d. 1447) envisioned Christ 'as chopped meat on

[59] The *Bartholomäus* states that the cause of any disease can be detected by the colour of the urine. For example, if the urine is thin and white, the human being is melancholic. See Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, p. 23.
[60] Ortolf von Baierland, *Das Arzneibuch Ortolfs von Baierland nach der ältesten Handschrift,* in Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, p. 25.
[61] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 3. On the Man of Sorrows, see Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, N.Y: Caratzas, 1990). Also Bernhard Ridderbos, 'The Man of Sorrows: Pictorial Images and Metaphorical Statements' in A. A. MacDonald et. al., *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late Medieval Culture* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998).
[62] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 4.

a platter', and was warned that 'the offenses people do against him... tear him into smaller pieces than the flesh cut up on this plate'.[63] Such blood-centred visions echo liturgical ritualis:

> Christ figures used in the liturgy to perform the events of Passion Week were sometimes outfitted with bladders of animal blood that could be punctured at appropriate moments to display Jesus' bleeding before the faithful; cruets for eucharistic wine survive in the form of Christ images with spouts where the wounds occurred.[64]

Bynum notes the influence of blood piety on Eucharistic rituals, and particularly for female mystics who, if denied access to the cup at Mass, experienced instead a flooding of ecstasy in their limbs and 'the taste of the wafer in their mouths as blood'.[65] The hagiographer of Beatrice of Nazareth (d. 1268) described her as suffused with Christ's blood during the sacrament: 'It seemed to her that all the blood which flowed from his wounds was poured into her soul, and that all the drops of that precious liquid were so sprinkled on it that it was wholly washed by these drops and most perfectly cleansed from all the dust of sin'.[66] Similarly, Catherine of Siena (who, with Catherine of Genoa [d. 1510], was a central proponent of blood piety in Europe), experienced the host as blood in her mouth or spilling from it.[67] Such Eucharistic visions served to

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[63] Peter of Vaux, *Life of Colette of Corbie*. From Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 4.
[64] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood,* p. 4.
[65] Ibid. This visionary amalgamation of flesh and blood is interesting when considered in the light of the twelfth-century removal of the chalice from lay communion. Instigated because of clerical anxieties over the inherent dangers of the spillage of the wine or damage to the host during mass, thus causing a literal trauma to Christ's body, the initiative was justified by the Aristotelian notion of concomitance. This idea – the link between a reality and an outside phenomenon that was nevertheless inseparable – showed that after consecration, Christ's body was present in the host and the wine, thus enabling the use of only the bread. See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 70-71. Converging with the medieval theological preoccupation with wholeness, or *intactus*, Colette of Corbie's vision of bloodied pieces of Christ's flesh is thus striking in its conflation of flesh and blood. The paradoxical 'wholeness' of Christ's flesh and blood, with the mutilation of his body on the platter, create a near impenetrable sequence of the dismantling and reassembling of the Christic body, seeking, perhaps, a reassurance in the truth of resurrection and salvation.
[66] From *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, in Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 4.
[67] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 4.

heighten the lay frenzy for blood relics: 'Pilgrimages proliferated to places (such as Wilsnack, Daroca, Walldürn) where hosts supposedly bled or chalices turned to blood; older cult sites that claimed relics of Christ's blood from the Holy Land (such as Bruges, Schwerin, and Weingarten) bloomed anew'.[68]

Through the influence of such ideas, Margery Kempe's faith in the transubstantiation of the Eucharist is exhibited in her internalisation of Christ's edict that she should forsake the eating of flesh in order to receive his body more receptively: 'And in-stede of þat flesch þow schalt etyn my flesch & my blod, þat is þe very body of Crist in þe Sacrament of þe Awter' (17). Kempe rejects the materiality of the sacraments, clear that she ingests Christ himself: 'I be-leue þat it is hys very flesch & hys blood & no material bred' (115), clearly exculpating herself of Lollardy. Her conceptualisation of blood, then, has a metaphysical significance that provokes her many pilgrimages, showing a devotion to blood as part of the wider medieval blood piety seen here. She visits the Holy Blood of Hailes at around age forty-four; a trip which prompts a characteristically emotive response: '[she] went forth to þe Blod of Hayles, & þer was schrevyn & had lowde cryes & boystows wepyngys' (110).[69] And, despite great sickness and infirmity at around the age of sixty, Kempe is carried to Wilsnack in a wain to visit the Precious Blood, 'wyth gret penawns & gret disese', all the while affirming God's instrumental facilitation of the journey and the miracle of the blood: 'thorw þe help of owr Lord sche was browt to Wilsnak & saw þat Precyows Blod which be miracle cam owt of þe blissful Sacrament of þe Awtere' (234-5). For Kempe, the blood of the relics becomes a central focus

[68] Ibid., p. 5.
[69] It is possible to date this trip to Hailes to 1417, because there is mention in this chapter of the death of Bishop Peverell, whose demise in 1419 was prophesied two years prior. See *BMK*, p. 309.

for her devotion; an antidote to the pain and immobility of her advancing years, and a substitution for her own lost and polluted blood. After menopause, then, I argue, the multivalent meanings of blood are refined and epistemologically refocused, adopting a singularly spiritual and fecund significance: pain, therefore, becomes either *of*, or *for* Christ.

Yet whilst faith such as Kempe's, in these blood relics, required an acceptance of the immutability of God as symbolic of the 'triumph over death and decay', Bynum identifies the paradox of blood as living, and in continuity with the body, whilst also shed and separated, even in death. The iconography of Christ's death depicts this tension, where events after death are still represented with Christ's wounds as fresh, dripping with red blood.[70] Blood's loss, or outpouring, is the loss of life, but it is also that same blood that carries life, having the potential for regeneration and restoration. Perhaps correspondingly, then, it is not only suffering that is evoked by the image of living blood, but also liberation and fertility. Examples such as shepherds, alewives and servant girls who stole the host for 'conjuring', hoping for fertility – 'the increase of flocks or beer or love', suggest a cultural connotation of the fecundity of blood.[71] Medieval folk traditions situate blood as a life-bringer, for curing leprosy, blindness, epilepsy and sin, and secular literature tells of people seeking blood to cure mortal illness or stop haemorrhages.[72] This idea of blood as an independent presence, with its own, detached and mobile meanings – able to be divided, changed, to transcend boundaries, to create the loss or regeneration of life – presents a complex paradigm that precludes

[70] On the development of Bynum's central paradox, see Chapter 7, *Wonderful Blood*.
[71] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 155.
[72] Ibid., p. 156. Bynum also cites the criminals sentenced to travel to Wilsnack in order to be expiated for their crimes. Once accomplished, the penitent could be reintegrated into their community, to regain a place in society, showing blood in this instance to be liberating and facilitating. See p. 155.

preconceptions of blood as a straightforward indicator of human pain and suffering.

Furthermore, as we have seen previously, medieval medical theories hold that the foetus is formed from maternal blood, given form by the male seed. The foetus is fed by uterine blood and blood from the breast (given that in medieval scientific theory all bodily fluids originate in some form of blood, and that breastmilk was considered to be reformed blood).[73] The implications of the gendered menstrual blood from which Christ also originates in his human form posed a theological dilemma, whilst also giving rise to Marian devotion.[74] John of Capistrano argued for the high ontological status of *sanguis Christi* by stressing the formation of Christ's body entirely from the pure menstrual blood from his mother's womb.[75] Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (340-97), was instrumental in reconciling the 'unnatural' act of the Incarnation with Mary's sustained intactness, inspiring what Miri Rubin sees as 'a social revolution'.[76] He affirms the 'contribution' of Mary's womb (and inherently, uterine blood) to the gestation of the Christ-child:

> …the Virgin…established a new method of generating. So flesh was born of flesh. Thus the Virgin had of her own what she gave; for the mother did not give something of another, but she contributed her own from her womb in an unusual manner, but in a usual function.[77]

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[73] See, generally, Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, and Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, esp. pp. 117-30. Hildegard of Bingen notes how, once the growing foetus has received 'the spirit of life' in the womb, 'the vessels that lead to the breasts open themselves under the influence of the lively movement of the womb's fruit and the activity of the elements, and lead the milk to the breasts...' See *Holistic Healing*, p. 98.

[74] On the use of maternal and reproductive imagery and Christ, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, especially pp. 113-125.

[75] From Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, pp. 158-159. Berthold's decree contains the following: 'Therefore, we are bound to... [honor her] who, providing to the whole world the price [*pretium*] of human redemption and pouring forth from her virginal womb for the Christian faithful the universal cure [*ex virginali vtero refundens medicinam*], granted us a pledge of hope and a bodily token in his worshipful blood'. *Wonderful Blood*, p. 159.

[76] Miri Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 26.

[77] Ambrose, 'The Sacraments of the Incarnation of Our Lord', from Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 27.

Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologica*, written between 1265 and 1274, addressed the question of the Virgin's menstrual blood directly:

> But the menstrual blood, the flow of which is subject to monthly periods, has a certain natural impurity of corruption: like other superfluities, which nature does not heed, and therefore expels. Of such menstrual blood infected with corruption and repudiated by nature, the conception is not formed; but from a certain secretion of the pure blood which by a process of elimination is prepared for conception, being, as it were, more pure and more perfect than the rest of the blood. Nevertheless, it is tainted with the impurity of lust in the conception of other men: inasmuch as by sexual intercourse this blood is drawn to a place apt for conception. This, however, did not take place in Christ's conception: because this blood was brought together in the Virgin's womb and fashioned into a child by the operation of the Holy Ghost. Therefore is Christ's body said to be 'formed of the most chaste and purest blood of the Virgin'.[78]

For Aquinas, then, Mary's blood was pure because of the operation upon it by the Holy Ghost. But the gendered blood of gestation remains vital for Christ as well as all humans, so Christ proceeds to engender humanity, through his Passion and the female blood of regeneration.

The ontological movement of blood between bodies and genders, and the multipliability for which I argue, is evident through the myth of Jewish male menstruation, a polemic that originated in the twelfth century.[79] Such an acceptance of the abstruse mobility between blood and bodies in the Middle

[78] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Third Part, Q.31, Article 4: 'Whether the flesh of Christ was conceived of the Virgin's purest blood?', reply to Objection 3. Online text at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa>.

[79] References to male bleeding be seen in ancient sources. Pliny notes in *Natural History*, 'a flux of blood [that] occurs in the males'. The notion was 'not the result of independent observations but of a shared intellectual tradition that singled out the phenomenon as noteworthy'. See Gianna Pomata, 'Menstruating Men: Similarity and Difference of the Sexes in Early Modern Medicine', in *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity to Early Modern Europe*, ed. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 109-152 (p. 115). See also Irven M. Resnick, 'Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Males Menses', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 93 (July 2000), 241-263. Also Willis Johnson, 'The Myth of Jewish Male Menses', *Journal of Medieval History*, 24 (1998), 273-95. Also Heiko Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of the Renaissance and Reformation*, trans. James I. Porterj (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981). Also David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians* (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 105-111.

Ages illustrates the dynamic ways in which blood is conceptually re-purposed in medieval thought.[80]

Figure 2: De arte phisicali et de cirurgia, John Arderne, England c. 1425. Stockholm, Kunglia biblioteket, X 118. Image depicts what appears to be a tonsured male experiencing bloody effluvia.

A comparable anxiety over the polluting, nocturnal emissions of the clergy, which were aligned with quasi-menstrual bleeding by writers like Jean Gerson, demonstrates a further example of the perceived feminisation of certain men.[81] Similarly, the praxis of regular phlebotomy as part of a seasonal health regimen in monastic houses was conducted from the ninth century. The Benedictine monks of Ely, for example, were bled every six weeks.[82] The *Ancrene Wisse*

[80] See also Steven F. Kruger, 'Becoming Christian, Becoming Male?', in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 21-41.
[81] See Dyan Elliott, 'Pollution, Illusion, and Masculine Disarray: Nocturnal Emissions and the Sexuality of the Clergy', in *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 14-34, esp. pp. 27-9.
[82] See Martha Carlin and David Crouch, eds., *Lost Letters of Medieval Life: English Society 1200-1250* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 76. See also Angela Montford, *Health, Sickness, Medicine and the Friars in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Aldershot and Burlington: VT, 2004), p. 232. Also the Introduction to 'A Latin Technical Phlebotomy and Its Middle English Translation', ed. Linda E. Voigts and Michael R. McVaughs, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 74 (1984), 1-69 (pp. 1-34). Also Pedro Gil-

recommends quarterly blood-lettings for its anchoritic audience for the purposes of correct humoral balance and salvific cleansing.[83] Such non-menstrual bleeding enacted in a 'menstruating' and purgative way, is indicative of the commonality of feminine blood across genders, and also its purifiying, as opposed to contaminating, potentiality.[84] Such medical ideas are also evident in religious texts like *The Pore Caitif*. Here, a man who is corrupted by 'fleshli lust' is 'in bodi a man: in soule he is vndirstondun a woman'. Likewise, 'a womman forsoþ if she haue hir manlynesse in goostli vertues: & þouȝ in bodi she be a womman, in soule neþeles she is a man'.[85] Such lost distinctions echo the way in which medieval culture held unfixed and flexible definitions of gender, along with an understanding of the mutability of gendered blood, indicating the translatability of gender characteristics and implying the imposition of a pejorative process of feminisation for men in the same way that menopause – the loss of that same, punitive blood – affords women the more valued masculinisation.[86]

Sotres, 'Derivation and revulsion: the theory and practice of medieval phlebotomy', in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, pp. 110-47.

[83] See Part 8 of the *Ancrene Wisse*: *Guide for Anchoresses, a Translation based on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402*, ed. Bella Millett (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), pp. 155-65, esp. p. 161. This translation is designed by Millet to use in parallel with her edition of the *Ancrene Wisse* in the original Middle English. For the purposes of concision, I will cite only from Millet's translation in this study. See also *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402*, *with Variants from other Manuscripts*, Vol.1, EETS O.S. 325, Bella Millett, with glossary and notes by Richard Dance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). And for Introduction and Notes, see *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from other Manuscripts*, Vol. 2, EETS O.S. 326, Bella Millett, with glossary and additional notes by Richard Dance (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2006).

[84] On this practice, see Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Bathing in Blood: The Medicinal Cures of Anchoritic Devotion', p. 95-6.

[85] *The Pore Caitif*, p. 185.

[86] Peggy McCracken has discussed circumcision in rabbinic Judaism, 'male menstruation' in the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Guinea. The impurities released through the blood of penile incision is characterised as female, paradoxically enabling the man, through 'menstruation', to rid himself of any feminised qualities. See *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero*, pp. 6-8. See also Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, 'Blood: Cultural Effectiveness of Biological Conditions', in *Sex and Gender Hierarchies*, ed. Barbara Diane Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 83-107.

Figure 3: ‘Monstrous’ gender hybrid with bearded vagina, from the Luttrel Psalter, England c. 1325-40, BL. Add 42130, f.62v (detail).

While this hybrid figure is portrayed as maleficent on the folio, that a ‘blue’ man is depicted running from it (seen on the full folio), pointing to the word ‘protector’ in the quotation from Psalm 32:20 in the text itself, it reveals not only the inherent danger of the gender hybrid, but its very *possibility* in the medieval imaginary. As Katherine A. Smith has argued, ‘the hybrids…are intelligible not only as barometers of difference but also as springboards for the reader’s appreciation of the layers of meaning in the text and their pertinence to his / her conception and construction of self’.[87] Such images signify the flux and disorder of gender borders, the multivalent phenomenologies of blood and bleeding, and the extent to which they are synchronically subversive and productive. Moreover, that monks and nuns can be considered to have genders of their own which differed from those ‘ordinary’ genders *extra claustrum*, as scholars like

[87] Kathryn A. Smith, ‘Margin’, in *Studies in Iconography*, 33 (2012), 29-44 (p.33). See also Lucy Freeman Sandler, ‘The Word in the Text and the Image in the Margin: The Case of the Luttrel Psalter’, *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, ‘Essays in Honour of Lilian M.C. Randall’, 54 (1996), 87-97.

Bergqvist, Salih and Riches have argued, the rich complexity of gender transformations cannot be avoided.[88]

Blood, then, is mobile; at once a symbol of fertility and affirmation, of pain, pollution and loss. Beyond this, it is transcended, in the light of Leviticus 17:11, 'Because the life of the flesh is in the blood' [*quia anima carnis in sanguine est*], to 'the seat of the soul'. Medieval physiological theory debated the position of the soul – located variously in the head, *heart*, and blood – but much devotional and preaching material from the High Middle Ages suggests that blood carries life, or soul.[89] Bildhauer challenges these modern scholarly binaries, however. She scrutinises them as ignoring 'non-lethal blood-loss and non-bloody deaths', relying on and enforcing the concept of the 'bounded body, where blood is either 'inside' or 'outside''.[90] Medieval medical texts emphasise the need for regular menstruation for the balanced health of the female body, yet 'escaped blood' in other contexts has connotations of loss, and demise. Furthermore, menstrual blood is an essential feature of female wellbeing and efficacy in its 'inner' guise – whilst 'outside' contact with a menstruating woman is culturally, and often scientifically, polluting and dangerous, as we saw in Chapter Two: a curse. Menstrual blood is also used for medicinal cures for leprosy.[91] The heart of this chapter is located within this tension: in the significance of the menstrual cessation of menopause – *losing blood* in a

[88] Johanna, Bergqvist, 'Gendered Attitudes Towards Physical Tending Amongst the Piously Religious of Late Medieval Sweden', in *Medicine, Healing and Performance*, ed. Effie Gemi-Iordanou, Stephen Gordon, Robert Matthew, Ellen McInnes and Rhiannon Petitt (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), pp. 188-225 (p. 189). See also Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih, 'Introduction. Gender and Holiness: performance and representation in the later Middle Ages', in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Riches and Salih (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-8.
[89] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, pp. 161-2.
[90] Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, pp. 5-6.
[91] Virgin blood is offered as a cure to a leprous lady in the *Queste del saint grail*. See McCracken, pp. 1-10. Hildegard of Bingen recommends menstrual blood as a cure for leprosy. See Hildegard von Bingen's *Physica*, p. 61, and Chapter Four of this study.

different sense – the *loss* of the 'curse' (and, concomitantly, of other, *beneficial* aspects of menstruation), and the new meanings this brings to painful experience.

In Chapter Two, I considered the dangerous potential of the 'deadly woman' and her contaminating touch to others. Here, I wish to establish the dichotomous pain and purgative benefit that menstruation affords *women*, and thus draw closer to some conclusions about the productive *absence* of that menstruation in the menopausal female. *The Knowing of Women's Kind in Childing*, states, somewhat paradoxically, that '[t]he flourys of women ys anguysch'.[92] Female bleeding is in itself here an affliction; a synthesis of scientific and theological thinking that is emphasised through the description of the blood as a 'mortall poyson', or 'corrupte blode'. The treatise considers the over-abundance of menstrual flow, recommending blood-letting and laxatives as a counteraction to these 'euyll humors'.[93] Such evils, of course, require purgation, as the text outlines: 'And so þis purgation ys *ordende* to women & ys clepid menstrual be-cause hit commyth euery monyth onys'.[94] Women are thus not only contaminated by 'euyll' blood, but are divinely ordained to be so.

The *Sekeness of Wymmen* lists several explanations for the retention of the menses (excluding menopause), ranging from excess heat or cold, to thinking too much or being angry.[95] Clearly, obstacles to monthly purgations cause profound bodily afflictions and disordered behaviours: the text lists various aches and pains associated with retention, heart disease, and the falling 'evel' [sickness]:

[92] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 46.
[93] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 46 and p. 82.
[94] My emphasis, *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 54.
[95] The *Sekeness of Wymmen*, p. 61.

> And longe *withholding* of þis blode makith women otherwhiles to fallen into a dropesye & oþerwhiles makith hem to haue þe emerawdeȝ [haemorrhoids]; otherwhiles it grevith the hert & þe longes and makith hem to haue þe cardiacle [heart disease]. And oþerwhiles it affrayeth þe hert so moche that it makith hem to fallen downe aswowe as though they hadden þe falling evel. And thei liggen in þat syknesse a day or two as though thei wer dede. And oþerwhiles they haue þe scotamie [dizziness] with grete stoneyng [confusion] in the brayne & wenen þat all thynge tornyth vp so downe. And yf this withholding be for the sykenesse of þe blode in þe moder - þat þe blode may not flowe in due tymes, as it shuld – her vryne wyl be otherwhiles rede as blode.[96]

Inert female menstrual blood is thus regarded as capacious in its destructive potential to the woman herself. Like the religiosity in *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, the *Sekenesse of Wymmen* depicts the 'falling sickness', today termed epilepsy, as 'þe falling *evel*' [my emphasis], ascribing it with a latent maleficence borne from the retention of such noxious blood. Furthermore, the disorder caused is reiterated through the affliction of dizziness ('scotamie') and confusion ('stoneyng'), whereby physical malady is compacted by the inversion of reality, and 'all thyng[s] tornyth vp so downe'. Such disorientation of normality is testament to the profundity with which menstrual blood, and its unnatural entrapment in the body, was subscribed in medieval culture. Indeed, one of the cures contained in the text is blood-letting from elsewhere in the body: 'blode letyng in other places to deliuere hem of blode that they mowe nought ben yporged of'.[97] Even other variants of blood are preferable than no blood at all in purging the body of its poisonous excess, brought on, at least, by retained menstrual blood.

The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' cites the female lack of heat as the cause of the 'bad and superfluous humours' being unable to be naturally expelled without the purgation of menstruation. It also lists numerous physical

[96] The *Sekeness of Wymmen*, p. 62.
[97] The *Sekeness of Wymmen*, p. 66.

illnesses that are considered to be the product of menstrual retention (pain in the neck, back or head, acute fever, pangs of the heart, dropsy, dysentery), although the tone of the text lacks the sanctimonious subtext of the examples above, emphasising instead a more 'factual' cause and effect.[98] 'Black cohosh' (*cimicifuga racemosa L*) was a plant renowned for treating menopause.[99]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, *De Secretis Mulierum* aligns infirmity and morality from the offset; the self-righteous motivation of Commentator A is silently underpinned by the notion of female weakness in a moral as well as physiological sense: 'It is written so that we might be able to provide a remedy for their infirmities, and so that in confessing them we might know how to give suitable penances for their sins'.[100] He summarises Psuedo-Albertus Magnus' incentive for writing:

> The reason for this is that women are so full of venom *in the time of their menstruation* [my emphasis] that they poison animals by their glance; they infect children in the cradle; they spot the cleanest mirror; and whenever men have sexual intercourse with them they are made leprous and sometimes cancerous.[101]

Menstrual blood, for this writer, is the cause of *female* pain and illness, as well as an independent force capable of malign, external destruction. Such views were ubiquitous throughout the medieval period, resting on the ambivalence that menstruation was a mark of female sin, but also a necessary and natural aspect of human fertility. The Latin Father, Pope Gregory the Great, in 597, responded moderately to Augustine's question of whether or not a woman should be permitted to attend church when menstruating.[102] Gregory does not

[98] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', *The Trotula*, p. 66.
[99] John M. Riddle, 'Research Procedures in Evaluating Medieval Medicine', in *The Medieval Hospital and Medical Practice*, ed. Bowers, pp. 3-18 (p.8).
[100] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 59.
[101] Ibid., p. 60.
[102] See Charles T. Wood, 'The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought', pp. 710-727.

advocate the institutional ostracisation of women because he regards their menstruation as a 'sickness', resulting from their weak natures, for which they should seek a church-based remedy.[103] As Wood attests, this interpretation of female physiology does not so much 'absolv[e] Eve... [but] downplays her responsibility by implicitly denigrating her capacities', maintaining the paradigm of women's bodies as afflicted and infirm.[104]

The inextricability of the medieval Christian culture and medical understandings of the female body thus renders the issue of menopause and subsequent pain paradigms as complex and entangled. The value of female blood inside or outside the body; its necessity for generation yet capability to poison or to destroy; its latent pollution and potential to heal; its existence as a mark of sin but also as a vital means of purgation: these binaries will deepen the following exegesis of Margery Kempe's menopausal life stage. They raise questions of the cultural perceptions of pain, both subjective and objective, the ways in which bodies, and bodily functions, can have multiple meanings and applications, and, not least, the ways in which blood can be divided, reused, redefined: and by default, made meaningful through its absence in the loss of menstrual 'sickness'.

Several holy women in the Middle Ages ceased to menstruate as part of an increasing desire to enclose and to control the body. Thomas of Cantimpré recorded Lutgard's menstrual cessation, Colette of Corbie's biographer states

[103] Gregory states: 'So a woman's menstruous flow of blood is an infirmity. Therefore, if that woman, who in her infirmity, touched our Lord's garment was justified in her boldness, why is it that what was permitted to one was not permitted to all women who are afflicted through the weakness of their natures?... A woman's periods are not sinful, because they happen naturally'. From Wood, 'A Doctor's Dilemma', p. 714.
[104] Ibid., p. 714.

that she never menstruated: 'a special grace not heard of in others'.[105] Columba of Rieti (d. 1501) is reported to have told her prioress that she did not menstruate. A short medical treatise known as 'The Nature of Women' states that 'Wommen of relegion purge noght because of rysyng o nyght and synggyng and ocupacyon in her seruyse her blod wastyth'.[106] By the end of the sixteenth century, hagiographers frequently point out that holy women do not menstruate or excrete, so concerned are they with repressing ordinary effluvia.[107] Amenorrhoea (the absence of the menses), then, is desirable for a trajectory towards sanctification. It marks a twofold juncture of pain removal whereby the 'anguysch' of menstruation, about which medical texts write so much, and the pain of Original Sin, are simultaneously eroded and replaced with a state of closure and purification. Painful experience can therefore be of Christ, and for Christ; an undistracted *imitatio Christi* more authentically focused. Christ becomes the object *and* the subject of pain, leaving non-menstruating women like Kempe freer to act as mediators between his painful experience and its earthly articulation. As I shall argue, Kempe projects beyond an *imitatio Christi*, through the loss of her own reproductive capacity, engendering instead a transformed fecundity that enables a *pain surrogacy* which is entrenched in the mature female body. Kempe, through menopause – through *losing* blood – achieves the same state of somatic closure for which the holy women of her age strove. She is, by biological prescription, more enclosed,

[105] From Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, pp. 122 and 138.
[106] 'The Nature of Women', in London, British Library, MS Egerton 827, s. 14, ff. 28v-30v. This Middle English excerpt is an abbreviated translation of a longer Latin adaptation of Musico's *Gynaecia*, extant only in one copy: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 15081 (s. 13-14), ff. 86vb-89va, entitled (misleadingly) *Trotula de naturis mulierum*. The Middle English extract, 'The Nature of Women', is edited by Monica Green in 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts in Middle English', in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West*, IV, pp. 53-88 (pp. 83-88). Compare this with the similar example from *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, in Chapter Two of this study, p. 148, n.45.
[107] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 211.

and more measured: more devout; and more authorised to act as a pain surrogate, as we will henceforth see.

Re-mothering Strategies: Surrogacy as a New Fecundity

> Sche myth neyþer wepyn lowde ne stille but whan God wolde sende it hir, for sche was sumtyme so *bareyn* fro teerys a day er sumtyme half a day & had so gret peyne for desyr þat sche had of hem þat sche wold a ȝouyn al þis worlde, ȝyf it had ben hir, for a fewe teerys, er a suffyrd ryth gret bodily peyne for to a gotyn hem wyth. And þan, whan sche was so *bareyn*, sche cowde fynde no joye ne no comforte in mete ne drynke ne dalyawns but euyr was heuy in chere & in cuntenawnce tyl God wolde send hem to hir a-geyn, & þan was sche mery a-now (my emphases, 199).

The language of sterility and *bareyn*-ness that Margery Kempe employs when she mourns her loss of ghostly weeping is an indication of the way in which this spiritual gift represents a self-identified fecundity and psychological completion. When she receives the gift of tears at Mount Calvary in Spring 1414, during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, she is aged forty-one, and at a turning point in her life of piety following her long-desired vow of chastity, as we have seen. The cries, she mentions at this point in the narrative, 'enduryd many ȝerys aftyr þis tyme' (68), a fact that she clarifies later in the *Boke*: 'þis maner of crying enduryd þe terme of x ȝer' (140). The productive value of Kempe's weeping, revealed by the reiterated pain that its absence creates, marks it as a vital facet of her efficacy as an emerging holy woman, and a fruitful replacement for the biological productivity of her former incarnation as a wife and mother. It is remarkable, then, that the terminus of those ten years of demonstrative crying, at circa 1424, locates Kempe at the age of 51, and, according to the medieval medical sources illustrated above, at the precise age of menopause.[108]

[108] Perhaps this also demonstrates that Kempe's spiritual progression from boisterous to pious weeping now shows her as enlightened from Vincent Gillespie's notion of the 'stasis' of the mourner who cannot move on. See Gillespie, 'Dead Still / Still Dead'.

That the cessation of menstrual blood and holy tears converge at this juncture, is striking.[109] That Kempe proceeds thereafter to modify her productivity, from the biological prescription of menstruation and the didactic and divine gift of tears, to a new phase of surrogacy and re-mothering strategies, displays an insistence on fructification and engenders a fresh hermeneutic of painful experience. For not only is Kempe now freed of the dysmenorrhoea of her fertile years and the tangible stain of Eve's transgression (Kempe makes many references throughout the text about her sinful state, presented as a given), she is also now characterised by less excess and superfluity, making her more measured and balanced, free to heal and to minister.[110] Menopause occurs, according to *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* due to a lack of superfluity: 'Ne þe women of l [50] yere [of] age be-cause they be so dryed þat þe hote of þe blode is distroyde þat no superhabundant humvre may ryse in hem ne passe'.[111] I wish to argue that the process of cooling and drying and the subsequent humoral economy to which such medical texts allude enables a quieter equilibrium of physiology that allows Kempe to adopt a surrogate role. Rather than regarding her as an essentialised product of her biology, therefore, I instead suggest that this paradigm of modification engenders a productive manipulation of motherly activities. In other words, Christ's words to Kempe that 'þu art to me a very modir & to al þe world'

[109] Even before the end of this ten-year phase, Kempe informs us that after her pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Rome, God draws her meditations further towards his Godhead, as well as his manhood. This evolution in her devotional practices is enriching (she is more 'illumynyd' and more 'feruent'), and yet her tears become more subtle and less laborious: 'ȝet had sche not þat maner of werking in crying as sche had be-for, but it was mor sotyl & mor softe & mor esy to hir spirit to beryn' (209).

[110] Kempe, for example, makes assumptions about the adversity that she suffers from others, as being 'þe skowrges of owyr Lord þat wold chastyse hir for hir synne' (11). We are also reminded of the historical sin that provides Kempe with so much anguish at the beginning of her narrative, and to which she refers on occasion, highlighting the ongoing burden that it represents: 'Sche was schreuyn sum-tyme twyes or thryes on þe day, & in specyal of þat synne which sche so long had conselyd & curyd' (12).

[111] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 48.

(91) become literally embodied, repositioning her as authorised surrogate and agent of divine maternity.

Kempe's surrogacy is foregrounded during a vision of the Nativity, when she becomes a handmaiden to the Virgin Mary. Such emphasis on Christ's infancy was inspired by the 'connection medieval culture drew between Christ's Passion and his infancy', like the diptychs which juxtaposed the Virgin Mary with the Man of Sorrows.[112] Several of the activities in which Kempe engages mystically are rooted in the every day rituals of childbirth and lying-in.[113] Such activities are close in nature to those that Poor Clare, the nun to whom the thirteenth-century *Meditationes vitae Christi* were addressed, was urged to undertake. They are therefore 'spiritual exercises' which illustrate her knowledge of such texts and ideas.[114] In Nicholas Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, Christ's birth is described with brevity and painlessness: 'when tyme of þat blessed birþe was come…[Jesus went] oute of þat wombe without trauile or sorowe'.[115] The midwife in Love's account is, in fact, the Holy Ghost, as Mary is described as

> …swetly clippyng & kissing [Jesus], [and] leide him in hir barme, & with a full pap, *as she was taght of þe holi gost*, weshe him alle aboute with hir swete milke, & so wrapped him in þe kerchif of her hede, & leide him in þe crach'.[116]

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[112] See Kathy Lavezzo, 'Sobs and Sighs Between Women: The Homoerotics of Compassion in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Fradenburg and Freccero, pp. 175-198, at p. 182. See also Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 106-7.
[113] See Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth, 'A Very Maternal Mysticism: Images of Childbirth and Its Rituals in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', esp. p. 50.
[114] See Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, pp. 49-51. Gibson also includes in her book examples of paintings, psalter illuminations, diptych panels and alabaster panels, which depict the infant Christ along with Mary and assistants, illustrating the images with which Kempe must have been familiar. See pp. 55-7 and p. 62.
[115] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 'Of þe natiuite of oure lorde Jesu. Capitulum vj', p. 38.
[116] My emphasis, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, p. 38.

With similar brevity, the apocryphal Infancy Gospel of St. James, which was highly popular in the Middle Ages, describes the sudden birth of Christ: '…an intense light appeared inside the cave, so that their eyes could not bear to look. And a little later that light receded until an infant became visible; he took the breast of his mother Mary'.[117] Joseph seeks out midwives in this account, although the midwife named 'Salome' is divinely punished for her apparent disbelief in Mary's virginity and her intervention through 'insert[ing] a finger into Mary'. After her hand disappears in a ball of flames, Salome is repentant and saved.[118]

In Kempe's visionary account, the painlessness of Mary's labour is apparent through the absence of its articulation, signifying an antithetic childbirth experience to her own labouring trauma – so central for her self-identification that it is recalled and featured in the earliest pages of her narrative, as we saw in Chapter One.[119] In her vision of Mary's childbirth, however, Kempe is fully in control, suggesting a sense of expertise:

> Also sche beggyd owyr Lady fayr whyte clothys & kerchys for to swathyn in hir Sone whan he wer born, and, whan Ihesu was born, sche ordeyned beddyng for owyr Lady to lyg in wyth hir blyssed Sone. And sythen sche beggyd mete for owyr Lady & hir blyssyd chyld. Aftyrward sche swathyd hym wyth byttr teerys of compassion, hauyng mend of þe scharp deth þat he schuld suffyr for þe lofe of synful men,

[117] 'Infancy James 19:15-16', in *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas*, Ronald F. Hock (Santa Ross: Polebridge Press, 1995), p. 67. The Infancy Gospel of James was later reworked into the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, and feasts in honour of Mary included readings of the gospel liturgically. On the influence of these gospels in later centuries, see R. Trombley and A. Carr, 'Birth of the Virgin', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Vol. 1, ed. Alexander P. Kahzdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 291. Also R. Trombley and A. Carr, 'Presentation of the Virgin', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Vol. 3, p. 1715.
[118] 'Infancy James 20:1-11', in *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas*, p. 69.
[119] The painlessness of Christ's birth is frequently emphasised in medieval writings, for example, in St. Bridget of Sweden's vision, where Mary is 'rapt into hye contemplacyon... Then she being thus in prayer... sothenly in a moment and in the twynklynge off an ey she had borne her chylde... And that maner off the byrth was so sothenly and so wisely done that I myght not discerne nor perceive how er what membyr off her body she had borne her chylde wythall'. From *Women's Writing in Middle English*, Second Edition, ed. Alexandra Barratt (Harlow: Longman, 2010), p. 92.

> seying to hym, “Lord, I schal fare fayr wyth ȝow; I schal not byndyn ȝow soor. I pray ȝow beth not dysplesyd wyth me” (19).

As a replacement wet nurse of sorts, Kempe begs food for the Virgin and the Christ child and thus appropriates a position of nurturing provider. She undertakes the medieval custom of swaddling the newborn with characteristic emotion, swathing him not in sheets of fabric, but in her ‘byttr’ tears of compassion, a pseudo-maternal performance that mirrors, if not usurps, Mary’s anguish at the foot of the cross. And the ‘byndyn’ that she does acknowledge will follow, will be gentle, not ‘soor’.[120] In adopting the role of merciful nurse, Kempe distances herself from the future torture and pain correspondent with Christ’s birth, the ‘scharp deth’ of which she is mindful throughout this episode, and imagines herself as a balsam with which to soften the impending persecution.

Kempe’s mystical instinct to nurse and to feed the Virgin and the infant Christ is likely to be borne from the medieval practice of wet nursing, described in medical texts as a given. *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing* states that after childbirth, one should ‘tak a norse for hym to kepe þe chylde’.[121] The treatise also advises *not* allowing the mother to feed her own baby in the early days, owing to the purgative effects of the labour. Instead, ‘svmme say þat hyt were good for a chyld to drynk þe mylk of *ix women* be-foore he drank eny of hys modere’.[122] The ‘Book on the Conditions of Women’ assumes the presence

[120] Medieval anxiety over the solidification of the infant’s body and its state of softness and vulnerability seems to be the main reason for the popularity of swaddling. Bartholomaeus deemed swaddling clothes necessary in order to prevent the child from acquiring ‘various shapes’. Mustio recommended swaddling for ‘as long as the infant coagulates and is solidified with his whole body’. From William F. MacLehose, *A Tender Age: Cultural Anxieties over the Child in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 19-20.

[121] *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing*, p. 72.

[122] *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing*, p. 72. The treatise also states that ‘þan [ie. after nine other women’s milk] hys modere mylk ys best for hym’ (p. 72). Whilst the mother’s own milk is recommended from this point, the number of other women who are suggested to feed the

of a nurse: ‘let the child’s nurse anoint its tongue frequently with honey and butter’.[123] Commentator B of *De Secretis Mulierum* refers to ‘nursing women, like wet nurses’, who, according to Averroes, cannot become pregnant because lactation inhibits menstruation.[124] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus explains this theory by enforcing the connection between the menses and breast milk (after childbirth – and considerably after, in the case of some wet nurses – ‘her breasts are hardened, because the womb closes and the menstrual substance flows to the breast’).[125] The writer of ‘On Treatments for Women’ concurs, though its reverse focus is on the prevention of the menses for efficacious milk production: ‘let her [the wet nurse]... beware provoking her own menses [through sexual activity]’.[126] These assumptions about the presence of wet nurses firstly indicate the practice of wet nursing as a cultural essential, particularly for the urban upper classes. This is something that Valerie Fildes has termed ‘an ancient, deeply-ingrained and widely accepted social custom’.[127] There are fewer sources on the extent of wet nursing practices for the medieval period than for the Early Modern period.[128] However, non-medical sources show, as Fildes has documented, that in most of western Europe, from the early second millennium, many noble and more wealthy families employed wet nurses, increasing from the eleventh century. Popular sentiment can be seen through Bernard of Gordon’s (c.1258 - c.1320) *Regimen sanitatis*, where he

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baby after birth is striking. As none of these multiple wet nurses would be subject to the same defiled milk as the mother, post labour, the only likely explanation for this advice is that wet nursing was considered actively beneficial to the health of the child. For further discussion of the danger of the mother’s own milk after birth, see MacLehose, *A Tender Age*, p. 22.

[123] ‘Book on the Conditions of Women’, in *The Trotula*, p. 109.

[124] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 71. Averroes, *Colliget*, II, 10, f. 54rb: ‘Et sunt alique mulieres que non possunt impregnari dum lactant’.

[125] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 109.

[126] ‘Book on the Conditions of Women’, in *The Trotula*, p. 111.

[127] Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986), p. 100.

[128] See, for example, *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations: Images, Rhetorics, Practices*, ed. Jutta Gisela Sperling (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

states that wet nursing is often required because ‘women nowadays are too delicate or too haughty or they do not like the inconvenience’.[129] This is echoed by a twelfth-century Bestiary, which states: ‘The women of our own race quickly wean even those who they love, and if they are of the richer classes they actually scorn to suckle them’.[130] The trend seems to have grown, as ‘by the later Middle Ages, it was established practice even for artisans and small shopkeepers to employ wet nurses’.[131] But the notion of the concomitant dormancy of the menstrual cycle also emphasises the status of wet nurses as non-reproductive; as women who have necessarily given birth, but whose subsequent wet nursing role is contingent on their surrogacy as opposed to their maternity. This model, then, is strikingly accessible to Kempe, opening an adoptive pathway that enables a gradual transformation towards maternal substitution.[132]

The surrogacy hermeneutic develops more prominently on Kempe’s pilgrimage to Rome, a time of her middle age which, as we have seen, marks a

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[129] Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies*, p. 47.
[130] Fildes, p. 47.
[131] Fildes, pp. 48-49. See also Sarah Blaffer-Hrdy, ‘Fitness Tradeoffs in the History and Evolution of Delegated Mothering with Special Reference to Wet-Nursing’, *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 13 (1992), 409-442; Luke Demaitre, ‘The Idea of Childhood and Child Care in Medical Writings of the Middle Ages’, *Journal of Psychohistory*, 4 (1977), 461-490; Leah Otis, ‘Municipal Wet Nurses in Fifteenth-Century Montpellier’, in *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 83-93; Christine Klapisch-Zuber, ‘Blood Parents and Milk Parents: Wet Nursing in Florence, 1300-1530’, in Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 132-64.
[132] The practice of wet nursing in medieval Europe was commonplace not only amongst the nobility but also the upper echelons of the urban population: the prosperous townspeople. Infants were either nursed in the wet nurse’s home, or by live-in wet nurses in the cases of the wealthier families. See Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 61, and pp. 55-76. Mothers who employed wet nurses were not considered ‘bad’ mothers, and nor were women who abandoned their own children to take up employment as a wet nurse (p. 75). This suggests the cultural normalcy of wet nurses. Because of the social class differential, they were something of a status symbol. Given that Margery Kempe fits the class criteria as a prosperous urban dweller, and that we know of the emphasis that she placed on wealth and status in her early life, it seems highly probable that she would have employed wet nurses for her children. Kempe’s father was John Brunham, several times mayor of Lynn and Member of Parliament. Kempe boasts to her husband in the early stages of her text that ‘sche was comyn of worthy kenred’ (9). Shahar argues that Kempe’s brewing and milling endeavours – activities that denote her leisure time and economic focus – are clear indicators of the likelihood of her having employed wet nurses (p. 62).

strategic shift in her life trajectory where she throws off the shackles of earthly marriage and embarks on a path of chastity and piety. Kempe is around the age of 41, in 1414, when she sails from Venice to the Holy Land, and as such, perhaps in a premenopause or perimenopausal phase. As she journeys with Richard, a broken backed man whom she persuades to accompany her, she encounters two Grey Friars and a woman, who had with them 'an asse þe which bar a chyst & an ymage þerin mad aftyr our Lord' (77). This Christ-image, denoting the medieval tradition of devotion to the infant Christ, becomes a focus for female reverence on the journey, a multilayered worshiping performance whereby the mothering, as well as the doll, provoke Kempe's distracting sobs:[133]

> And þe woman the which had þe image in þe chist, whan þei comyn in good citeys, sche toke owt þe image owt of hir chist & sett it in worshepful wyfys lappys. & þei wold puttyn schirtys þerup-on & kyssyn it as þei it had ben God hym-selfe. &, whan þe creatur sey þe worship & þe reuerens þat þey dedyn to þe image, sche was takyn wyth swet deuocyon & swet meditacyons þat sche wept wyth gret sobbyng & lowde crying. & sche was meuyd in so mych þe mor as, whil sche was in Inglond, sche had hy meditacyons in þe byrth & þe childhode of Crist, & sche thankyd God for-as-meche as sche saw þes creaturys han so gret feyth in þat sche sey wyth hir bodily eyelych as sche had be-forn wyth hir gostly eye. Whan þes good women seyn þis creatur wepyn, sobbyn, & cryen so wondirfully & mythtyly þat sche was nerhand ouyrcomyn þerwyth, þan þei ordeyned a good soft bed & leyd hir þerup-on & comfortyd hir as mech as þei myth for owyr Lordys lofe, blyssed mot he ben (77-8).

Kempe's empathetic crying at the sight of the wives' nurturing devotions to the Christ-doll has been interpreted by Kathy Lavezzo as a homosocial event: the doll is not only 'a conduit for the ladies' original maternal desires; it enables the condensation of a number of female same-sex fantasies', including a desire for

[133] Hope Emily Allen notes how St. Francis' devotions provided the Church with examples such as 'the devotion to the Infancy of Christ', responsible for the institution of 'The Crib', now practised by the Church. Allen suggests that a chapel in St. Margaret's in Lynn may have stimulated her devotion to the infant Christ. See *BMK*, ed. Meech and Allen, p. 297, n. 77/17.

the holy mother, Mary.[134] Lavezzo's Freudian reading of this episode appropriates the doll image with a tradable value, regarding it as a 'commodity' which facilitates a 'traffic in Christ'; allowing the women to access their feminine needs and desires. It is clear that the symbolism of the doll does allow for a worshipful performance between women, a shared identification capacitated through the socio-maternal functions of childrearing. But rather than the locus of the Christic body as a catalyst for female desires, I am concerned instead with the displacement strategies that emerge from the event, and the ways in which Kempe's reciprocal, surrogate activity underlies her current metamorphosis as a middle-aged holy woman.

It is significant that the Christ-doll is offered to the local *wyfys* specifically, and, given that she has recently abrogated her own life as a wife and mother in favour of chastity and pilgrimage, Kempe's tears may reveal a latent grief for her surrendered maternity, especially because, as Liz Herbert McAvoy has persuasively shown, she has left a baby back in England.[135] Her reaction to God's disclosure of this pregnancy, as we saw in Chapter One of this study, is of dismay; an inconvenient encumbrance that will hinder her literal and spiritual journeys: '...how xal I þan do for kepyng of my chylde?' (48). God promises her that he 'xal ordeyn for an kepar' (48) for the child, presumably in order for

[134] Kathy Lavezzo, 'Sobs and Sighs between Women', p. 186. For a historical explanation of these activities, see Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 198. Bynum illustrates how female mystics acted out maternal and nuptial roles in the liturgy, 'decorating life-sized statues of the Christchild for the Christmas crèche or dressing in bridal garb when going to receive their bridegroom in the Eucharist'. See also Ursula Schlegel, 'The Christchild as Devotional Image in Medieval Italian Sculpture: A Contribution to Ambrogio Lorenzetti Studies', *The Art Bulletin* 52.1 (March 1970), pp. 1-10. Also Elizabeth Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 54, n. 22.

[135] See McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 56. See also McAvoy, 'Margery's Last Child', p. 181-3, which refutes Laura L. Howes' article, as discussed in Chapter One, p. 132, n. 177. McAvoy points to an addendum at the end of chapter 16, which advises the reader to read chapter 21 before chapter 17 ('Rede fyrst þe xxi chapetre & þan þis chapetre aftyr þat' [p. 38]), and the use of the pluperfect tense to denote how Kempe refers retrospectively to the birth of this last child. McAvoy concludes that the vow of chastity between Margery and John was without relapse, and that, as Christ promises her that he will find 'keepers' for the baby, Kempe's last child was probably a few months old when she departed for Rome.

Kempe to be free to continue with her planned pilgrimage to the Holy Land.[136] It would seem likely that the 'kepar' would have been a wet nurse, probably caring for the child in her own home, given Kempe's physical absence. Once she is 'newly delyueryd of [the] chyld', Christ tells her that 'sche xuld no mor chyldren beryn' (38). His simultaneous decree that she should become Christ's messenger, to travel to Norwich to disclose God's approval to the vicar of St. Stephen's, clearly juxtaposes Kempe's liberation from reproductivity with her spiritual progress as God's own consul. Her feelings about this last, forsaken baby would perhaps be mixed, although the narrative sidelining of her children suggests that their temporary abandonment was, for her, a necessary sacrifice.[137] However, I contend that a sacrificial trajectory is not what Kempe essentially strives for here, although this does play a part in her wider imitation of the Virgin. Many scholars have considered the reasons for the narrative absence of her children in the *Boke*, especially as she is prolific in her childbearing.[138] In the light of Kempe's early commercial enterprises and materialistic bent, as well as the normalcy of wet nurse employment within this social stratum, I would suggest that the lack of 'present' children in her testimony (save her adult son, as will be discussed later) is because of her use of wet nurses throughout her reproductive lifespan. As children were generally weaned at the age of two, infants required a wet nurse for some time. Kempe, therefore, might have had limited relationships with her children, especially in

[136] I am grateful to Liz Herbert McAvoy for her help in establishing the chronology of Kempe's final childbirth and its proximity to her travel.
[137] On child sacrifice, see Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), esp. pp. 76-107.
[138] The propensity for wet nurse usage amongst the upper and prosperous urban classes meant that women of this social rung would often give birth 'to their fullest biological capacity'. Shahar notes examples of women bearing up to nineteen children, largely because the employment of wet nurses for their other offspring resulted in them losing the natural (albeit unreliable) contraceptive effect offered by lactation. See *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 70. Kempe's fourteen children are thus further suggestive of her systematic use of wet nurses.

their early years.[139] Moreover, once her economic foci became antithetically spiritual, her employment of wet nurses would have become pragmatic for the sake of pilgrimage and solitariness. Thus, the subordination of a child-narrative within her text is a product of two powerful forces: the social trend for entrusting one's children to surrogates, and the later drive to construct a spiritually-rooted narrative.

The requirements for wet nurse qualification in medical texts held that the nurse must be reasonably close to childbirth in order to be efficacious. Aldobrandino of Siena states that 'it should be at least one or two months since she has had a child'.[140] The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' states that she 'is not too close to her last birth nor too far removed from it either'.[141] Vincent of Beauvais cited the wet nurse stipulations of Avicenna, who stipulated that the nurse must have given birth to a boy within the previous two months, and carried the child full term ('according to a natural time').[142] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* requires her to have 'twyes trauelyd of chyld'.[143] Given that Kempe herself is fairly recently delivered of a child when in Rome, and the fact that the terminus of her reproductive life is officially sanctioned by Christ, she paradoxically meets certain wet nursing requirements stipulated by medical texts. The surrogacy strategies that she develops in the Holy Land are thus an understandable response to both the socio-medical perception of the

[139] See Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 64. Furthermore, medieval infant mortality rates were such that writers such as P. Ariès argue that medieval people formed 'emotional defence mechanisms against bonding with an infant whose prospects of survival were slim'. Shahar contests this notion, suggesting that rather than a defence mechanism, a lack of maternal attachment was due to the social norm of sending one's child away to be nursed, and was thus an inherently normalised value. *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 74.
[140] Aldobrandino of Siena, 'Régime du corps', trans. Faith Wallis, in *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, p. 497.
[141] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, p. 110-1.
[142] Avicenna's *Canon*, 1.3.3. The Latin translation of the *Canon* began to gain influence in France and, later throughout Europe, from 1220-30. From MacLehose, *A Tender Age,* p. 6 and p. 23.
[143] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 72.

postpartum female body, ripe for nursing, and to the cultural predilection for the employment of wet nurses. Furthermore, the ubiquitous iconography of the Virgin and child, Christ often portrayed as nursing at the breast, takes on greater meaning for Kempe post-conversion, now that her journey towards holiness has become literal as well as heartfelt and founded on a strong desire for Marian identification.[144] Bridget of Sweden was also said to nurse her own children, as was common in the upper classes of Scandinavia, suggested when 'she sees the relics of the Virgin's milk in a monastery and at vespers the Virgin authenticates the relics, saying that just as Birgitta had nursed her own children, so this relic had been in the Virgin's breast'.[145]

Kempe thus constructs a hermeneutic which engenders a surrogate role in a paradoxically post-reproductive and holy context. Medical texts are strict in their specifications of the nurse's diet, physical condition and behaviour – not least the requirement of sexual abstinence – because her milk was thought to have pathological potential at the same time as being vital and nourishing. Kempe represents an inverse version of the enforced chastity of the wet nurse via her recent vow as a willing proponent of abstinence and non-reproductivity. Furthermore, this osmosis of physical health suggests what MacLehose terms 'a symbiosis between nurse and infant'.[146] In the light of this symbiotic

[144] This iconography included representations of the *Virgo lactans*, and also the poignant Eve nursing her child, portrayed, for example, on the bronze doors at Hildesheim and Verona. See Mary McLaughlin, 'Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries', p. 115.
[145] Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 52.
[146] MacLehose, *A Tender Age*, p. 24. The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' states that: 'If the bowel of the child is loose, let constipating things be given to the nurse' (*The Trotula*, ed. Green, pp. 110-1). *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* advises that the nurse be: 'wel a-vysd & not wrathfoll, & þat sche lovyth þe chylde with all here hert…. And þat sche entermet not of dedeuyt [sexual pleasure] of dewery [love-making], for of þat myȝght fall here purgacyon & tak a-way here mylk & mak hym dry' (p. 72). Both examples show how Kempe fulfils the criteria of wisdom ('wel a-vysd'), not feeling anger ('not wrathfoll'), love in her heart, and sexual abstinence ('entermet not of dedeuyt of dewery'). This demonstrates Kempe's suitability for surrogacy based on her character and qualities. On the danger of the wet nurse, see MacLehose, *A Tender Age* pp. 1-52. Also see MacLehose, 'Nurturing Danger: High Medieval

relationship, Kempe's imitation of this surrogate model in Rome is a further move towards a close connection with the infant Christ.[147] In other words, the wet nursing subtext allows for a deeper bond with the Christ child, with whom she must therefore be inextricably tied.[148]

Given these surrogate qualifications and resonances, Kempe's geographical and personal odyssey imposes a multivalent import to the effigy of Jesus, stirring in her a pain that brings to mind not only the infant Christ, but the maternal sacrifice that a complete devotion to him expiated. Paradoxically, perhaps, the tableau of affective women creates in Kempe an acceptance of materiality as she recognises the wives' faith towards an object that is physically visible, correlative with her own faith in her 'gostly' visions, and thus reveals to her that not everything from the material world need be altogether abandoned. In fact, for McAvoy, 'the doll reconfigures the child in this text as talismanic figure that guarantees access to and articulation of the author's female-focused mystical insights'.[149] The women's mothering of the doll, in a mirroring of the Virgin Mary's mothering of the Christ child, is in itself re-enacted by the re-mothering of Kempe, who is see 'wepyn, sobbyn, & cryen so wonderfully &

Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child', in *Medieval Mothering* (New York and London: Garland Publishing: 1996), pp. 3-38.

[147] The importance of this symbiosis can be seen through the power with which wet nurses were accorded. Aldobrandino of Siena states that 'beauty and ugliness are due in large measure to nurses'. As well as the dietary implications of the nurse, Aldobrandino also emphasises the concurrent danger of the surrogate's power. She 'should be healthy, as far as one can tell, for sickly nurses kill children straight away'. And she 'should take care not to sleep with a man, because this is what corrupts the milk, and she should not become pregnant, for a pregnant woman when she nurses kills and destroys children'. From *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, ed. Wallis, pp. 497-8.

[148] By the early thirteenth century, the role of the wet nurse developed from the physical act of breastfeeding to a wider position in the household, whereby mothering, or 'nannying', duties were undertaken. According to McLaughlin, these involved bathing, cleaning, soothing the child and teaching it to speak. Some noble households retained the same nurse for many years. This significant and intimate social role gives rise to a culture of surrogacy that Kempe harnesses during her time on pilgrimage. See McLaughlin, 'Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries', p. 117.

[149] Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"[An] awngel al clothyd in white": Rereading the Book of Life as *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Women and Experience in Later Medieval Writing: Reading the Book of Life*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Liz Herbert McAvoy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 103-21 (p. 113).

mythtyly' (78), that she provokes the wives to turn their attentions to her, laying her on a bed and comforting her. The pain of the Virgin's loss and the pain of Christ's death, signified by the doll, becomes displaced to Kempe, whose own suffering is now not only the primary image of the episode, but locates her fully as the privileged surrogate of Christic and Marian pain, herself requiring nursing by Christ's own worshippers.

Kempe's piety towards the Christchild develops during a visit to the Dominican house in Lynn, where, in the Chapel of Our Lady (which contained a magnificent image of the Virgin Mary), she experiences a dream-like vision.[150] Echoing the swaddling activities that we have already seen Kempe practise both towards the envisioned Christchild and the Christ doll, she now takes 'gostly joye' in witnessing the Virgin swathing her son with the lightest touch, suggesting the comfort she receives through the internalisation of this mothering operation:

> ...& sodenly sche sey, hir thowt, owr Lady in þe fairest syght þat euyr sche say, holdyng a fayr white kerche in hir hand & seying to hir, "Dowtyr, wilt þu se my Sone?" & a-non forth-wyth sche say owr Lady han hyr blissyd Sone in hir hand & swathyd hym ful lytely in þe white kerche þat sche myth wel be-holdyn how sche dede. Þe creatur had þan a newe gostly joye & a newe gostly comfort, wheche was so meruelyows þat *sche cowde neuyr tellyn it as sche felt it* (my emphasis; 209).

The ineffability of Kempe's experience illustrates the profundity with which she appropriates Mary's motherhood, and by implication, her desire to achieve an *imitatio Mariae*, as we will see. Indeed, that the Virgin herself requests that

[150] On the image of the Virgin, see Meech and Allen, *BMK*, p. 338, n 209/15-16. Prior to this account, Kempe has just mentioned her pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Rome and her vow of chastity (209). The immediacy of this recollection, and the likelihood of some chronology in the narrative continuation, as well as the fact that this visit occurs back in Lynn, suggests that the event occurs during what Santha Bhattacharji has deemed Kempe's 'quieter' years, between 1418 and 1433 (and thus when she was aged between 45 and 60). See Bhattacharji, *God is an Earthquake*, pp. 18-21.

Kempe witnesses her tending to her son draws Kempe more indispensably into the event, creating a mothering imperative that underlies her surrogacy strategies. Similarly, divine reinforcement of these strategies, from God himself, occurs on her way home from a visit to see the Abbess of Denney, where she feels 'heuy' that the boats have all departed and she may fail at fulfilling God's bidding.[151] In comfort, 'owr Lord mad a maner of thankyng to hir, for-as-meche as sche in contemplacyon & in meditacyon had ben hys Modyrs maydyn & *holpyn to kepyn hym in hys childhood* & so forth in-to þe tyme of hys deth' (my emphasis; 203). Direct appreciation from God for Kempe's duties as a handmaid and nurse to him during his infancy and childhood ('keeping' Jesus in the same way that a 'keeper' was secured for her own child), depict them as valuable services both practically and spiritually. In fact, during the extended private sermon that follows between God and his disciple, the words 'seruyse', 'seruyn' or 'serue' occur frequently, connecting Kempe's surrogate duties with service to God, and therefore as valid offerings for spiritual promotion.[152]

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[151] In attempting to situate this episode within Kempe's life span, there are two significant factors to consider. First, as Hope Emily Allen has indicated, the request from the Abbess (probably a Margaret, or Margery, Mill, Milly, or Milley) for Kempe's visits, would have been considered weighty. As this house of Franciscan nuns was a strict enclosure, such visits would require formal, 'sometimes papal', permission. This suggests that Kempe was at an advanced enough stage in her life and spiritual maturity, to be invited on these terms. Second, Kempe mentions that the visit takes place during 'pestylens-tyme' (202). Allen notes how the precise epidemic or date cannot be made certain. However, several epidemics did occur during the first third of the fifteenth century, including a pestilence mentioned in the *Annales Monasterii de Bermundeseia*, in Norfolk specifically, in 1420: 'fuit pestilentia in partibus Northfolchiae'. Other dates that Allen mentions as possible matches are 1427 and 1431. Even at the earliest date of 1420, this would position Kempe at the age of 47, and therefore at a likely peri-menopausal or menopausal stage. See Allen, *BMK*, p. 337, n 202/6 and n202/16.

[152] The mystical value placed on Kempe's surrogate duties reflects a society where high mortality levels necessitated surrogates of various kinds. Siblings, aunts, uncles, institutions like foundling hospitals and private adoptions were sources of guardianship. Factors such as epidemics and plagues, famine, poverty and malnutrition, meant that children who themselves survived these earthly challenges would be likely to be orphaned or semi-orphaned at a young age. On the medieval population, see Josiah Cox Russell, 'Medieval Population', in *Social Forces*, 15, (1937), 503-511. See also Pamela Nightingale, 'Some new evidence of Crises and Trends of Mortality in Late Medieval England', in *Past & Present*,187 (2005), 33-68. Also Mary E. Lewis and Rebecca Gowland, 'Brief and Precarious Lives: Infant Mortality in Contrasting Sites from Medieval and Post-Medieval England (AD 850-1859), in *American Journal of Physical Anthropology,*134, (2007), 117–129. The emergence of foundling homes spread rapidly. Guy of Montpellier founded the Order of the Holy Spirit in 1160 to care for orphans and foundlings. The order won the patronage of Pope Innocent III, who established foundling

Nowhere is Kempe's desired surrogacy more consolidated than in a brief passage within the same few pages of narrative as the infancy visions. Suggestive of a similar chronology because of its concurrent *recollection*, the passage depicts the Christ child suckling at the Virgin's breasts *within* Kempe's soul, positioning her as a vessel of divine sustenance, sanctioned to internalise the ultimate mother-child relationship: 'And also, dowtyr, þu clepist my Modyr for to comyn in-to þi sowle & takyn me in hir armys & leyn me to hir brestys & ȝeuyn me sokyn' (210). The nurture that Kempe provides for the nursing Jesus within her own soul is a re-mothering device that at once lifts the bodily borders of earthly motherhood and enables her to redesign a selfhood that is authorised by her possession of the infant Christ. Her probable delegation of her own children's nursing is now a missed opportunity for Marian identification; a situation that Kempe rectifies via an increasing insistence on surrogate activity and meditation.[153]

Such stratagems were no doubt inspired by the popular medieval iconography of Christ's own maternity, documented comprehensively by Bynum. Maternal metaphors have their genesis in the Old Testament, where the Israelites are frequently shown to be conceived in God's womb, and being fed with God's milk.[154] Such images largely disappear in the New Testament,

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hospitals in Saxia, the legacy about which Kempe may have been aware. See McLaughlin, 'Survivors and Surrogates', p. 122. However, Shahar notes how the church, in its quest to foster exogamy and change patterns of family structure, extirpated 'the custom of adoption practised in Rome... introducing in its stead, spiritual parentage as represented by the godparents, and with it a new system of spiritual affinity' (*Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 73). This spiritual surrogacy represents an ideal conduit through which Kempe can access her holy ambitions.

[153] Other holy models of maternal nursing may have provided Kempe with the desire to replicate the maternal feeding that she may have previously bypassed. It was well known that a close bond was formed between the infant and the woman who nursed it. The mother of Catherine of Siena had twenty four children, but she only breastfed Catherine. Later in life, her mother mentioned the special bond that she had for the only child that she had suckled. Similarly, Bernard of Clairvaux was breastfed by his mother. See Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies*, p. 48.

[154] See, for example, Isaiah 66:11-12: 'That you may suck, and be filled with the breasts of her consolations: that you may milk out, and flow with delights, from the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord: Behold I will bring upon her as it were a river of peace, and as an

and are occasional in the patristic writings of Clement, Ambrose, and Augustine, for example.[155] But Bynum notes a rise in maternal imagery from the eleventh century on, in writers such as Anselm of Canterbury (ca.1093-1109) and Julian of Norwich (ca.1342-ca.1416), whose affective piety focused on the accessibility of God through his humanity – 'creation and incarnation are stressed more than atonement and judgement' – of course, God's incarnation provides humanity with the divine connection of salvation.[156] Julian tells us:

> The moder may geve her childe sucke her milke. But oure precious moder Jhesu, he may fede us with himselfe, and doth full curtesly and full tenderly with the blessed sacrament that is precious fode of very life...The moder may ley her childe tenderly to her brest. But oure tender mother Jhesu, he may homely lede us into his blessed brest by his swet, open side, and shewe us therein perty of the godhed and the joyes of heven, with gostly sekernesse of endless blisse.[157]

Guerric, abbot of Igny (d. ca.1157) describes Christ as having 'breasts... He is a father in virtue of natural creation...He is a mother, too, in the mildness of his affection, and a *nurse*' (my emphasis).[158] Aelred of Rievaulx (d.1167) meditates on Christ's infancy, but also on his feeding of Christians: '...his outspread arms will invite you to embrace him, his naked breasts will feed you with the milk of sweetness to console you'.[159] A Middle English translation of Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, originally written for a female recluse, indicates a medieval familiarity with surrogacy terms, as he advises his reader to meditate on the Christ child playing, on 'hou seruisable he was to his moder,

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overflowing torrent the glory of the Gentiles, which you shall suck; you shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you'. The heathen nations will 'suck' at the breasts of New Jerusalem: a biblical image of maternal surrogacy.

[155] See Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 125-8.

[156] Ibid., p. 130.

[157] 'A Revelation of Love', chapter 60, in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 313.

[158] From the second sermon for SS. Peter and Paul, chap. 2, *Sermons* 2: 384-86; trans. the monks of Mount St. Bernard abbey, *Liturgical Sermons* 2: 155. In Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 122.

[159] *De institutione*, chap. 26, *Opera omnia* 1:658, in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 123.

and anoþer tyme how swet and gracious he was to his nursche'.[160] 'Nursche' in this context denotes Joseph, and thus 'foster-father'.[161] And Adam, abbot of Perseigne (d.1221) makes a distinct reference to wet nursing beyond Christ's own to his people: the children of God nurse at the Virgin's breast alongside Christ: 'Do you think...that this most loving of all children would refuse to his nursing brothers the womb or the breasts of his mother, when he has chosen her precisely for mother so that she may be the nurse of the humble?'.[162]

The transference between bodily fluids in medical theory – breast milk is transformed menstrual blood, as we have seen – extends to theological paradigms, whereby Christ's blood, in the form of wine, mean that water and milk all flow between and within each other, constructing an overarching nursing motif.[163] The connection is, in fact, made clear to Kempe at an early stage of her spiritual journey, when she experiences God ravishing her spirit and ordaining her to relinquish the eating of meat. Instead, God requests that she 'schalt etyn my flesch & my blod, þat is þe very body of Crist in þe Sacrament of þe Awter' (17). When she relays these revelations to the anchorite at the Friars Preachers, he articulates the very transformation that culture (and medical theory) prescribes, by stating, 'Dowtyr, ȝe sowkyn euyn on Crystys brest, and ȝe han an ernest-peny of Heuyn' (18). As receiver of Christ's milk, blood and body, and thus now in a state of evolving grace, Kempe is both recipient of divine sustenance, and authorised provider, given her promised place in heaven. This

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[160] Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum: Two English Versions*, ed. John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, EETS O.S. 287 (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 41, ll. 637-61.
[161] MED s.v. norĭce, 1(a) A wet nurse; nursemaid, governess; foster mother; foster parents; (b) a man who takes care of a child, foster father; a tutor; as a foster father.
[162] Adam of Perseigne, *Correspondance*, in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 124-5.
[163] See p. 215, n.73 of this chapter. Also Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, p. 122, for the transference of Christ's bodily fluids according to Guerric, and pp. 132-3 on how mothers, like Christ, feed their offspring with their blood (since milk is processed blood). See also Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, pp. 119-30 for an explanation of medical theories of reproduction and bodily fluids.

model of substitution creates a replacement-hermeneutic that, as will become clear, indicates the medieval assumption of surrogacy as a cultural essential.[164]

As well as visionary discernments of infant and nursing motifs, Kempe's affectivity translates to earthly infants too. In Rome, a poor woman calls her into her house, offering her rest and a drink. Beyond this act of kindness, Kempe is moved by the nursing infant there:

> & sche had a lytel manchylde sowkyng on hir brest, þe which sowkyd o while on þe moderys brest; an-oþer while it ran to þis creatur, þe moder syttyng ful of sorwe & sadness. Þan þis creatur brast al in-to wepyng, as þei sche had seyn owr Lady & hir sone in tyme of hys Passyon, & had so many of holy thowts þat sche myth neuyr tellyn þe haluendel, but euyr sat & wept plentyvowsly a long tyme þat þe powr woman, hauyng compassion of hir wepyng, preyd hir to sesyn, not knowyng why sche wept. Þan owr Lord Ihesu Crist seyd to þe creatur, 'Thys place is holy' (94).

The image of the breastfeeding infant provokes a displaced devotion to the Christchild, transcending the very human activity of the nursing mother to a place of 'holy' signification. Like the Christ-doll episode, Kempe's weeping becomes the primary focus, causing the mother, already full of 'sorwe & sadnes', presumably because of her poverty, to show her compassion to Kempe, praying for her to cease her distressing lamentation.[165] The scene is an edifying one, however, as Kempe leaves to continue her sojourn around Rome, bearing witness to further destitution and 'thank[ing] God hyly of þe pouerte þat

[164] Miraculous tales about women beyond childbearing age suddenly being able to lactate might also have entered Kempe's frame of reference, given the religious works to which she had access, via her confessors. In Bologna, an older couple took in an abandoned child but could find no nurse. After prayers and a vow to a saint, the woman had milk in her breasts. There are also frescoes in the church of San Giovanni Valdarno in Tuscany that depict 'the miracle of a seventy-five-year-old-woman having milk to feed her grandchild for several months after the parents had died of the plague'. From Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies*, p. 53. Such stories and representations indicate the supernatural possibility of efficacious surrogacy even for women of middle age and beyond, forging a connection between nursing and holiness that would not have escaped Kempe's attention.

[165] We are reminded by this weeping that Kempe is still in her early forties and not yet subject to the 'dryer' time of the age of full menopause, at around fifty, nor the cessation of her tears at age 51.

sche was in, trostyng þerthorw to be partynyr wyth hem in meryte' (94). Here, Kempe literally follows in the footsteps of Bridget of Sweden who, after the death of her husband Ulf, 'went in pylgremage to Rome' at the age of forty-two, 'ther to abyde in the lyfe of penaunce', and 'she lyuyd the resydue of hir lyfe in the cyty of Rome'.[166] The impoverished, nursing mother thus becomes a reverential model in her projection of the Mary and child image, sharing her milk with Kempe in a representation of the Virgin mother and thus facilitating her spiritual progress and access to God's maternity.

Replacement or surrogate strategies occur elsewhere in Rome, when, after her mystical marriage to the Godhead, Kempe reacts emotively to any sighting of a boy child, kissing him '*in þe stede of Criste*':

> Sche was so meche affectyd to þe manhode of Crist þat whan sche sey women in Rome beryn children in her armys, ȝyf sche myth wetyn þat þei wer ony men children, sche schuld þan cryin, roryn, & wepyn as þei sche had seyn Crist in hys childhode. And, yf sche myth an had hir wille, oftyn-tymes sche wolde a takyn þe childeryn owt of þe moderys armys & kissed hem in þe stede of Criste (86).

This desire to achieve a substitute access to the Christchild is brought with her back to Lynn, presumably occurring during the years spent at home after her pilgrimage to Rome, between 1415 and 1424, when her tears cease in their boisterousness. On meeting a group of women with children in their arms, Kempe enquires 'ȝyf þer wer any man-childe a-mongys hem, & þe women seyd, "Nay". Þan was þe mende so raueschyd in-to þe childhood of Crist for desir þat sche had for to see hym þat sche mith not beryn it but fel downe & wept & cryid so sor þat it was merueyl to her it' (200). It is Kempe's unfulfilled longing to *see* the Christchild, to in some way experience, kiss and embrace the manhood of

[166] Thomas Gascoigne's 'Lyfe of seynt Birgette', in *The Mirror of Our Ladye*, p. li and p. lvi.

God in a physical way, which provokes the grief seen here. As McAvoy suggests, Kempe's desire to dote on boy-children 'validates Margery's production of self as maternally informed mystic who holds the key to salvation'.[167] It is her prior experience as a mother that provides the language and the perception required to access Christ, to achieve her place in heaven, thus making these strategies of surrogacy felicitous routes towards success.

An evolving validation of Kempe's surrogate pathway occurs in Rome when her self-appointed role becomes externally reinforced. Relying on people's charity for her meals, Kempe meets a man named Marcelle, who 'bad hir to mete' for two days of the week, and whose wife was 'gret wyth childe' (93-94). Kempe's spiritual demeanour was clearly capable of stirring feeling in others, as the couple were 'hyly desiring to haue had þis creatur to godmodyr to hir childe whan it had ben born', despite the fact that 'sche abood not so long in Rome' (94). In the sharing of food, brought about by an act of Christian charity, Kempe is able to provide affirmation of the couple's faith through her symbolic situation as an impoverished pilgrim and as a speaker of God's word. The impact of her company and ministry is not only a foreshadowing of things to come, but displays the couple's desire to consolidate this new relationship in God through the appointment of Kempe as their child's ordained godmother. Kempe thus becomes not only a surrogate parent, but also a surrogate for God on earth, through the godparent's didactic position of wisdom and spiritual understanding.[168]

[167] McAvoy, 'An awngel al clothyd in white', p. 112.
[168] See Rob Lutton, 'Godparenthood, Kinship, and Piety in Tenterden, England 1449-1537', in *Love, Marriage and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Isabel Davies, Miriam Müller, and Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 217-34. See also Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

This broader medieval paradigm of godparenting as a form of surrogacy was considered to be solemn enough that failure to fulfil one's godparent duties was considered a sin.[169] It was a precondition of the role that the chosen godparent had great knowledge of the tenets of the faith, as they became, in Shahar's words, a 'spiritual relative'.[170] The tradition of spiritual kinship developed from the early Middle Ages and was important because 'the medieval family sustained itself and its members by fostering an alternative network based on the voluntary tie of godparenhood to save some people from the problems [of family failure]'.[171] If we return to the medical texts that set out the desirable characteristics of wet nurses, as we have seen, an interesting picture emerges. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* requires the nurse to be 'wel-a-vysed & not wrathfoll & þat sche lovyth þe chylde with all here hert', and that 'sche entermet not of dedeuyt of dewery [sexual pleasure from love-making]' (72).[172] Aldobrandino of Siena emphasises the importance of the nurse's 'moral character': she should not be 'hot-tempered, or sad, or timid, or foolish, for these things upset the complexions of children and make them foolish and given to evil ways'.[173] Bartholomaeus also indicates the complex influence that was accorded to the nurse: 'And so the virtue of the nurse will complete the defect of the infant'.[174] His maxim, 'from the good *disposition* of

[169] See Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 117.The extent to which ties with one's godparent were close, is difficult to determine. Shahar notes how in Tuscany, for example (a region very close to Rome), contact was very limited in the late Middle Ages.This would explain the enthusiasm with which these Roman parents requested Kempe's godparenting commitment, despite realising that as an English pilgrim her presence in their child's life would be restricted. In England, ties may have been closer. See Shahar, *Childhood*, pp. 117-8.
[170] Ibid, pp. 117-8.
[171] Steven A. Epstein, 'The Medieval Family: A Place of Refuge and Sorrow', in *Medieval Families*, ed. Carol Neel, pp. 405-28, (p. 417).
[172] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 72. The Cambridge version of this treatise adds being 'wyse' as important, and further impediments to be 'not angry' (p. 73).
[173] From Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, p. 497.
[174] 'sic infantis defectum suppleat virtus gerulae nutricis, sicut ibidem dicit Constantinus'. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, from MacLehose, 'Nurturing Danger', p. 27, n. 159, and p. 50.

nourishing milk, a good consistency of the offspring occurs' (my emphasis), is suggestive of an ideological framework for wet nursing whereby temperament and morality hold equal weight to physiology and constitution.[175] Similarly, Avicenna believed that the nurse could harm the infant with corrupt milk if she had poor moral or emotional health: if 'she suffers from bad illnesses of the soul, such as anger, sadness and fear'.[176] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* corroborates the notion in terms of the receipt of milk by the infant, suggesting the influence of temperament to be unitary. The reader is advised to 'lok þat he be in good eyere [atmosphere] & fede hym whan he ys mery [happy] & þan schall none corrupcyon hym greve ne entire with-in hym'.[177]

It is striking that Margery Kempe, in her middle years of maturation, embodies the totality of these wet nurse's virtues. Her post-vow chastity, discernment of God's word and correlative wisdom – the antithesis of foolishness and anger – position her as a prime candidate for the intermediary status of the nurse. Whilst incompatible with many physical requirements (youth being key), Kempe is nevertheless able to fulfil the criteria for disposition and therefore safety.[178] She therefore constitutes a fusion of mature-nursing credentials, based on the medieval value system of routine surrogate use, and accepts the institutionalisation of this blend through a new status as godparent, or, as I have argued, 'eldmodyr'. Such a status is compounded by the fact that,

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[175] 'Ex bona autem dispositione lactis nutrimentalis, bona fit consistentia prolis, et converse, et ex corruptione sanguinis nutricis necessario laeditur corpusculum pueri vel infantis, et hoc propter puerilis naturae mollitiem'. From MacLehose, 'Nurturing Danger', p. 50, n. 160.
[176] *Canon* 1.3.2, fol.66ra, from MacLehose, 'Nurturing Danger', p. 51, n. 161.
[177] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 74.
[178] Medical texts demonstrate a tension between the benefits of breastmilk and the paradoxical dangers that it can pose. Just as a healthy mother or nurse can nourish and positively influence the child, so an unhealthy woman represents pathological danger, or, at the least, the ability to misshape or corrupt. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* warns the nurse against eating salty or bitter food, lest it 'schall rot þe schylde' (p. 76). The powerful, necessary yet dangerous surrogate's milk is at once life-sustaining and potentially pathological. In spite of such paradoxes, the myriad of medical material on the subject is useful for the purposes of this study in proving the extensiveness of the wet nursing model, and its ubiquitous existence as a cultural norm.

at least in London, civic law held that on the death of a male citizen, his underage children became the responsibility of the mayor and aldermen.[179] Since Margery Kempe's father was elected mayor of Lynn five times, and was alderman of the Holy Trinity Guild from 1394 to 1401, it is probable that Margery Kempe had a familiarity with questions of guardianship and surrogacy in civic as well as spiritual terms.[180] Kempe therefore creates a 'maternal ministry' of sorts, whereby her familial experience, moral character and privileged insight into God's word fosters a surrogate position that is at once sought by her and requested of her.[181]

Surrogacy in the form of the godparent occurs again in Rome when a gentlewoman asks Kempe to be 'godmodyr of hir childe', whom she names 'aftyr Seynt Brigyt, for they haddyn knowlach of hir in hir lyue-tyme' (94). The simple narrative qualification: '& so sche dede', suggests the matter-of-factness with which Kempe dictated the decision to accept another godparent request to her amanuensis; the short sentence indicating the instinctiveness with which she adopts the role. The Bridgettine connection gives added power to her decision, enabling Kempe to not only tread more forcefully in Saint Bridget's footsteps and to forge relationships with her acquaintances, but to become a surrogate to Bridget's namesake. In direct application of the vision that situates Kempe as handmaid to the Virgin and Christchild, here, she is able to imitate another holy mother – Saint Bridget – via the spiritual mothering accorded to the godmother.

[179] See Caroline M. Barron and Claire A. Martin, 'Mothers and Orphans in Fourteenth Century London', in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400*, ed. Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 281-96 (p. 281).
[180] On Margery Kempe's father, John Kempe, see Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p. 49.
[181] Liz Herbert McAvoy employs this term in *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 51.

The ‘gret fauowr a-mong the pepyl’ (94) that Kempe generates during her time in the Holy Land, is heightened by an English priest who has heard of her in England, and ‘longyd hyly to spekyn [with her] ȝyf God wolde grawntyn hym grace’ (96). Removing the parental intermediaries normally required for the establishment of a godparent / child dynamic, the priest directly requests from Kempe her maternal administrations:

> Þan be inqwyryng he cam in-to þe place wher þat sche was, & ful humbely & mekely he clepyd hir modyr, preying hir for charite to receyuen hym as hir sone. Sche seyd þat he was wolcom to God & to hir as to hys owyn modyr (96).

There follows a reciprocation in their newly adopted relationship resonant of family dynamics, whereby the priest, who ‘wolde... no lengar suffyr hir to beggyn hir mete’, insists that she eat meals with his company (96-7). Kempe, meanwhile, recognises in him a willing recipient of her teaching and revelations: ‘& þan sche, discuryng þe preuyte of hert, reuelyd what grace God wrowt in hir sowle thorw hys holy inspiracyon & sumwhat of hir maner of leuyng’ (96). Thereafter, Kempe and the priest employ the proper nouns *Modyr* and *Sone* as their forms of address, surpassing the paradigm of parentally-ordained godparent roles, and becoming active participants in a surrogate mother-child template. Indeed, when the priest becomes afraid of threats from enemies during their passage back to England, Kempe responds with a fusion of mothering and spiritual discernment: ‘Nay, sone, ȝe schal far ryth wel & gon saf be þe grace of God’ (100-1). He is reassured by her maternal ministering; Kempe is happy to have the company of an adopted son: ‘trusty[ng] meche in hir felyngys and mad hir as good cher be þe wey *as ȝyf he had ben hir owyn sone born of hir body*’ (my emphasis, 101). Like the infant boys in Rome that Kempe ‘kisse[s] in þe stede of Criste’ (86), the priest becomes a substitute not

only for her own children, left resolutely in England as symbols of a past reproductive stage, but as a surrogate child *in þe stede of Criste*, a figure through which she can project her displaced love and tenderness towards the Divine.

This episode serves to exemplify the multivalent ways in which Kempe develops her surrogacy, using it as a means through which to make *use* of her earthly experience on her trajectory towards holiness. However, after the Easter of 1415, Kempe departs from Rome and arrives in Norwich, where the spiritual significance of her pilgrimage is placed under scrutiny by an anchorite, possibly of the name Thomas Brakleye.[182] Despite the anchorite having once been a loving supporter, recent gossip and 'euyl langage' turns him against her, causing him to ask 'wher sche had don hir chylde þe which was begotyn & born whil sche was owte, as he had herd seyde' (103).[183] Kempe answers somewhat ambivalently in response to this accusation of sexual incontinence and procreation, stating, 'Ser, þe same childe þat God hath sent me I haue browt hom, for God knowyth I dede neuyr sithyn I went owte wher-thorw I xulde haue a childe' (103). Liz Herbert McAvoy has argued that the *Boke's* chronology does not support the possibility of Kempe having produced a child during pilgrimage, along with the unlikely oversight that she would miss the 'narrative opportunity' to mention the delivery of a child just before she is to visit the site of the Nativity.[184]

[182] Probably May 1415, when Kempe was forty-two. On the chronology and an explanation of the anchorite's identity see Windeatt*, BMK*, p. 214, n. 3352 and p. 216, n. 3389.
[183] See Howes, 'On the Birth of Margery Kempe's last Child', p. 224, for a speculation that Kempe could have been pregnant with her last child on pilgrimage. See also McAvoy, *Notes and Queries*, p. 181-3, for a refutation. For a discussion of the implications of slanderous accusations towards Margery Kempe and her subsequent saintliness, see Olga Burakov Mongan, 'Slanderers and Saints: The Function of Slander in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Philological Quarterly*, 84 (2005), 27-47.
[184] Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Notes and Queries*, p. 182.

In spite of this rather than because of it, I wish to offer the re-evaluation that, in fact, Kempe's somewhat clouded response, the 'childe' that she has 'browt hom', is not intended to denote the literal fruit of her womb, but rather the progeny of godchildren and surrogate children that she has spawned on her travels. Ironically, she *has* begotten offspring, and she *has* fulfilled God's command to 'increase and multiply' (Genesis 1:22), using a form of holy surrogacy that is entirely in keeping with her spiritual maturation. At the age of forty-two, and having now undertaken the most significant journey of her life, she reveals a fecundity that is not bound up with corporeal efficacy, but with the ability to reproduce her motherly devotion and to reveal God's will in the souls of others. Just two years later, aged forty-four, Kempe is given the opportunity to divulge her understanding of Genesis 1:22, when, in York, she is challenged by a 'gret clerke' as to the meaning of the scripture 'Crescite & multiplicamini' (121).[185]

> Ser, þes wordys ben not vnderstondyn only of begetyng of chyldren bodily, but also be purchasyng of vertu, which is frute gostly, as be heryng of þe wordys of God, be good exampyl ȝeuyng, be mekenes & paciens, charite & chastite, & swech oþer, for pacyens is more worthy þan myraclys werkyng' (121).

Though the clerk's question may have had suspicious undertones about Kempe's sexual incontinence, she employs a similar measure in her response to that in Norwich.[186] Making the insightful distinction between bodily and spiritual generation, and carefully listing examples of ghostly fruits, she reveals an oratory skill and spiritual wisdom that effectively rebuffs the clerk as posing an arbitrary and spurious question. She recalls, perhaps, God's reassurance to

[185] On this episode and the accusation of Lollardy, see Alistair Minnis, 'Spiritualizing Marriage: Margery Kempe's allegories of female authority'.
[186] See p. 243 of Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, for a discussion of the implications of the clerk's question, and the cultural anxiety in the late Middle Ages about the potential exploitation of Genesis 1:22 for 'free love' and immorality.

her after his disclosure that she is pregnant with her last child, that he ‘wyl þat þow bring me forth more frwte’ (48), implying that her future will entail a more spiritual generation. Not only does she prove herself to be a maturing teacher, but her knowledge of divine fruits implies a refocusing of the reproductive mode with which she, along with all the other wives and mothers excluded from free access to a spiritual life, has been hitherto defined. Her ‘lost blood’ has indeed been replaced with a holy productivity. Now, she will embody these virtues and generate new fruits for preaching and healing, in effect transforming her anachronistic body into one of a new fecundity, capable of absorbing others’ pain instead of her own, and with which a powerful *re*productivity will be born.

Chapter Four: Margery Kempe's *Phisik*: The Healing Value of Pain Surrogacy

When Margery Kempe faces the most dangerous illness of her lifetime – the postpartum illness that threatens the annihilation of her sanity and prompts the tearing of the very body to which she ascribes blame – she is cured not by medics or medicines, but by the appearance of a 'most bewtyuows' Christ, whose blessed 'chere' effects her instant stabilisation and return to the concerns of the household. In a broader healing paradigm, where Kempe would have later partaken in the sacrament received during the purification rite, or women's churching after childbirth, the medicating effect of Christ's body in communion, and the transformative potentialities of that divine flesh are illustrated.[1] Through this lesson in spiritual *medicina*, Kempe's curative understanding is established, as she places her faith firmly in the efficacy of divine treatment. This faith is dramatically tested many years later, when a stone and piece of wood from the vault in St. Margaret's Church fall onto her back, a blow so terrible that she 'ferd as sche had be deed a lytyl whyle' (21). On crying,'Ihesu mercy…hir peyne was gon' (21-2).[2] That this injury occurs, quite possibly, on 9th June 1413, just two weeks prior to Margery and John Kempe's critical vow of chastity, illustrates how crucial Kempe's surety in God's

[1] Although it is not specifically mentioned in the *Boke,* Yoshikawa notes what would have been the inevitable shriving of Kempe in the purification ceremony at her local church. See Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Mysticism and Medicine: Holy Communion in the *Vita of Marie d'Oignes* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Poetica* 72, Special Issue, *Convergence / Divergence: The Politics of Late Medieval English Devotional and Medical Discourses*, ed. Denis Renevey and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Tokyo: Yushodo Press, 2009), p. 115. See also the work of Gail McMurray Gibson on churching, as cited in Chapter One of this study.

[2] Notice the same, powerful invocation to the Name of Jesus that helped Kempe in her avoidance of marital sexual union, as seen in Chapter Two, pp. 161-2, n.83.

medicina is.[3] For this pain removal and divine rescue coincides with the vow that, in its Godly ordination, symbolises another type of cure for Kempe's corporeal scourge, and sets her more fixedly on a trajectory towards her own physician's path.

The discourse of *Christus medicus*, or Christ the Physician, was a ubiquitous notion in the Christian Middle Ages, originating from scriptural conceptions of God as the healer of body and soul.[4] The etymological genesis of the term 'doctor', is, in fact, fused with religious teaching in the late Middle Ages, emphasising a conceptual crossover between religion and medicine that Kempe understands and manifests.[5] Ideas about the medicinal qualities of the Eucharist were widely disseminated through preaching in the late Middle Ages.[6] The Book of Eccelsiasticus states:

> Honour the physician for the need thou hast of him: for the most High hath created him. For all healing is from God, and he shall receive gifts of the king. The skill of the physician shall lift up his head, and in the sight of great men he shall be praised... My son, in thy sickness neglect not thyself, but pray to the Lord, and he shall heal thee. (38: 1-9).

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[3] Barry Windeatt has located the incident thus, in relation to two other events that can be dated with certainty in the *Boke.* See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 82.

[44] On *Christus Medicus*, see the rulings of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, as cited in the Introduction of the present study. See also Henry of Lancaster, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*, trans. Catherine Batt. Also Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Introduction', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, pp. 1-24. Also Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Holy Medicine and Diseases of the Soul: Henry of Lancaster and *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*', *Medical History*, 53, 397-414. Also Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler, eds., *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, esp. William J. Courtenay, 'Curers of Body and Soul: Medical Doctors as Theologians', pp. 69-76. Also Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, esp. Chapter One, 'Medicine for the Soul', pp. 1-33. Also John Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

[5] OED: doctor (n) 3(a) the Doctors of the Church, 'certain early 'fathers' distinguished by their eminent learning; 5(a) A person who is proficient in knowledge of theology: a learned divine. 6(a) A doctor of medicine; in popular current use, applied to any medical practitioner. The Latin term 'to teach' is *docere.*

[6] St. Augustine (c. 354-430) discussed the notion of *Christus medicus*. Albert the Great (c. 1193/1206 – 1280) regarded the Eucharist as 'medicine in the pyx of the sacrament'. Albert the Great, *De Eucharistia, Opera omnia*, dist. 3, tract. 1.4, 38: 247, quoted in Naoe Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Mysticism and Medicine: Holy Communion in the *Vita of Marie d'Oignies* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', 109-22.

As Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa has documented recently, the interrelation of sin and disease was an idea that was predicated upon the pre-Cartesian understanding of the body and soul as unified entities, meaning that sin could be interpreted as the root of sickness, and confessional cleansing as an efficacious remedy.[7] Theologians like St. Augustine made frequent use of the motif of *Christus medicus*, suggesting that the Passion of Christ was the most apposite medicine for the treatment of sick bodies and souls, a concept that was later developed in terms of the power of the Eucharist as a healing device.[8] Illustrating what Yoshikawa regards as the 'symbiotic relationship between medicine and religion', Henry of Lancaster's *Le Livre de seyntz medicines* depicts the healing of Henry's wounds by Christ the Physician and also the Virgin, his nurse.[9] Concomitantly, Diane Watt has recently argued for the widespread medieval belief in Mary the Physician, or *Maria medica*, which validated the role of the woman as healer, and which, she suggests, was an important model for Margery Kempe's healing practices.[10] A medieval lyric encapsulates this tradition aptly: 'On o ledy min hope is, / Moder and virgine; / We shulden into hevene bliss / Thurgh hire medicine'.[11] And Monica Green's vast body of work on female medical practices has revealed the growing exclusion of women from formalised, textual forms of medicine, but their

[7] See Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Introduction', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, p.9. My grateful thanks to Professor Yoshikawa for allowing me to see a pre-publication draft.
[8] Yoshikawa, p. 10. See also R. Arbesmann, 'The Concept of *Christus medicus* in St. Augustine', *Traditio* 10 (1954), 1-28.
[9] Yoshikawa, 'Introduction', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, pp. 15-6. Also *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*, ed. Batt. For a discussion of the Virgin's nursing in Henry Lancaster's text, see Yoshikawa, 'Holy Medicine and Diseases of the Soul: Henry of Lancaster and *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*'.
[10] Diane Watt, 'Mary the Physician: Women, Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, pp. 41-69. My grateful thanks to Professor Watt for allowing me to see a pre-publication abstract.
[11] IMEV 2359: 'Now skrinketh rose and lilie-flour'. Lyric no. 193, in *Middle English Lyrics: Authoritative Texts, Critical and Historical Backgrounds, Perspectives on Six Poems*, ed. Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1974), pp. 181-2.

continued, silent and un-categorised work.[12] Bridget of Sweden was known to have founded a hospital near her home where she tended the sick.[13] Like Chaucer's Doctour of Phisik, who 'the cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote, / Anon he yaf the sike man his boote [remedy]', Margery Kempe, in her post-menopausal years, develops a healing perspicacity which will see her efficacy as a physician in her own right.[14]

This chapter, therefore, is concerned with the development of the pain hermeneutic in *The Book of Margery Kempe* in relation to Kempe's strategies as a physician and healing agent of God. I wish to argue, in development of the surrogate activities that were explored in the previous chapter, that these acts of healing denote not only an emulation of the medieval concept of *Christus medicus* but also the spiritual flourishing that situates that healing as a further example of re-productivity. We have already seen the ways in which medieval medical texts overlook the menopausal phase as a significant stage in the female lifecycle, characterised rather as an absence, or *lack* of prior moisture and heat, and how Kempe's replacement productivity redresses this void through nursing and surrogacy. In considering the broader function of the medieval nurse, and the multivalent ways in which Kempe utilises domestic, medical and religious discourses of healing, I aim to illustrate how her mid to later years signify a further development. Through continued activities of healing and the painful transition from wife to widow, I will suggest that Kempe

[12] Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, esp. p. 290. See also 'Documenting Medieval Women's Medical Practice', in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, p. 329.
[13] Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 53. On the medical practice of the Swedish female enclosed, see Johanna Bergqvist, 'Gendered Attitudes Towards Physical Tending Amongst the Piously Religious of Late Medieval Sweden', in *Medicine, Healing and Performance*, ed. Gemi-Iordanou et. al, pp. 188-225.
[14] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*', in The *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, pp. 23-36 (ll. 423-4, p. 30).

embraces others' pain in order to achieve a oneness with Christ that is only possible through an identification with *Christus medicus*, and with Christ on the cross.

The Multivalency of the Nurse

As well as the nourishing provider – the wet nurse, the medieval 'nurse' was accorded further power: that of healer and prophylactic agent.[15] Bartholomaeus required the nurse to 'apply medicine, so that she may lead the sick child to health'.[16] The accepted view of the child's weak body, based on Arabic authority, meant that the nurse was often used as a treatment intermediary; her body used as a conduit for medical remedies to be passed to the infant. Avicenna, for instance, recommended that the first step towards healing the child was to attend to the nurse's health. Haly Abbas recommended cures and ointments for the child, and medications to be given to the wet nurse. Rhazes exercised more caution, suggesting that powerful medications should not be given to children, even via the nurse. Instead, the therapy should attend to the infant's food source by purging the nurse's head and body. The Arabic authors also prescribed curative foods to be administered to the child via the nurse's body.[17] Medieval medical texts reflect these teachings; the 'Book on the Conditions of Women', for example, states: 'If a carbuncle appears in the body of the child, let barley water be given to the nurse, and occasionally let her be scarified. Let her eat neither sweet nor salty things'.[18] These stratagems denote

[15] For the MED definition of 'nurse', see Chapter Three, p. 243, n. 161. The Middle English meaning emphasises the surrogate or care-giving qualities of a nurse, rather than any overt medical application. But as these medical texts show, the 'wet nurse' was often given healing responsibility in a surrogate form.
[16] 'Medicina utitur, ut ad idoneitatem perducat puerum aegrotantem' (Bartholomaeus, *Dpr*., 6.9); MacLehose, p. 23.
[17] From MacLehose, *A Tender Age: Cultural Anxieties over the Child in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* pp. 24-5.
[18] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, pp. 112-3.

not only a caution surrounding the over-zealous medical management of the child's weak body, but also the wet nurse's performance of a wider role: that of the healing surrogate. As an intermediary for the powerful cures thought to be too potent for direct administration to the child, her milk is bestowed with properties beyond nutriment, and with transformative potential.

The curative power of breastmilk, not only as a vehicle for treatment but as the remedy itself, is evident in some medieval medical texts, beyond the treatment for paediatric illness.[19] Its extended use permeates into remedies for adult ailments, suggesting a multifunctionality that imbues milk with meanings far greater than nourishment alone, and which elevate the lactating mother towards the position of esoteric physician. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* recommends breastmilk as a cure for excessive heat in the uterus, when it is as hot as burning coals: 'For þat euyll ye muste tak oyle of þe white of xij eggys, saffvrne, mylk of a woman; let menge all to-gethyre & [mynyster] hit with a pessary'.[20] The *Sekenesse of Wymmen* also includes women's milk in a recipe for a pessary to aid the superfluous bleeding that results from the heat of the uterus:

> …yf hir thence that is brennyth that comyth fro hyr at þe priyve member, take than þe muscillage of psillium & þe muscillage of þe sedes of quinces & of þe gumme of draganti albi ana [1 ounce], of womannes mylk [6 ounces], caste it into þe prevy member & this medecyn helith & staunchith all blode þat comyth thorouȝ hote causes.[21]

The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' similarly stipulates 'the milk of a woman' for a pessary to alleviate a womb that is 'distempered in hotness'.[22] It

[19] For a comprehensive survey of infant feeding, see Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986).
[20] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 96.
[21] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, p. 84.
[22] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, pp. 88-9.

also recommends ‘the milk of another woman’ to be given as a drink for labouring women who are experiencing delays or who are carrying a dead foetus.[23] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen* also advises ‘womans mylk & oyle togeder ydronke’ to accelerate childbirth, perhaps partly because of a sympathetic association.[24] There is a clear indication here of human milk as cooling and calming by nature; able to soothe, subside and reduce afflictions, but also as an active catalyst to trigger results. The author of the *Sekenesse of Wymmen* also considers sores of the uterus which are caused, it is asserted, primarily by excessive heat, ‘as comenly it dothe, more þan of colde’.[25] However, sores caused by the *cold* are also to be treated by a pessary containing breastmilk: ‘medle hem togeder with womans mylk & with þe jus of planteyn... when they ben well ymedled, do it to þe maladie in þe priue membre’.[26] Clearly, the curative properties thought to be contained within breastmilk are not restricted to a single effect: its benefits are multifarious and its precise efficacious constituent is ambiguously potent.

More variously, the *Sekenesse of Wymmen* advises on treatments for the inflammation of the uterus and the abscesses that subsequently develop. To ‘make þe enpostume [abscess] rype’, a mixture, including ‘womannes mylke’, is made to create a ‘plastre’ (a poultice or salve) for external or internal application.[27] *The Knowing of Woman’s Kind in Childing* has a comparable recipe for an ‘emplaustre’ (plaster or salve) that will ripen ‘apostemys’ (abscesses), this time applicable to ‘man & woman’.[28] Sticks from certain trees

[23] Ibid., pp. 102-3.
[24] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, p. 138.
[25] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, p. 148.
[26] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, p. 150.
[27] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, p. 118.
[28] *The Knowing of Women’s Kind in Childing*, p. 108-10.

are softened and mixed with pork fat, butter, wine and 'mylk of a woman'.[29] The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' discusses ulcerations of the uterus, advising a mixture of deadly nightshade, great plantain with rose oil, and white of egg with 'woman's milk', which are noted as 'by nature cold', to anaesthetise the stabbing pain of the womb.[30]

Whilst the cooling properties of breastmilk feature as a common denominator, the multiple and occasionally contradictory uses of breastmilk for curative purposes imply an inherent potency that is difficult to specifically locate. An apt illustration of this broad efficacy can be found in the 'Book on the Conditions of Women' as follows:

> In order to know whether a woman is carrying a male or a female, take water from a spring and let the woman extract two or three drops of blood *or milk* from her right side and let these be dropped in the water. And if they fall to the bottom, she is carrying a male; if they float on top, a female (my emphasis).[31]

We have already seen in the third chapter the diverse meanings that the medieval world attached to blood, and its various manifestations inside and outside the body. Here, not only is the parturient female's blood made interchangeable with her breastmilk (as seen above, and as we might now expect in the medieval context), the prophetic power which it is accorded creates an esotericism beyond a singular, medical usage. For instance, when Christina Mirabilis was bound and fettered with chains of iron, escaping with God's help, she remained hiding 'in wildernesse priuely with oure Lorde'. Looking on her dry, virgin breast, she 'sawe hit drepe swete milke agaynes alle

[29] *The Knowing of Women's Kind in Childing*, p. 110.
[30] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, pp. 92-3.
[31] *The Trotula*, pp. 102-5. This practice is widely copied into medieval recipe collections. In the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, for example, a woman 'þat is with childe [should] mylke a droppe' into the water of a well, and if it 'synke to þe grounde, þan is it taken of a knafe childe &, if it flete a-bown, þan es taken of a mayden childe', p. 56.

righte of kynde and nature…And so the virgyne Cristyn was norysched nyne wokes with the mylke of hir owne pappe'.[32] Because Christina sustains herself for nine weeks, Thomas of Cantimpré, the writer of her *vita*, compares her to the Virgin Mary as 'the incomparabil and singler virgyne, Cristes moder', who also feeds Christ from her virgin breasts.[33] Similarly, when Christine is incarcerated once again and unable to eat, 'hire maydenly pappes bigan to sprynge licoure of ful swete oyle, and that toke she and sauerd hir brede with alle and hadde hit for potage and *oynement*'.[34] There is thus a clear concomitance between Christina's breasts as sources of food and healing. Substantiating this connection is her response after her leg is deliberately broken and a 'leche' [physician] is called, she 'thoghte it vnworthy to haue annothere leche to hire woundes but oure sauyour Jhesu Cryste', and she subsequently escapes, having developed a sudden and miraculous strength. God is her divine doctor, in this example. St. Agatha, the patron saint of wet nurses, is described during her incarceration in *The Pore Caitif* as receiving a vision of 'goddis massenger', St. Paul the Apostole, who 'cam to hele hir woundis, fleshly medicyn to my bodi'; a trope which conflates her renown as a martyr associated with her breasts, with the divine healing that she experienced.[35]

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[32] Thomas of Cantimpré, 'The Middle English Life of Christina Mirabilis', in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114, in Brown, *Three Women of Liège* pp. 51- 84 (pp. 57-8). The legendary Catherine of Alexandria, from whose tomb on Mount Sinai holy oil was carried all over the western world, was said to have bled milk rather than blood from her severed veins when she was decapitated. Several holy virgins from the Low Countries – Christina the Astonishing, Gertrude van Oosten, Lidwina of Schiedam – 'supposedly nursed their adherents or *cured others with their breast milk*' (my emphasis). See Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* p. 273.
[33] From the Middle English translation of Cantimpré's *vita*, in 'The Middle English Life of Christina Mirabilis', *Three Women of Liège*, Brown, p. 58.
[34] 'The Middle English Life of Christina Mirabilis', *Three Women of Liège,* ed. Brown, p. 64 (my emphasis). MED s.v. oinement 1(a) A medicinal salve prepared or used for external application; (b) a specified medicinal ointment. 3(a) An ointment prepared for ceremonial or sacramental purposes; (b) the ointment used to consecrate kings and priests; consecration with this ointment; (c) the ointment or sacrament of extreme unction; (d) the oil or sacrament of baptism.
[35] *The Pore Caitif*, p. 194.

Women's milk, then, seems to have a multipurpose and transformational power that not only heals and soothes pain, but also metaphysically communicates the wisdom and intuition associated with motherhood. I wish, therefore, to argue that through the wet-nursing identifications that Margery Kempe enacts in her post-reproductive state, a new development in her spiritual journey is made possible. This is due to the movement that I observe from the role of the wet nurse, to the healing nurse (to coin the modern term), to the healer. For now that Kempe has achieved an emulation of the Virgin Mary via her literal and surrogate mothering experiences, she is able to begin the mature and informed task of ministering to others, offering her healing powers as a physician of both the physical and heavenly worlds. The pain surrogacy that I will henceforth show underlies Kempe's strategy to make productive use of her prior painful experiences, to visualise Christ's pain in every 'patient' that she adopts and to position herself as God's doctoring disciple and ultimate surrogate of divine pain.

Margery Kempe's Phisik

While still in Rome, Kempe is called by her confessor to nurse (in the healing and nurturing sense) an elderly and infirm woman for 'obediens' and 'penawns', forming a direct reciprocation between the suffering patient and Kempe's painful penitence:[36]

[36] Monica Green advises caution in the employment of the term 'nurse', which she sees as 'problematic mostly because some modern commentators cannot rid themselves of the medical connotations of the term fixed by the development of professional nursing in the nineteenth century'. See 'Documenting medieval women's medical practice', p. 341. Green prioritises nurse duties as those of wet-nurses and nannies (as I have shown in my MED definitions). However, my argument is based upon the notion that I regard Kempe's 'nursing' activities as multivalent and surrogate in nature, and influenced by a wider cultural milieu which imbued breastmilk especially as incorporating healing potential. I therefore see Kempe as a 'healer' as much as a surrogate 'nurse'.

> Than þe good preste hir confessowr bad hir be vertu of obediens & also in party of penawns þat sche xulde seruyn an hold woman þat was a poure creatur in Rome. & sche dede so sex wekys. Sche seruyd hir as sche wolde a don owyr Lady. & sche had no bed to lyn in ne no clothys to be cured wyth saf hir owyn mentyl. & þan was sche ful of vermin & suffyrd gret peyn þerwyth. Also sche fet hom watyr & stykkys in hir necke for þe poure woman and beggyd mete and wyn bothyn for hir. And, whan þe pour womans wyn was sowr, þis creatur hir-self drank þat sowr wyn & ȝaf þe powr woman good wyn þat sche had bowt for hir owyn selfe (85-6).

Kempe is careful to emphasise the 'gret peyne' that she experiences in caring for the woman, re-enacting the devotional techniques learned from the 'worshepful wyfys' whose mothering of the Christ-doll is underscored by a silent acknowledgement of Mary's maternal sacrifice. In fact, Kempe administers to the elderly woman 'as sche wolde a don owyr Lady', foregrounding her rationale of the task as both divinely aligned and painfully sacrificial. Her recollection of this episode of six weeks fails to mention the physical infirmity or suffering of the poverty-stricken woman whose situation was bleak enough to warrant priestly intervention. Rather, Kempe is at pains to describe the surrendering of her own comfort: her amanuensis employs the pronoun 'sche' eight times to accentuate her sacrifice of food, wine and bed, and her humility in begging for their food and drink. Indeed, Christ's bearing of the cross is evoked by the sticks that she carries on her shoulders, an image which affirms the intended penance of the endeavour and which establishes Kempe's nursing role as an explicit facet of her spiritual trajectory. It is perhaps no coincidence that this period of charitable care precedes her marriage to the Godhead in the following chapter, recalled, then, as a vitally sacrificial step on her path to ultimate divine union.

Kempe's activity as self-appointed physician develops as a logical extension of her life experience and growing holiness. When in St. Margaret's Church, presumably during her fairly settled years in Lynn after 1418, she discovers a man in distress, who is kneeling and wringing his hands in despair.

Her concern is evident, as ‘sche, parceyuyng hys heuynes, askyd what hym eylyd’ (177). The man responds to Kempe as ‘dame’, strengthening the location of this episode in her mid to later years of menopause or post-menopause.[37] He describes a postpartum wife who is ‘owt hir mende’ (177), and who, because of her violent and aggressive behaviour, is manacled by the wrists in striking evocation of Kempe’s own period of postpartum trauma. Kempe’s credibility as a spiritual authority is acknowledged by the distraught husband when she offers her services: the man replies, ‘ȝa, dame, for Goddys lofe’ (178), suggesting an unspoken acceptance of her status as a religious woman whose external perception now extends to that of healing potential. In stark contrast to the roars, cries, and ‘smytyn & bityn’ that precipitated her shackling, the woman is calmed by Kempe’s entry, ratifying the older woman’s outward demeanour as comforting and revealing a paradoxical insight into Kempe’s celestial aura that belies her psychotic symptoms. She tells Kempe, ‘For ȝe arn... a ryth good woman & I beheld many fayr awngelys a-bowte ȝow, & þerfor, I pray ȝow, goth not fro me, for I am gretly comfortyd be ȝow’ (178). In the presence of other visitors, the woman remains frenzied: ‘And, whan oþer folke cam to hir, sche cryid & gapyd as sche wolde an etyn hem & seyd þat sche saw many deuelys a-bowtyn hem’ (178).[38] This animalistic behaviour results in the woman being removed to the far end of town, like a leper, where she is ‘bowyndn handys and feet wyth chenys of yron þat sche xulde smytyn no-body’ (178): displaced and fettered, her disordered female body is now post-productively threatening.

[37] MED s.v. dame: A woman of rank or position, a superior, a mistress, a mother. 1(a), (b), and (c) respectively.

[38] Such an agitated reaction to other visitors may be explained as an intrusion into the lying-in chamber, and, if men were witness to her distress, a violation of what was considered to be an exclusively female time and place, as we saw in Chapter One. The MED denotes ‘godsip’ as 1(a) One's sponsor at baptism or confirmation, a godparent; and 2(a) A close friend, companion, pal. This indicates a cultural connection between midwifery and ministry about which Kempe would have been aware. See also Gibson, ‘Scene and Obscene: Seeing and Performing Late Medieval Childbirth’, pp.8-9. Also Florschuetz, ‘Women’s Secrets’, pp. 235-68.

In poignant identification, Kempe acts antithetically to the people who removed her from their uncomfortable sight and instead accepts the woman's pain, her twice daily visits a physical communication of hope and an acknowledgement of the authenticity of this new mother's anguish. By the late Middle Ages, midwives had acquired a salvific authority which, according to Gibson, 'came close to the power of clergy'.[39] Canon law required midwives to be instructed in the form of infant baptism. Whilst any Christian was theoretically permitted to perform an emergency baptism, midwives were the only laypeople specifically empowered to do so. John Mirk gives instruction on how to teach midwives to conduct infant baptism. He emphasises the importance of speaking the sacred words 'alle on rowe', and disallows any 'wymmenes lore'.[40] Through her prayers and presence, Kempe offers a validation of the woman's pain, and in this midwifery mission, effects a miraculous therapy of life-saving magnitude:[41]

> And þe sayd creatur preyid for þis woman euery day þat God xulde, ȝyf it were hys wille, restoryn hir to hir wittys a-geyn. And owr Lord answeryd in hir sowle & seyd, 'Sche xulde faryn ryth wel'. Þan was sche mor bolde to preyin for hir recuryng þan sche was be-forn, & iche day, wepyng & sorwyng, preyid for hir recur tyl God ȝaf hir hir witte & hir mende a-ȝen (178).

Like a medic increasing their patient's dosage, Kempe takes God's reassurance as a catalyst to increase her prayers, amplifying their efficacy with weeping and sorrowing, and acting as a surrogate for the pain that she labours to alleviate.[42]

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[39] Gibson, 'Scene and Obscene', pp. 15-6.
[40] Myrc, John, *Instructions for Parish Priests, edited from Cotton MS. Claudius A II,* ed. Edward Peacock, EETS O.S. 31 (London: Trübner, 1868), p.5 (l.123).
[41] Given the exclusion of men at the birthing site until the sixteenth century and beyond, the Church had little choice but to imbue midwives with this substitute priestly role. Jean Towler notes one religious hospital, St. John's in Winchester (1275), which did widen its scope in 1414 'to include assistance to women in childbirth'. Before this time, St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London (1123) had included 'pregnant women' among its patients. See Jean Towler, *Midwives in history and society* (London: Croom Helm, c.1986), pp. 24-5.
[42] There is debate in medical historiography in relation to whether or not the midwife can be regarded as a medical practitioner at all; that childbirth is not a 'condition' to be pathologised.

Such is the extent of the woman's recovery that Kempe's amanuensis heralds it as a miracle, revering her healing powers as cause for sanctification.[43] Not only is the woman reborn into a mind of worship and praise, she is 'browt to chirche & purifijd as oþer women be', and reintegrated into the community (178). Through its implicit connection to the purification ceremony, Diane Watt suggests that 'in intervening in the life of this very distressed and ill woman, Margery Kempe was emulating the Virgin's care for the sick'.[44] Kempe thus succeeds not only in facilitating a recovery from psychosis to serenity, but brings the woman from a seemingly demonic possession to purification in the churching ceremony. Coming full circle, Kempe utilises her post-reproductive status to rebalance the childbirth trauma that she herself once endured. In her new understanding of the route towards healing she is able to *re*-produce in a way that sees a fragmented woman become whole, and which situates her not at the margins of the town but in ritual therapy at the church door.[45]

Kempe attaches considerable significance to the churching ritual, which is reinforced by a vision that she experiences on Purification Day when the

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Green notes how male physicians did turn to female *obstetrix* as their 'eyes and hands' when conducting intimate examinations. However, those male physicians did not seem to consider women *learned* in medicine. See 'Documenting medieval women's medical practice', p. 340, n.72. Peregrine Horden contests this view by arguing that nurses provided a promotion of the 'balance of the non-naturals', and are therefore medical practioners, given that the emphasis on medicine in the Middle Ages was about prevention rather than cure. See 'A Non-Natural Environment', p. 139.

[43] For other instances of Kempe's suggested sanctity, see pp. 22, 37 and 156 in *BMK*. Hope Emily Allen notes that Kempe seems to show hope of being venerated in the Church of St. Margaret's in Lynn. See p. 325, n. 156/26. See also Gail McMurray Gibson, 'St. Margery: "The Book of Margery Kempe"', in *Equally in God's Image. Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Bolton Holloway, et al (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 144-163.

[44] Diane Watt, 'Mary the Physician: Women, Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages', p. 39.

[45] The Church insisted that university-trained physicians first call a priest to aid advise them. It also stipulated that every community should appoint 'at least one widow to assist women who are striken with illness'. This widow was restricted to midwifery and the like, and remained accountable to the priest. See Towler, pp. 29-30. Also M. Chamberlain, *Old Wives' Tales. Their History, Remedies and Spells* (London: Virago, 1981). It is significant that widows, specifically, presumably because of their mature wisdom as *sages-femme*, were empowered by the Church for female medical care. Given that a widow is, by her nature, post-reproductive, due either to age or removal from the debt of matrimony, it is apt that Kempe adopts a midwife role in her own post-reproductive yet fruitful life phase.

Virgin Mary presents Christ at the temple.[46] She is 'raueschyd' by the perception of this event, witnessing it with such verisimilitude that she imagines herself offering up Christ 'wyth owr Ladys owyn persone' (198) and thus participating intrinsically in the purification of Mary's postpartum body. The intensity of the experience provokes a physical reaction in Kempe, who struggles to walk with her candle towards the priest: '[she] went waueryng of eche syde as it had ben a dronkyn woman, wepyng & sobbyng so sor þat vn-ethe sche myth stondyn on hir feet' (198). Struggling to bear her pain, she falls to the ground climactically, the 'feruowr of þe spiryt' so great that it triggers corporeal failure: 'þe body fayld & myth not endur it' (198). The witnessing of divine purification clearly resonates with Kempe to the extent that she can no longer endure the intensity of the experience – to be integrated into a moment of such ceremonial import is to be reminded of the Christian possibility of female rebirth: a central pivot on which her re-productive future rests. She therefore meditates 'many tymes whan sche saw women ben purifyid of her childeryn' (198), transposing the inspirational image of Mary and the Christ child onto the lay women of her community and thus, in an intercessory act, creating salvific opportunities for all childbearing women to be freed of defilement.[47]

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[46] Sue Niebrzydowski has written on the value placed by women on the Churching ceremony. See '*Asperges Me, Domine, hyssopo*: male voices, female interpretation and the medieval English purification of women after childbirth ceremony', esp. p. 5. David Cressy notes the role of the midwife in the ceremony: 'Midwives served as keepers of the custom, and may have helped organise the traditional parts of the ceremony; their prominence at churchings also advertised their skills in the birthing room'. In 'Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England', *Past and Present* (1993), 106-46, esp. p. 114. Carole Rawcliffe notes the risk that childbirth posed to the spiritual health of the mother. Not only was the child the product of Original Sin, it had been nourished on retained menstrual blood which was thought to be contaminated, as we have seen. Thus women who died in childbirth could not be buried in the church, as we saw in the first chapter of this study. Postpartum women frequently visited icons and altars of the Virgin and St. Anne, offering candles in thanksgiving. Carole Rawcliffe, 'Women, Religion and Childbirth in Later Medieval England', in *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, ed. Diana Wood (Exeter: The Short Run Press, 2003), pp. 95-6.

[47] Kempe's adoration of the Virgin and child is emphasised during her pilgrimage to Aachen when she is about sixty years of age, in 1433. She sees 'owr Ladys smoke & oþer holy reliqwiis which wer schewyd on Seynt Margaretys Day' (237). Allen notes that these relics are the garment of Our Lady worn at Christ's birth, the swaddling-clothes of Jesus, the cloth which had

This preoccupation largely explains, then, Kempe's unyielding commitment to heal the fractured postpartum woman, to enable the mother to regain her physical health and therefore gain access to spiritual health through the rite of purification. But her willingness also stems from the visions of herself as handmaiden to the Virgin (as seen above) and to St. Anne, visions that occur in the earliest part of her dictated recollection and beyond and which suggest the centrality of childbirth rituals as vital for her construction of a spiritual and healing self. Not only does Kempe discern Saint Anne 'gret wyth chylde', for instance, she concomitantly prays to be 'hir mayden & hir seruawnt' (18), illustrating an instinctive desire to take a midwifery role in Saint Anne's parturience and reflecting the medieval reliance on female communities for childbirth procedures. Kempe is present at the birth – '& anon ower Lady was born' – and 'kepe[s]' Mary until she is twelve years old: a privileged position holding influence on the future Mother of God (18). The vision develops to encompass Kempe as Mary's companion in adult life, where they, along with Joseph, visit Saint John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, when Saint John is born. Characteristically, Kempe begs to administer 'seruyse & plesawns' to Saint Elizabeth, suggesting that this vision of the birth of Saint John held influence over her own desire to care for the postpartum holy woman: a duty that is anticipated strikingly by her decision to take on the journey 'a potel of pyment & spycys þerto' (18).[48] The honeyed and spiced wine, 'pyment',

received the head of John the Baptist, and the waist-cloth Jesus wore on the cross (356, n. 237/34-7). Our Lady's smock was thought to have apotropaic qualities in assisting women in childbirth. As a post-reproductive woman herself, Kempe's interest in this relic can only have been in regard to her intention to provide assistance to other labouring women. Carole Rawcliffe discusses the appeal of objects like these in providing women with a sense of protection and comfort. She notes the discovery of a badge of the *sancta roba* in Pottergate, Norwich, and other Walsingham badges, which Kempe could have acquired. Carole Rawcliffe, in *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, p. 103.

[48] MED s.v. piment: (a) A sweetened, spiced wine used for refreshment and in medical recipes; a medicinal potion, (c) a medicinal ingredient.

symbolises not only the comforting therapies of the physician's pack (and spices, as we have seen, are used for their warming properties), but a 'potel' – the vessel into which the 'pyment' is poured – contains the specific quantity of two quarts and is thus redolent with the notion of medicinal dosage.[49]

Medieval medical texts confirm the commonplace of midwives as an integral part of birthing practices. The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' advises that 'a midwife assist' with her hands when a child does not 'come out in the manner in which it ought', as well as offering various decoctions and odoriferous spices like those found in Kempe's 'pyment' above.[50] It notes that 'there are certain physical remedies whose power is obscure to us, which are helpful when done by midwives'. Reminiscent of the multipliable potency of breastmilk, whose power is intangible, another esoteric object – a magnet – is thus recommended for the midwife to hold during proceedings.[51] The *Sekenesse of Wymmen* depicts sixteen separate variations in the manner in which a baby might present at delivery, advising the midwife directly as to how to manipulate each presentation with her hands.[52] It later documents the problem surrounding a lack of competent midwives which is perpetuated by the secrecy which such female activities generate: 'Divers tymes it happith of diuers women a mischeuous greuaunce in trauaillinge of chyld for defaute of good mydwifes, and that greuaunce kepen priue & it nedith for to be holpen'.[53] 'On Treatments for Women' warns of the danger of poor midwifery care, stating that problems during childbirth are 'because of the failure of those assisting them:

[49] MED s.v. potel(le, also pottel: 1 (b) a liquid *measure* (my emphasis).
[50] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, pp. 100-1.
[51] Ibid., pp. 106-7.
[52] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, pp. 122-38.
[53] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, p. 164.

that is to say, this is kept hidden by the women'.[54] Like the wet nurse whose milk is simultaneously nourishing and pathological, the midwife is both integral and threatening to the sealed and feminised birthing scene that Gibson describes: a privileged physician of women's secrets whose privy role renders her singularly accountable. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* similarly suggests this attitude towards the older woman midwife whose actions are under scrutiny; in this instance, when cutting the umbilical cord: 'And assentyth nevyre to þe foly of sume olde women þat were wont to kot hym with glas or with a pese of a potte of erthe or with a scharp ston, or all þat ys by foly & wyche-crafte'.[55] The extent of a midwife's duties is revealed via a warning about old midwives' bad advice to wet nurses: 'And lok ye do not afture svme old women þat gyf here norysse to ete, when here mylk faylyth, þe estrayne of schepe or of kow or of oþer bestys femalys... so hit turnyth to corrupcion & rotyth þe chylde'.[56] Such cultural anxieties about the power of midwives (and wet nurses) and their proximity to danger are undoubtedly the products of a patriarchal world where female knowledge and sorority pose a threatening paradigm of male exclusion. Nikki Stiller regards the marginalisation of older midwives as rooted in their knowledge of the mystery of birth – 'the source of women's latent power and men's latent envy'. Negative accusations, she argues, 'stem from reactions to the situation in which the powerful mother-surrogate helps the daughter achieve exclusively feminine ends'.[57]

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[54] 'On Treatments for Women', in *The Trotula*, pp.124-7. On the topos of secrecy, see Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, especially Chapter 2, 'Men's Practice of Women's Medicine in the Thirteeth and Fourteenth Centuries', pp. 70-117, and Chapter 5, 'Slander and the Secrets of Women', pp. 204-45.

[55] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 72.

[56] Ibid., p. 72.

[57] Nikki Stiller, *Eve's Orphans*, pp. 64-66. Towler discusses the categorisation of midwives as 'white witches', and some as 'black witches' in the very late Middle Ages. 'Women lay healers mainly... ministered to the the poor... The rich could turn to qualified licensed physicians, who, by the fourteenth century, were beginning to be officially tolerated by the Church'. Towler, p. 35.

That may be the case, but these texts nevertheless situate the midwife as a crucial surrogate in facilitating the successful delivery of the parturient female.[58] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* addresses the birth assistant directly as a partner in this shared objective: 'How ye schall help a woman þat [trauelyth] of chylde'.[59] And 'On Treatments for Women' employs the quite unusual first-person plural mode of address to indicate the mutuality of effecting a cure for mastitis in the postpartum phase: 'For pain of the breasts caused by milk, *we* should mix clay with vinegar and make a plaster' (my emphasis).[60] But it is the advice for a stillborn delivery in *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* that most acutely illustrates the conflation of midwife and minister, where the birth assistant not only shares in the physical act of her patient's delivery, but embodies the shared duties of medic and priest in an act of spiritual and surgical hope:

> And yf þe chylde be dede, ȝef here to drynk ysop & hote watere & sone schall sche be delyuerde. Or tak a lytyll scrowe [scroll] & wryt þys with-in: + In nomine Patris et Filij & Spiritus Sancti Amen + Sancta Maria + Sancta [f. 14] Margareta + ogor + sogor + nogo + and kyt þat scrov in-to small pecys & ȝiffe here to drynk. Or wrytt in a long escrow all þe psalme of Magnificat anima mea & gyrde hit a-boute here. But wethyth well þat þis ne none oþer kepyth no woman at commenabyll tyme of delyuerance [but as a preparatyue] & þer-for let þe mydwyffe helpe.[61]

Not only is the written prayer offered by the birth assistants to the mother as a medicine to be ingested and internalised, the text stipulates unambiguously

[58] Carole Rawcliffe notes how medieval male physicians, despite their theoretical knowledge and training, had little experience of intimate examinations of their female patients, which was normally the preserve of 'a midwife, acting as his intermediary'. From *Women and Religion in Medieval England*, ed. Wood, p. 95.
[59] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 62.
[60] *The Trotula*, p. 148-9. *The Sekenesse of Wymmen* also provides a recipe for the treatment of mastitis following childbirth in a short passage that reverts to Latin rather than the Middle English (which constitutes the majority of the treatise): 'De tumore mamille pro multitudine lactis' [Concerning tumour of the breast due to copious milk]. A recipe is mixed and placed on the genitals as it is from here that the milk can be dissolved (p. 160).
[61] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, pp. 64-6. The Latin meaning of 'sogor' is the conjugation of 'sugor': to suck, or to take in. I have been unable to determine any translation for 'ogor' or 'nogo', suggesting that they function as lyrical or mnemonic words.

that this preparation is to be administered in accordance with the midwife's physical intervention. John of Mirfield, a priest and physician in the late fourteenth century who recorded this practice in his *Breviarium Bartholomei*, disclaimed any personal belief in the use of scripture for magical purposes, illustrating the pejorative way in which such practices were perceived by the male clergy as they worried about verbal or superstitious cures.[62] The association of midwifery and the use of charms is also mentioned in a fourteenth-century manuscript, which names a Latin charm, 'quicunque vult', which was to be said three times over the woman in labour. Such charms appear to be untranslated in vernacular manuscripts, especially in connection with childbirth: 'O infans, siue viuus, siue mortuus, exi foras, quia Christus te uocat ad lucem!' ['O infant, whether living or dead, come forth because Christ calls you to the light!'].[63] Similar charms can be found elsewhere:

> Anod*ur* for þe same. Tak a nobley & wryte in þ*a*t obley makyng fyrst a crose on þe bakke syde of þe obley '+ In no*min*e p*at*ris + Lazare' & let þe womon sey on p*at*e*r* n*oste*r or sche reseyue þat obley. & þe*n* take þe mylke of a womon þat hath a son & let her*e* reseyue a qu*an*tite þ*er*of. & wryte in anod*ur* obley on þe bake side as þu dydest befor*e* '+ & filii + exi foras +.' & let her*e* reseyue þe seconde, seyng befor*e* ii p*at*e*r* n*oste*r, & aft*er* þe reseyuyng of þe obley, let here reseue þe mylke as sche dede afore. & wryt in þe iii obley '& sp*iritu*s s*an*cti + chr*istu*s vocat te' & antequ*am* recipiat, dicat t*er* p*ater* n*oste*r & recipiat vltimo de lacte vt p*rius* & lib*er*abit gra*tia* dei & in þe fyrste obley make an hole with a prykke & in þe secunde ii & in þe thryde iii holes. & p*ro*bata est.[64]

As Olsan attests, this charm 'exemplifies the extent to which religious rituals were involved in medical care in the fifteenth century. The ritual of writing sacred words on the back of a wafer and dispensing it to a patient in a series of

[62] Mirfield cited from Towler, p. 32. On such clerical concerns, see Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), esp. Chapter Two, 'Charms, Prayers and Prophecies: Magic and Religion', pp. 46-69.
[63] *The Sekeness of Wymmen*, p. 31.
[64] New Haven, Yale Medical Historical Library, Cushing/Whitney MS 47, f.38r, from Lea T. Olsan, 'The Language of Charms in a Middle English Recipe Collection', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 18 (2005), 29-35 (p.31).

three doses is common in English MSS. [In another recipe] we see a fully developed mimesis of the Eucharist that employs a mother's milk in place of wine. As in other obley charms, the ritual is repeated three times in accordance with the invocation to the Trinity, written on the wafers in three parts'.[65] Olsan sees such practice as a sacramental act, even if it is not one officially recognised by the church.[66] Alessandra Foscati also cites a fifteenth-century medical receipt for accelerating childbirth, where the instructions are in the vernacular but the words to be written on the host are 'rigorously in Latin', thus illustrating the Eucharist as a healing object within the household.[67] Usefully, Don Skemer defines the varying terms of such spoken or written aids in healing praxis. The word *charm*, he suggests, should be restricted to verbal charms, spells, and incantations for spoken use. The word *talisman* should be reserved for powerful, apotropaic objects engraved with astrological images. A *textual amulet* signifies writings on the body used for protection.[68]

There is also some evidence to suggest that the 'eating' of scripture was conceptualised by holy women as a means to experience Christ. Ida of Louvain 'ate' communion and scripture, which is paralleled in her *vita* to Mary's bearing

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[65] Olsan, 'The Language of Charms in a Middle English Recipe Collection', pp. 31-2. See also Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms and Prayer in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice', *Social History of Medicine*, 16 (2003), 343-66. See also Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 89 (2015), 406-433. Also Hilary Powell, 'The "Miracle of Childbirth": The Portrayal of Parturient Women in Medieval Miracle Narratives', *Social History of Medicine*, 25 (2012), 795–811. And Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), esp. Chapter Two, 'Charms, Prayers and Prophecies: Magic and Religion', pp. 46-69.

[66] Ibid., p. 32.

[67] Alessandra Foscati, 'Healing with the Body of Christ. Religion, Medicine and Magic', in *Il 'Corpus Domini': Teologia, Antropologia e Politica*. A cura di Laura Andreani and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, (Firenze: Sismel, 2015), pp. 209-226 (p. 211-2). Some historians have argued that the notion of 'accelerating childbirth' or 'provoking menstruation' can also be euphemistic for an abortifacient. See, for example, John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992). However, Monica Green disagrees, arguing that the remedies suggested in the *Trotula* texts do not suggest such indications. See *The Trotula*, p. 222, n.144.

[68] Don Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 18.

Christ in her uterus.[69] Here, we see not only a connection between the, admittedly, *metaphorical* ingestion of scripture – literally eating the 'Word' – and the generation of childbirth, but also the activity as in fact having Eucharistic associations. There is some irony in John of Mirfield's above criticism of these female-centric rituals of childbearing, given that they are brought about themselves by the Judeo-Christian insistence of postpartum defilement and segregation.

We have no evidence that Kempe employed such Latin 'charms' in her care of the postpartum woman. However, we are made aware of Kempe's accelerated praying in this episode. Now that Kempe has gained the trust of the woman and her husband as a holy 'phisik', I would argue that her ministrations denote godly as opposed to deviantly supernatural approaches. Therefore, the example demonstrates an amalgamation of medicine and ministering that, coupled with the medieval tradition of the older, wise midwife, represents an explanation for the way in which this form of surrogacy holds such appeal for Kempe in her middle to older age.

Clearly, Kempe imagines herself as a crucial healing agent in these holy scenes. This pain surrogacy – the willing receipt and sharing of others' pain – is exemplified elsewhere in the *Boke*'s visionary accounts, where her role as Mary's handmaid extends to her presence in scenes of Christ's Passion and illustrates the way in which maternalised pain is fundamental to Kempe's pain perception.[70] During the intense Passion visions, which will be discussed at length in the sixth chapter, Kempe shares the Virgin's pain at Christ's beating by the Jews: 'And þan owr Lady & sche hyr vnworthy handmaydyn for þe tyme

[69] See Bynum, *Holy Fast and Holy Feast*, p. 406, n. 48.
[70] Hope Emily Allen notes how Kempe develops the handmaiden narrative throughout her *Boke*, and would seem to have been inspired by 'The Meditations of St. Elizabeth'. *BMK*, p. 265, n 18/31.

wept & syhyd ful sor for þe Iewys ferd so fowle & so ven[ym]owslych wyth hir blisful Lord' (190). This union-in-pain between Mary and Kempe, enacted in a communal time and place, foregrounds maternal experience as the key site at which Kempe is able to understand and to *bear* her, and others', pain. In a subsequent, post-crucifixion vision, Kempe's pain surrogacy is once again manifest, when she comforts and cares for the grieving Mary: 'Than þe creatur thowt, whan owr Lady was comyn hom & was leyd down on a bed, þan sche mad for owr Lady a good cawdel & browt it hir to comfortyn hir' (195). Reminiscent of the wives in Rome who comforted her and laid her on a bed in maternal care-giving, now Kempe re-enacts the nursing tableau through her ongoing and privileged handmaid duties to the Mother of God. The cawdel [caudel] that Kempe blends and offers Mary is a fortified drink of spices or a broth, and, like the pyment that she carries in service to the postpartum Saint Elizabeth, represents a curative offering that reveals her self-conceptualisation as physician and healer of pain.[71] Kempe reinforces this belief when she instructs Mary to accept the mixture, demonstrating her intense desire to cure, and the assumed efficacy of her medicine: 'A, blissyd Lady, ȝe must nedys comfortyn ȝowr-self & cesyn of ȝowr sorwyng' (195). Such a curative action is literally reversed in *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*, where Henry of Lancaster longs to drink the milk of the Virgin Mary as a healing aid: 'And, most sweet Lady, as it seems to me, I may say that to drink your sweet milk would be good for my wounds, just as those who are wounded drink a little salve'.[72] Henry also asks God for

> …a drink that could comfort me and clean me from within and expel the filfth of my wounds. That drink would be suitably delicious to drink and work powerfully internally to bring about what it was prepared and

[71] MED s.v. 'caudel' (a) A hot fortified drink, esp. one containing spiced wine or ale; also, a broth; (b) a pudding, meat loaf, or the like; (c) a mess.
[72] Ibid., p. 190.

> specifically prescribed for…Master, it is your great humility, by which you were pleased to prepare such precious medicines, and so very noble a drink, for us sick and afflicted.[73]

Kempe's mystical discernment and visionary offering to the Virgin later reveals the long-term success of her divine nursing duties, not only as Mary's handmaiden but as Christ's keeper throughout his childhood: 'sche in contemplacyon & in meditacyon had ben hys Modyrs maydyn & holpyn to kepyn hym in hys childhod & so forth in-to þe tyme of hys deth' (203).[74] And it is Christ himself who provides clear authorisation of the legitimacy of Kempe's contemplative care-giving; for it, she will gain 'þe same mede in Heuyn *as thow þu dedist it to myn owyn persone er to my blissyd Modyr*, & I xal thankyn þe þerfor' (my emphasis; 203). Substitution, or surrogacy, therefore, has deific validation as an activity of holy merit, and Kempe finds numerous healing strategies, using both earthly and mystical subjects, through which to gain edification and by which to generate means of production.

The Pain of the Leper

In Chapter seventy-four of the *Boke*, Kempe indicates her increased age when she reveals the contemplation of her own death which is seemingly overdue in her mind: 'heryng hir Messe & reuoluyng in hir mende þe tyme of hir deth, sor syhyng & sorwyng for it was so long delayd' (176). Christ responds with the precise term of 'Al þis xv ȝer', which, given that the earliest possible date of her death is 1438, and assuming that the prophecy transpires, positions the chapter at around 1423, when Kempe would be about fifty (and at the exact time of

[73] Henry of Lancaster, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*, trans. Batt, p. 189.
[74] Wet nurses were often retained in the households of more wealthy families for many years, and throughout a child's formative years. See notes above, and especially McLaughlin, 'Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries', p. 117.

menopause, according to the medical texts that we have seen). As her reaction is one of distress, perceiving fifteen years of further life, separate from God, to be like a thousand years, Christ reassures her of his love and renews her meditations on his Passion. Here, a critical turning point occurs in Kempe's spiritual development whereby she begins to connect the sick and afflicted with Christ's corporeal suffering in a graphic and ocular manner. From this moment on, she is unable to endure the sight of a leper or other 'seke man, specialy ȝyf he had any wowndys aperyng on hym' (176). Pain surrogacy takes on a new, nuanced guise, as on witnessing such lepers or impaired people, Kempe weeps 'as ȝyf sche had sen owr Lord Ihesu Crist wyth hys wowndys bledyng' (176), the lepers now symbolising the tortured Christic body through their substitute and pitiful injuries.[75] Though the sight of lepers had been 'abhomynabyl' to her during her 'ȝerys of worldly prosperite', she now desires to kiss and embrace them for the 'lofe of Ihesu' (176-7), substituting love for hatred and mourning her inability to demonstrate physically this polarised shift in perception for the afflicted.

The association of leprosy with sin has biblical origin: in the Book of Numbers, Moses' sister Mary is punished with leprosy for her criticism of him (Numbers 12: 8-15).[76] And Christ's healing of lepers is recounted severally in the gospels, where there is a clear correlation between bodily contamination

[75] The slipperiness of the term 'leper' was initiated by Jerome's translation of the Bible into the Vulgate in AD 383, which created an important shift in meaning. The Hebrew word *sāra'ath* (understood in Mosaic Law to indicate imprecise skin conditions such as scaly, scabrous and raw skin), translated into the Greek *lepra*, and then into the Latin *leprosy*. Jerome's description of Christ as a leper, then, was intended to convey the image of Christ's bruises, lesions and damaged flesh. See Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), p. 73. See also Isaiah 53:4, 'Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: and we have thought him as a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted'.
[76] Mary is named Miriam in later biblical translations.

and the spiritual health towards which they are brought.[77] Medieval writers often saw physical affliction as a positive fortuity, where the sick should be regarded as 'chosen' and their souls more able to progress heavenwards. Chaucer's Parson asserts that 'peyne is sent by the rightwys sonde of God, and by his sufferance, be it meselrie, or mayhem, or maladie'.[78] St. Anselm (d. 1109) counselled the dying bishop of Rochester that 'the progress of the soul grows out of the failure of the flesh'.[79] *The Manere of Good Lyvyng*, a Middle English translation of the late twelfth or early-thirteenth century treatise, the *Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem* which was often attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1175), instructs a community of nuns (probably those at Syon Abbey) that sickness should be embraced as a divine gift. The *Liber* was known as a favourite contemplative text by Bridget of Sweden, who perhaps obtained her copy during a pilgrimage to Spain in 1341, and who thus played an important role in diffusing its popularity elsewhere, including at Syon.[80] The texts states that 'Suche as be strong and hool it ys profitable for them to be seke, les by the strength of bodely helth they rejoyse more in transitory and worldly thyngys than they ouȝt to doo'. Addressing a 'Reverent suster', it advises 'be ye not hevy in your seknes but thanke God. Wysche ye to have the helth of the soule rather than of the bodye. The diseasis of the bodye be

[77] Luke 17: 12-19, for example, describes ten men who ask Jesus for mercy. On his instruction to go to the priests, they are made 'clean'. One man returns, glorifying God and illustrating a belief that the leprosy was begotten from divine sources and was healed in God's name.
[78] 'The Parson's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 308, ll. 622-5.
[79] W. Frölich, ed., *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury I*, no. 53. From Rawcliffe, *Leprosy*, p. 55.
[80] The manuscript of the *Manere* (Oxford, Bodlian Library, MS Laud misc. 517) was copied by William Darker, a monk of Sheen, and probably copied for the nuns at Syon. William Darker is known to have copied at least one other MS for Elisabeth Gibbs, abbess of Syon. See 'Introduction', in *The Manere of Good Lyvyng: A Middle English Translation of Pseudo-Bernard's* Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem, ed. Anne E. Mouron (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 1-40.

remedyes and medicyns of the soule'.[81] The *Ancrene Wisse* tells its anchoritic audience that

> Illness is a hot fire to bear, but nothing purifies gold as it does the soul. Illness that God sends – not what a woman may come down with through her own foolishness – does these six things: (i) washes away the sins that have already been committed, (ii) protects against those that were about to be, (iii) tests patience, (iv) maintains humility, (v) increases the reward, (vi) makes whoever bears it patiently equal to a martyr. In this way illness is the soul's salvation, an ointment for its wounds, a shield against its receiving more, as God sees that it would if illness did not prevent it.[82]

The French surgeon, Guy de Chauliac (d. 1368), when writing specifically about the diagnosis of leprosy, emphasised the importance of stressing to patients that their affliction was a mark of election as opposed to a curse: 'Firste, in clepynge Goddes help, he schall comforte ham and saie that this passioun or sekenesse is saluacioun of the soule and nought to say the trouthe, for if leprouse men were reproued, it wer a purgatorie to þe soule'.[83] However, it should not be presumed that medieval culture held that sin, or divine election, was the only cause of leprosy. A twelfth-century chronicler and monk, for example, showed a measured objectivity when discussing the *lepra* of Bishop Aelfweard of London (d. 1044). He noted the numerous natural causes that might have caused the illness: a plethora of blood boiling up in the veins, excessive heat, a humoral imbalance or some respiratory impediment to the flow of the vital spirits around the body.[84] Indeed, several explanations for the causation of leprosy abounded during the Middle Ages, not least those that were influenced by Galen's theories of the humours (an excess of choler or black bile were thought to be particularly dangerous). Being a product of

[81] The XLIII exhortation, in *The Manere of Good Lyvyng*, pp. 125-7.
[82] *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses: A Translation*, Bella Millet, Part 4, section 7, p. 69.
[83] *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, 'þe secounde chapitle, of the lepre', p. 381.
[84] W.D. Macray, ed., *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis* (RS, 1886), from Rawcliffe, *Leprosy*, p. 51.

conception from coitus with a menstruating woman was a common explanation; a commentator on pseudo-Albertus Magnus testifies that 'should conception take place the fetus would be leprous'.[85] Other causative factors included 'hot' food that upset the body's temperature, infected foodstuffs, contagion, hostile planetary forces, corrupt air and heredity. Kempe's fixation on lepers can thus be explained by their visual identification with Christ's wounds, the substitute closeness that she wishes to experience with the Christic body and a desire to heal their pain (as Christ also healed lepers) through a ministry which proposes affliction as divinely elected.

When her confessor accedes to her kissing leper women but not men, she embarks on a visit to the hospital where her intended act of surrogacy is marked in its performance between the pious 'self' and the contaminated 'other':[86]

> Þan was sche glad, for sche had leue to kyssyn þe seke women & went to a place wher seke women dwellyd whech wer ryth ful of þe sekenes & fel down on hir kneys be-forn hem, preyng hem þat sche myth kyssyn her mowth for þe lofe of Ihesu. & so sche kyssyd þer ij seke women with many an holy thowt & many a deuowt teer, &, whan sche had kysssyd hem & telde hem ful many good wordys & steryd hem to mekenes & pacyens þat þei xulde not grutchyn wyth her sekenes but hyly thankyn God þerfor & þei xulde han gret blysse in Heuyn thorw þe mercy of owr Lord Ihesu Crist... (177)

[85] *De Secretis Mulierum*, pp. 130-1. See also McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero,* p. 139, n.9. Also Rawcliffe, *Leprosy*, esp. pp. 64-103. The medieval understanding that sexual union with a menstruating woman produces leprous offspring originates from Mosiac Law, where menstruating women are regarded as unclean, as we have seen. Luke Demaitre illustrates how ancient ideas translate into common hearsay. See Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 168-70. This renders the leprous women in the hospital as doubly defiled through their biological *and* leprous pollution. A useful article on the connection between lepers, women and Jews is by Susan Zimmerman, 'Leprosy in the Medieval Imaginary', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38: 3 (2008), 559-587.

[86] This was probably the hospital of St. Mary Magdalen, founded on the causeway leading to Gaywood in 1145, although it could have been one of four others mentioned by Stephen Guybord of North Lynn in his will of 1432. See *BMK*, p. 332, n. 177/9-10. Lazar hospitals were frequently named after St. Mary Magdalen because of the biblical association of sexual promiscuity with leprosy.

That she is allowed this visit directly after experiencing 'gret mornyng & sorwyng for sche myth not kyssyn þe laȝers' (176) illustrates how some of these 'seke women' must have had leprosy. Kempe's insistence on the repetitive kissing of them illustrates her desire to access Christ via the surrogate activity of received contamination and therefore pain.[87] This kissing, 'for þe lofe of Ihesu', represents a reciprocity of healing power whereby Kempe is sanctified through the potential receipt of contamination, the substitution of the women's sickness for Christ's wounds, and her ministry in response to their despair. Shulamith Shahar has noted the dangerousness of women's caring for the sick in opening them up to infection, which affected their life expectancy.[88] Such an act, which transgresses medieval notions of pollution and defilement, is inspired perhaps by the taboo encounters of other mystical women.[89] Some Italian saints drank pus or scabs from lepers' sores, ingesting disease. The desire for illness is also a theme of the *Nonnenbücher,* where the sisters pray to be afflicted with leprosy.[90] Elizabeth of Hungary is reported to have taken a leprous beggar into her bed, and spent much of her life nursing the diseased outcasts of her

[87] Although prolonged contact with the leprous was considered to be a risk for contagion, fears about contamination were slow to develop, and not universal. 'Contagion', in its medieval context, was based more on humoral theory than microbiology. Therefore, the definition was loose, encompassing pollution, putrefaction, heredity and personal contact. Kempe's other reasons for communing with the leprous must thus be given equal weight, especially the benefits of personal contact beyond infection. See Carole Rawcliffe, pp. 4 and 90-95. See also F.O. Touati, 'Contagion and Leprosy: Myth, Ideas and Evolution in Medieval Minds and Societies', in L. I. Conrad and D. Wujastyk, eds., *Contagion: Perspectives from Premodern Societies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 179-201.

[88] Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: 'Winter clothes us in shadow and pain'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 35.

[89] For an examination of the literary topos of kissing lepers, see Catherine Peyroux, 'The Leper's Kiss', in S. Farmer and B. H. Rosenwein, eds., *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society. Essays in Honor of Lester K. Little* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). Also S. Farmer, 'The Leper in the Master Bedroom: Thinking Through a Thirteenth-Century Exemplum', in R. Voaden and D. Wolfthal, eds., *Framing the Family: Narrative and Representation in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 79-84.

[90] The nuns of Töss, Unterlinden and Ethgelthal, composed biographies in the fourteenth century, which were compiled in the *Nonnenbücher*. See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 130-1 and p. 209.

community. She is described as overcoming the body's natural mechanisms of repulsion in order to achieve transcendence:

> She abhorred the horrible bath of a *leprosus* with natural horror, but she wished to subjugate the domestic enemy, that is, her own body... Right away, with unheard-of fervour, she drew the water of the fetid, dirty, and scabby bath with both hands and drank it. Thus she conquered herself.[91]

Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) also drank the bathwater of lepers after having washed their feet, to construct what Karma Lochrie sees as a 'perverse eucharistic sacrament':

> It seemed to me truly that I had communicated; indeed, I felt the greatest sweetness as if I had received communion. When a scab from the wounds remained in my throat, I tried to swallow it. My conscience reproached me to spit it out as though I had communicated; however, I would not spit it out in order to expel it, but in order to dislodge it from my throat.[92]

Angela's trajectory towards a union with Christ is based on 'interruptions of the body's integrity', which signify 'risks of perversion on the verge of perfection', in an *imitatio Christi*.[93] It is probable that Kempe wishes to identify with other holy women who nursed the leprous. Thomas Gascoigne's *Lyfe of seynt Birgetta* recounts her sober nursing of men's lesions: 'Of hir owne substaunce she repayred in hir countre many desolate hospytalles & as a busy administratrice mercyful & pytuous she visited the nedy syke men that were ther & handeled and wasshyd theyr sores without horror or lothsomnes'.[94] Marie d'Oigines (b.1177) was also known to have cared for lepers: 'they [Marie and her husband, now living chaste] serued sumwhile to summe mesellis [lepers] bisyde Niuelle, in a place that is named Villambrote'.[95] Kempe's priest and amanuensis

[91] From Demaitre, p. 247.
[92] From Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, p. 43.
[93] Lochrie, p. 42.
[94] Thomas Gascoigne's 'Lyfe of seynt Birgette', in *The Mirror of Our Ladye*, pp. xlvii-lix (p.liii).
[95] Jacques of Vitry, *The Middle English Life of Marie d'Oignies*, *Book I*, in *Three Women of Liège*, p. 90.

read of Mary d'Oigines' life and described it to Kempe.[96] Kempe's communing with the leprous is less excessive, less foul, but her mouth, as orifice to the body's vulnerable internality, nevertheless makes contact with the tainted patients whose defilement marks a meaningful fissure into which she can enter. Her 'many good wordys' – emerging from that same, disrupted mouth – are transformational, turning the despairing female patients who 'grutchyn' [complain] into humble receivers of God's love, and presenting a revision of their situation as imbued with grace and hope.[97] And Kempe's strategy of inclusion, where the women are drawn into God's love not in spite of their affliction but because of it, is reminiscent of her healing of the 'contaminated' postpartum woman whose final cure was a reintegration into the community that had marginalised her in fear. Julie Orlemanski writes, 'While the leprous kiss posed new experiential and intersubjective possibilities in the Middle Ages, these ran up against the asymmetry of its imagining, the solipsism of its intimacy'.[98] Despite Kempe's desire to receive the lepers' disease through her kissing mouth, to use the women as conduits through which to demonstrate her Christ-like love of humanity, she nevertheless paradoxically perpetuates the women's otherness by positioning herself as a religious authority, piously ministering to these objects of sin and affliction from the standpoint of healthy elevation. This is anticipated in chapter sixty-five when God reminds Kempe of the charity with which he bestows her:

> ... whan þu seest any laȝerys, þu hast gret compassion of hem, ȝeldyng me thankyngs & presyngys þat I am mor fauorabyl to þe þan I am to hem, and also, dowtyr, for þe gret sorwe þat þu hast for al þis world þat þu mythyst helpyn hem as wel as þu woldist helpyn þi-self boþe gostly & bodily, & forþermore for þe sorwys þat þu hast for þe sowlys in

[96] See *BMK*, p. 153 and p. 322, n. 153/1.
[97] MED s.v. grucchen: To murmur, grumble; complain.
[98] Julie Orlemanski, 'How to Kiss a Leper', *Postmedieval*: *A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 3 (2012), 142-57 (p.144).

> Purgatory þat þu woldist so gladly þat þei wer owt of her peyn þat þei mythyn preysyn me wyth-owtyn end (160).

Christ's words reinforce Kempe's desire to heal pain and suffering, both ghostly and bodily, with the same authenticity as if she were helping herself, and thus also her willingness to act as a substitute for others' pain. However, she is also grateful for the *difference* that she perceives from these lepers, thanking God for his favour to her in place of them; a powerful disconnect that locates her as at once unconditional surrogate and privileged phisik. Clearly, Kempe's spiritual maturation now encompasses an assurance of God's forgiveness and protection from earthly contamination; a test of the divine prophylactic of sorts, which sees her inclusion into the healing realm in stark contrast to the lepers' exclusion in quarantine: the 'place wher seke women dwellyd'.[99]

For the female lepers whose diseased bodies are so engulfed that they are 'ryth ful of þe sekenes', Kempe offers the remedy of redemption, replacing sinful impurity with the promise of heavenly bliss and in so doing, a rebirth of non-corporeality. This re-productivity allows her to maintain a pious vigil over the Christic wounds that she imagines through the leprous women whilst simultaneously effecting the rebirth that those wounds sanctioned. The ocularity of the experience for Kempe holds an irony for her defiled patients in that blindness is a common symptom of leprosy, caused by the inability to blink,

[99] Although the leprous were cared for in designated *leprosaria,* often on the outskirts of towns, recent archaeological evidence suggests that the leprous were not marginalised and mistreated, as has been suggested in historiography. The location of hospitals at the edges of towns had more to do with the availability of land than segregation. Likewise, extramural roadside locations were more suited for the collection of alms. Archaeologists have found evidence at the hospital of St. Mary Magdalen, Winchester, of neatly cut anthropomorphic graves with carved head niches, suggesting that they were marked: an indication of the dignity and respect accorded to the deceased lepers. A pilgrim's body was found to be buried alongside lepers' bodies. The pilgrim was buried with a scallop shell – a symbol of pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where Margery Kempe is known to have travelled. Clearly there was spiritual merit to be found in compassion towards and communing with the leprous. See Simon Roffey and Phil Marter, 'Treating Leprosy: Inside the Medieval Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen, Winchester', in *Current Archaeology*, 267 (2012), 12-18.

resulting in corneal ulceration.[100] Not only does she comfort the women, then, through the touching and kissing from which they are otherwise excluded, but she becomes their eyes in the sense of this new vision: the sight of mystical experience and discernment that does not rely on the normal functioning of the body's faculties. When one of the sick women is beset with temptations and terror, Kempe replaces her 'fowle & horibyl thowtys' (177), with her own vision of God and her faith in his healing power.

Beyond offering surrogate vision, however, is the further irony of Kempe's willingness to accept the pain of the women's sores, and thus the pain of Christ's wounds, through kissing. Other symptoms of leprosy (now known as Hansen's disease to limit stigmatisation) include permanent nerve damage and accompanying swelling, pain and ulceration. This ultimately anaesthetises parts of the face or the extremities that have been subject to the injurious bacteria. The dangerous absence of pain felt from the cuts, sores and abrasions thus makes their infection more likely, leading to the loss of fingers and toes.[101] Gilbertus Anglicus (c. 1180 - c. 1250), whose *Compendium medicinae* contains one of the first systematic accounts of leprosy to be produced in the West, states that 'one symptom [of leprosy] is a permanent loss of sensation, coming from within'.[102] And Jordanus de Turre (fl. 1310-1335) constructs an elaborate trickery for testing patients which involves pricking them with a needle at times

[100] See Rawcliffe, *Leprosy*, p. 3. Luke Demaitre has cross-referenced several ancient and medieval medical texts for common signs of leprosy. In identifying the eyes as 'unmoving, terrifying stare' (presumably indicating blindness), the following writers concur: Avicenna, Bernard of Gordon, Henri de Mondeville, Jordanus de Turre, Guy de Chauliac, Jodocus Lommius, Ambroise Paré, Samuel Hafenreffer. Galen, Aretaeus and Salerno all identify 'eyeballs darken, bloodshot'. See Demaitre, p. 220.
[101] Rawcliffe, *Leprosy*, p. 2. Demaitre's cross-referencing of symptoms for the 'anaesthesia of extremities, etc.', includes in its list: Salerno, Bernard of Gordon, Henri de Mondeville, Jordanus de Turre, Guy de Chauliac, Niccolò Bertucci, Jodocus Lommius, Ambroise Paré. See Demaitre, p. 220.
[102] Gilbert the Englishman, *Compendium medicinae*, trans. Michael R. McVaugh, quoted in *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, p. 340.

other than are claimed by the doctor who tests. Such an ingenious approach was deemed necessary for patients who were understandably reluctant for a diagnosis of leprosy to be made.[103]

That the lepers have potentially lost the pain signals that Kempe seeks to surrogate, both separates these sick women further from Kempe's closeness to the suffering Christ, and makes her substitutable strategies more crucial and intercessory in terms of her development as God's healing disciple. If the warning-function of pain is lost in these women, Kempe offers herself up as a safety net through which the women can achieve salvation, and Kempe, in her willing receipt of others' suffering, can be doubly assured of her own safety in heaven.

In his seminal work, *Madness and Civilisation*, Michel Foucault discusses the regression of leprosy at the end of the Middle Ages. The two hundred and twenty lazar houses in England and Scotland, which contained a million and a half inhabitants in the twelfth century, had begun to empty in the fourteenth. What remained, were the places and the rites, 'which were intended, not to supress it [leprosy], but to keep it at a sacred distance, to fix it in an inverse exaltation'.[104] What persisted were: 'the values and images attached to the figure of the leper as well as the meaning of his exclusion, the social importance of that insistent and fearful figure which was not driven off without first being inscribed within a sacred circle'. The abandonment experienced by lepers was their salvation, offering 'another form of communion'. Although Foucault's emphasis on the segregation of lepers is characteristic of historiography from

[103] Jordanus de Turre, trans. Michael R. McVaugh, in *Sourcebook in Medieval Science*, ed. Edward Grant (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 754-55. From *Medieval Medicine: A Reader,* p. 343.
[104] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1961), pp. 4-24.

the 1960s to the 1980s, recent research on leprosy in the Middle Ages has challenged the extent to which the leprous were exhaustively reviled and excluded in society.[105] Foucault's point is that whilst the physical presence of leprosy fades away at the end of the Middle Ages, its structures remain, becoming replaced by alternative 'others' – vagabonds, criminals and 'deranged minds' – whose equivalent exclusion effects other forms of salvation. The mad, then, as 'a sort of great unreason', replace lepers as the general form of criticism: as objects of otherness and segregation whose 'social exclusion' was 'spiritual reintegration'.[106]

Foucault's argument is anticipated in Kempe's *Boke*, when one of the sick women in the same hospital as the leper women is beset by so many temptations that 'sche wist not how sche myth best be gouernyd' (177). This woman's mental affliction – ungovernable, deranged, even – is the result of a demonic assault so great that she fears death:

> Sche was so labowryd wyth hir gostly enmy þat sche durst not blissyn hir ne do no worschep to God for dreed þat þe Deuyl xuld a slayn hir. And sche was labowryd wyth many fowle & horibyl thowtys, many mo þan sche cowde tellyn. &, as sche seyd, sche was a mayde. Þerfor þe sayd creatur went to hir many tymys to comfortyn hir & preyd for hir, also ful specialy þat God xulde strength hir a-geyn hir enmye, & it is to beleuyn þat he dede so, blissyd mote he ben (177).

[105] Work by Rawcliffe, Demaitre and Touati has revived the scholarship in this sense (see references above). See also Elma Brenner, 'Recent Perspectives on Leprosy in Medieval Western Europe', *History Compass*, 8:5, 2010, 388-406. Mary Douglas' article on the correlative exclusion strategies of witches and the leprous in the Middle Ages evidences an extreme view on the extent of both, which scholarship has since revised. See Mary Douglas, 'Witchcraft and Leprosy: Two Strategies of Exclusion', in *Man, New Series*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (1991), 723-36.

[106] There are parallels between mysticism and madness. Several medieval mystics were labelled as insane by their hagiographers. Ida of Louvain covered the hand of her priest with kisses when he held the host. The priest accused her of insanity. Ida of Léau showed similar Eucharistic madness – her hagiographer called her behaviour insane. Philip of Clairvaux called Elizabeth of Spalbeck's ecstasies *imbecillitas*. See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 389, n. 59. These behaviours of 'unreason', prompting exclusion from societal norms, signify the pattern of exclusion and reintegration that Foucault proposes. On interpreting this mystical 'madness', the clergy are able to reassert their hegemonical boundaries by labelling behaviours as 'other' and thus dismissing their value in meaning.

Like the inclusion paradigm that Kempe seeks to orchestrate through her kissing of the leper women, she seeks here to remedy the torment that the devil inflicts upon the soul of this possessed woman. The ‘fowle & horibyl thowtys’ that overcome the woman indicate a disease of the mind; thoughts so unspeakable that they cannot be uttered, that separate her as a disordered aberration, unauthorised to be blessed or to worship God. Though her distress evokes Kempe’s postpartum psychosis in the early chapters of her *Boke* when she ‘lost reson & her wyttes a long tyme’ (2), the cause is antithetic: whilst Kempe was wracked with an implied sexual sin, this woman is ‘a mayde’. The woman’s frenzy is therefore a polar transformation from purity to possession, and Kempe’s labour as healer must be as bold as the metamorphosis is extreme. A synthesis of comfort and prayer follows, focused specifically on the construction of a protective field against the devil, and Kempe’s cure is successful once again. Her past experience of being out of her ‘mende’ has engendered an esoteric insight that enables a more directed strategy of prayer and discernment, as we saw in Chapter One. But it also enables an intuitive pain surrogacy born from this experience – unlike others, who have perhaps left the woman in exclusion, privy to her own distracted wits, Kempe is unafraid of the pain because the pain has been her own.

That Book II begins with the story of Kempe’s adult son, whose transgressions pose her problems as both a mother and a minister, elevates the episode as a significant structural and symbolic step on her path towards becoming a holy physician. As Liz Herbert McAvoy suggests, the positioning of this episode in a key locus ‘evidences potentialities within a maternal subjectivity to offer support and authority to Margery’s chosen vocation as holy

woman of God'.[107] Beyond Kempe's maternity, though, the episode situates her at a life stage that is post-conversion, during her middle age, and when her spiritual maturation drives an inclination for the correction of sin and healing.[108] She is clear in her endeavour: to draw her son from the 'wretchyd & vnstabyl worlde', if 'hir power myth a teynyd þerto' (221); one of the expected roles of the mother in the Middle Ages, according to conduct book literature.[109] The semantic emphasis of *Kempe's* transformative power, as opposed to any divine intervention, serves to illustrate the authority with which she is now bestowed, a perception that is underscored by the 'many tymys' that she meets with him: a persistence that effects a temporary disintegration of the mother-son relationship. Her remedy for the errant son's immorality is that he should at least remain chaste until marriage. The penalty for not following this maternal-physic's advice requires Godly endorsement – if he fails to follow her prescription then she prays that God will 'chastise' him and 'ponysch' him for it (222). This threat of divine retribution, which positions Kempe once again as an efficacious intercessor, evokes a curse-like subtext and could be viewed, as McAvoy attests, 'as a holy mother …abusing her privileged power in a quasi-diabolical way'.[110] Barbara Newman regards the event as an invocation of 'the rhetoric of child sacrifice: so great is her devotion that she would sooner curse her own son with leprosy than risk the damnation of his soul'.[111] McAvoy

[107] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, p. 34.
[108] The beginning of Kempe's attempts to draw her son away from worldly matters (and before he goes overseas) is noted to occur soon after Kempe's conversion, so when she was in her early to mid forties: 'It befel sone aftyr þat þe creatur be-forn-wretyn had forsakyn þe occupasyon of þe worlde & was joynyd in hir mende to God as meche as frelte wolde suffyr', is immediately followed by 'The seyd creatur had a sone…whom sche desyrd to a drawyn owte of þe perellys of þis wretchyd & vnstabyl worlde' (221).
[109] For a useful discussion of the influence of conduct books and domestic ideals in Margery Kempe's *book*, see Hwanhee Park, 'Domestic Ideals and Devotional Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 1, 40, (2014), 1-19.
[110] McAvoy, *Authority*, p. 43.
[111] Newman, p. 92.

interrogates the episode by concluding that Kempe is, instead, 'mother as agent of redemption'.[112] I wish to suggest that this role as 'agent', or, to continue with the language of this study, surrogate, is predicated on Kempe's evolving skill in middle age as a healer of bodies and souls and her knowledge that, like the elderly, postpartum and leper women whom she has also brought to salvation, her power will be based upon God's ordination of her as his physician and *dowter*.

After his mother's sharp words of correction, the son travels overseas, where his profligate lifestyle precipitates his return:

> ... throw euyl entisyng of oþer personys & foly of hys owyn gouernawnce, he fel in-to þe synne of letchery. Sone aftyr hys colowr chawngyd, hys face wex ful of whelys & bloberys as it had ben a lepyr. Þan he cam hom a-geyn in-to Lynne to hys maistyr wyth whech he had ben dwelling be-for-tyme. Hys maistyr put hym owt of hys seruyse for no defawte he fond wyth hym, but perauentur supposyng he had ben a laȝer as it schewyd be hys visage (222).

The common conflation of lechery and leprosy here in the Middle Ages moves beyond phonetic similarity, indicating a cultural assimilation of the two. A medical diagnosis of leprosy is not mentioned, but rather, the suggestion is one of appearance; of representation. The son is 'as it had ben' a leper; the employer 'supposyng' leprosy from the outward facial evidence. As we have seen, the biblical word *sāra'ath* was used to describe a varied range of dermatological disorders with symptoms such as scaly, scabrous and raw skin – comparable to conditions such as favus, psoriasis and eczema.[113] But symptoms of other conditions such as veneral diseases could have also fallen under the term, evidencing the wide scope of afflictions about which the epithet of 'leprosy' may have encompassed.[114] The public shame of the leper's face is

[112] McAvoy, *Authority*, p. 43.
[113] See p. 278, n.75 of this chapter.
[114] See Rawcliffe, *Leprosy*, pp. 72-3. Also Demaitre, pp. 198-239.

emphasised by Jordanus de Turre, who describes 'the roundness of the eyeballs, which seem to be starting from their sockets, so that a leper's face is horrible to see; its natural expression being distorted, it is a terrible sight'.[115] Gilbertus Anglicus concurs, depicting the distortion of the eyes, 'rimmed with red', and 'striking horror into those who see them'.[116] It is little wonder that innovations like Jordanus' leprosy skin test, as we saw above, were necessary creations given the shameful blight that a 'leprosy' classification would spawn.

The common perception of the interrelation between leprosy and sexual incontinence would have clearly given the son's employer concerns on the basis of the disfigured man's moral conduct and its potential scourge on his business. Medical ideas had seemingly infiltrated vernacular medical texts, like those of Gilbertus Anglicus, who asserted that 'Lepers search for sexual pleasure more than usual and more than they should; they are ardent in the act, yet find themselves weaker than usual'.[117] Aretaeus of Cappadocia, the ancient Greek physician whose ideas were significant enough to be published in Latin in the sixteenth century, held that *elephantia* [a disfiguring form of leprosy] was also named *satyriasis* [male hypersexuality] because it was manifested by an 'insatiable and shameless lust for sexual intercourse'.[118] Hildegard of Bingen suggested that leprosy produced, 'from lust, broad-surfaced ulcers, like crusts, with red flesh underneath'.[119] And, of course, since menstruating women were considered impure, those men who lay with them were thereafter correspondingly unclean: Saint Jerome warned men who undertook such behaviours that their semen would be spoiled 'as it is said, so that from this

[115] From *Medieval Medicine*, p. 343.
[116] From *Medieval Medicine*, p. 341.
[117] From *Medieval Medicine*, p. 341.
[118] See Demaitre, p. 209.
[119] Ibid.

conception *leprosi* and *elephantiaci* would be born, and loathsome bodies of either sex'.[120] The theologian, Theodoret, bishop of Cyr, writing five hundred years later, regarded the consequences as dangerous for both men and their progeny: '[I]f a woman is called impure, the purpose is that no one will have intercourse with her. It is said, in fact, that a union of this kind results in injury and *lepra*'.[121] Such connections are likely to be established via Galenic theories of intercourse which were propagated by medieval writers like Constantine the African. Constantine writes that 'of those who have intercourse too often: not only does fluid proceed from the members, but vital spirits exit as well through the arteries along with semen, and for this reason it is no wonder that those who couple frequently are weakened. For when the body is drained of these two [namely, fluid and spirit] and only appetite and pleasure remain, the vital spirit is dissipated, and many have died because of this'.[122] Prolific sexual activity thus weakens the body so critically that, not only is one presumably more susceptible to afflictions such as leprosy, but the behaviour can be fatal. Debates about the origin of syphilis have, according to Rawcliffe, 'fostered a persistent belief that most so-called English 'lepers' were not only suffering from venereal disease but were invariably seen by their contemporaries as the personification of moral depravity'.[123]

It is easy to see, then, how Kempe's son and the 'whelys & bloberys' that cover his face, might be construed by the community at Lynn to which he returns, as a symbol of iniquity and shame. However, when he goes about the

[120] Demaitre, p. 168.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Trans. Faith Wallis from *Constantini Liber de coitu. El tratado de andrologia de Constantino el Africano*, ed. Enrique Montero Cartelle (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1983), pp. 76-184. From *Medieval Medicine*, p. 518.
[123] Rawcliffe also notes that sermons *ad status* preached to the young and to married couples often invoked the threat of leprosy as a means of regulating sexual conduct. From Rawcliffe, *Leprosy,* pp. 85-7.

town proclaiming ‘wher hym liked’ about the punishment from God that his mother, ‘as he supposyd’, brought about, certain neighbours interpret the event differently, preferring instead to accuse Kempe of evil wrongdoing.[124] Such local condemnation of Kempe’s ministering as wicked is not unfamiliar; defamatory hearsay was articulated by the Archbishop of York when he confronted her in his chapel at Cawood: ‘I am euyl enformyd of þe; I her seyn þu art a ryth wikked woman’ (125). And the York anchoress who had previously shown Kempe great kindness, subsequently ‘wolde not receyuen hir, for sche had herd telde so mech euyl telde of hir’ (119).[125] Despite this enmity, her spiritual progress is evident when, in the face of accusations that she had ‘takyn veniawns on hir owyn childe’ (222), she takes little heed, remaining resolute on the issue and insisting that her son comes to seek grace and forgiveness himself. Indeed, Olga Burakov Mongan has suggested that slander, synonymous with blasphemy in medieval culture, enables Kempe to achieve sanctification and ‘constitutes part of her highly affective *imitatio Christi*’.[126] What we witness emerging, then, is the steadfastness of Kempe’s conviction in her holy path and in her knowledge of God’s sacred backing of her doctoring decisions. For just as she displays a certainty of diagnosis in her prayer for the divine punishment of her aberrant son, so she reasons that that son, afflicted with facial lesions so

[124] It is interesting to note that the disease of leprosy forced a shift in diagnostic practices in the Middle Ages. Faith Wallis writes about the problems of applying Galenic theory to the reality of practice. Rather than approaching the affliction in terms of the body’s fluidity, doctors had to treat leprosy as a specific entity separate from the patient. See *Medieval Medicine,* p. 339. The evolution of this idea in medieval society would suggest that it was easier to ascribe a visually horrifying disease such as leprosy to an external cause; namely, a curse.
[125] For an examination of the legal implications of defamation in Kempe’s *Boke*, see Brian VanGinhoven, ‘Margery Kempe and the Legal Status of Defamation’, *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 40: 1 (2014), 20-43.
[126] Olga Burakov Mongan, ‘Slander in *The Book of Margery Kempe*’, p. 36.

abhorrent that they effect his instant dismissal from employment, should be allowed to return to her in an independent desire for a healing salvation.[127]

Medieval treatments for leprosy were organised around the central topos that it was, in fact, an incurable disease. As Demaitre has argued, it was often the *failure* of treatments that led to the formal diagnosis of leprosy. Writers such as Aretaeus affirmed this by suggesting that leprosy entailed an 'inevitable demise', and Jacques de Vitry admitted a lack of omnipotence to his audience in a leprosarium chapel when stating that 'we cannot, or we do not want to, or we do not know how to heal your illness'.[128] Notwithstanding this reservation, treatment was divided into four linear steps. First, was regimen (control of diet; sexual abstinence to include the possibility of castration); the second, evacuation (purging humours via phlebotomy, medicines and baths); the third was rectification (the use of antidotes to rectify damage, such as seawater, gold, snake meat and blood); and finally, palliation (reserved for the officially 'leprous' and to include ointments, cosmetics and the surgical removal of nodules, to improve disfigurement).[129] The *Trotula* texts offer several suggestions for ointment recipes that are 'good for suppressing pustules in lepers', to include ingredients such as white lead, mastic and frankincense. The compound medicines *Hieralogodion* and *Theriac* are also recommended for improving leprous lesions.[130] Recent archaeological work, however, shows little

[127] The son's employment is likely to have been an apprenticeship, as sons of bourgeois families often left home during their teens. His leprous appearance would have suggested a 'lack of control' – a crucial element of the apprentice's transition to adulthood. Apprenticeship contracts also stipulated that the youth be 'without deformities'. See Daniel F. Pigg, 'Margery Kempe and her Son: Representing the Discourse of Family', in Classen, *Childhood in the Middle Ages Childhood in the Middle Ages: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005) pp. 329-339, especially p. 336. Kempe would have been aware of the story of Birgitta of Sweden's prodigal son, Karl, whose soul she saved through her tears. See Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, pp. 177-9.
[128] Demaitre, p. 244-6.
[129] For a detailed explanation of these stages, see Demaitre, pp. 258-77.
[130] See 'On Treatments for Women', pp. 134-5 and 'On Women's Cosmetics', pp. 182-3 in *The Trotula*. On *Hieralogodian*, see 'Compound Medicines in the *Trotula* Ensemble', pp. 195-6, and on *Theriac*, see 'Compound Medicines in the *Trotula* Ensemble', pp. 200-1, in *The Trotula*.

skeletal evidence for radical medical intervention, and records show that few hospitals employed doctors or physicians. The regimes at the hospitals appeared to have been based on diet, bed rest, frequent washing and 'spiritual intensive care'. To enter a hospital in fact involved a 'quasi-monastic life of obedience, chastity and humility'.[131]

The implication of women in medicine for the leprous is made explicit by Hildegard of Bingen, whose recommendation of menstrual blood as a curative marks a point of tension when considered alongside the notion of menstruating females as leprosy-causing, as we have seen: 'If a person becomes leprous from lust or intemperance, he should cook agrimony, and a third part hyssop, and twice as much asarum as there is of the other two in a cauldron. He should make a bath from these, and mix in menstrual blood, as much as he can get, and get into the bath'.[132] That menstrual blood – a site of toxicity and danger when combined with sexual activity – is here employed as a healing agent, recalls the multivalency of blood in the medieval world that was examined in the preceding chapter, and not least Bildhauer's observation that more often than not blood is the 'answer'.[133] When we further consider that in the thirteenth-century *Queste del saint graal*, the virgin sister of the grail knight, Perceval, allows her blood to be drained to cure a leprous lady (the sister's virginity being

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Green does, however, argue that the *Trotula* translations were mostly read by men and that most women would lack the education to use them. See the Introduction to this study, and, for example, Green, 'Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe', in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West*, pp. 39-78. Carmen Caballero-Navas takes a more optimistic view of female healthcare, in 'The Care of Women's Health and Beauty: an Experience Shared by Medieval Jewish and Christian Women', *Journal of Medieval History*, 34 (2008), 105-228.

[131] Christopher Catling, 'The Archaeology of Leprosy and the Black Death', in *Current Archaeology*, 236 (2009), 22-29. At the cemetery of the Hospital of St. James and St. Mary Magdalene, Chichester, just one foot amputation and some splinted bone fractures were excavated recently. See Catling, pp. 25-6.

[132] Hildegard von Bingen, *Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing*, p. 61. Hildegard also recommends freshly drained horse blood for those who have contracted leprosy from anger. The blood is first boiled with water, to 'remove the powers', and then the afflicted should sit 'up to his throat' in the bath (p. 212).

[133] Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, p. 23.

imperative for the efficacy of the cure), the qualitative content of blood as pure, is crucial.[134] As has already been discussed, medieval attitudes to blood situate it as at times polluting and at other times as imbued with fertility and healing power. That Kempe has neither virgin nor menstrual blood at this menopausal stage of her life is in many ways fitting for this medieval model where blood is conceived as fluid and adaptive. I would suggest, therefore, that in *losing blood,* as a prior subject of female codification, Kempe is freer to act as a healer of affliction and to gain agency through the shaking-off of those shackles that imbue female blood as powerfully and pejoratively loaded.

When, therefore, at last, the son fails to locate another remedy [*bote*] for his sickness, his homecoming is marked by the trauma of his infirmity and the faith that his mother will be efficacious as his healer:

> So at last, whan he sey non oþer bote, he cam to hys modyr, telling hir of hys mysgouernawns, promittyng he xulde ben obedient to God & to hir & to a-mende hys defawte thorw þe help of God echewyng al mysgouernawns fro þat tyme for-ward vp-on hys power. He preyid hys modyr of hir blissyng, & specialy he preyd hir to prey for hym þat owr Lord of hys hy mercy wolde forȝeuyn hym þat he had trespasyd & takyn a-wey þat gret sekenes for whech men fleddyn hys company & hys felaschep as for a lepyr. For he supposyd be hir preyerys owr Lord sent hym þat ponischyng, & þerfor he trustyd be hir preyerys to be deliueryd þer-of ȝyf sche wolde of hir charite preyin for hym (222-3).

Just as the postpartum woman is appeased by Kempe's blessed presence, so her son now seeks his mother's prayer-ful healing in a moment of confession and desperation that situates her in a quasi-priestly role. His sickness, made more acute by the public revulsion that excludes him from company and from

[134] See Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero*, pp. 2-3 and p. 120, n.2, for further reading. McCracken notes that Hartman von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich* is probably the best known literary treatment of the blood cure for leprosy. See Chapter Three of the present study for a survey of meanings of blood in the Middle Ages. See also the medieval poem *Amis and Amiloun*, where Amiloun contracts leprosy but is healed by an angelic vision which tells him that the cure is the blood of his brother's children. *Amis and Amiloun*, ed. M. Leach, EETS O.S. 203 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937, 2001 reprint).

employment, represents for him both the evidence and the cure, as his mother's power as a divine physician must be held in faith if his future is to be salvaged. Kempe willingly intervenes, now compassionate towards the pain of her progeny, and activates the pain surrogate hermeneutic that is at her ready disposal:

> Þan sche, hauyng trust of hys a-mendyng & compassyon of hys infirmyte, wyth scharp wordys of correpcyon promysyd to fulfillyn hys entent ȝyf God wolde grawntyn it. Whan sche cam to hir meditacyon, not forȝetyng þe frute of hir wombe, [sche] askyd forȝeuenes of hys synne & relesyng of þe sekenes þat owr Lord had ȝouyn hym ȝyf it wer hys plesawns & profite to hys sowle. So longe sche preyid þat he was clene delyueryd of þe sekenes and leuyd many ȝerys aftyr... (223).

Kempe's cure is twofold as she utilises the 'sharp words' befitting for a chastising parent and the accelerated, remedial prayer that, in its persistence and efficacy, resolves the affliction and sees the son delivered to purity and to health. This eventual accedence to coming to her son's aid not only evidences the necessity for her pain surrogacy to be predicated upon a palpable compassion for the suffering of the 'other', but also the caveat that it is God's will that provides the authority for the cure.[135] Despite her non-reproductive status now that she is post-conversion and operating a marriage of chastity, she facilitates a powerful rebirth of the 'frute of hir wombe' by offering herself as a maternal intercessor, capable of healing pain providing that God wishes for that pain to be alleviated.[136] That rebirth is compounded when the son marries and fathers a child – the only grandchild that Kempe mentions in her text – thus

[135] Kempe's stance is paralleled by Hildegard of Bingen, who, when advising on a treatment for leprosy, attests that her recipe for an ointment will heal the affliction, 'unless God does not wish it'. Hildegard von Bingen, *Physica*, p. 108.

[136] Karen A. Winstead's short exegesis of this episode emphasises the strategic parallelism between the openings of Books I and II. Where Christ is instrumental in Kempe's recovery and conversion at the start of Book I, so she 'plays the role *vis à vis* her son' at the start of Book II. Winstead views Kempe's actions as assuming Christ's role, which I would suggest is a further example of her surrogacy of Godly pursuits. Winstead, 'The Conversion of Margery Kempe's Son', in *English Language Notes*, 32 (1994), 9-13.

coming full circle from his mother's original prescription that he should be chaste until marriage.[137] In fulfilling the Christian edict of procreative marriage, he re-produces Kempe's own fecundity in a multipliable paradigm. For, in the light of the evidence that this son is, in fact, the first amenuensis of Kempe's *Boke*, and therefore implicated in the production of a holy endeavour of his own, the transition from painful 'leprosy' to edified surrogate for his mother's dictation constructs a complex layering of healing and productivity that is facilitated by Kempe's *phisik*.[138]

She tends her son's body and his soul in a single action, much like the Galenic medicine which takes a holistic view of the ebb and flow of human flux. And that action, replete with deific validation, is finally complete when, several years hence, the son returns to Lynn once again, 'al chongyd in hys aray & hys condicyonis' (223). His gratitude for his mother's intervention is unwavering, and his spiritual trajectory apparent – Kempe notices how 'sadde' he appears, and how 'reuerent to-owr-Lord-ward' (224). Now that Kempe is herself more advanced in middle years, and likely to be in or beyond the menopausal phase, she finds it timely to disclose to him her own revelatory experience; to teach him as mother to child, but also as holy-physic to patient: 'sche openyd hir hert to hym, schewyng hym & enformyng how owr Lord had drawyn hir thorw hys mercy & be what menys, also how meche grace he had schewyd for hir, þe whech he seyd he was vnworthy to heryn' (224). As a final therapy, Kempe's

[137] *BMK*, p. 223.
[138] On the evidence for Kempe's son as scribe, see the Introduction to this study. Also, Sobecki, '"The writyng of this tretys:"', and McAvoy, *Authority*, p. 33, n.20. Samuel Fanous argues that the son is the likely, if 'singularly ill-trained putative writer', in 'Measuring the Pilgrim's Progress: Internal Emphases in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, pp. 157-74 (p. 158). See also Nicholas Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', esp. pp. 398-9. Watson argues that circumstantial evidence, along with the first draft of the book being written using an unfamiliar spelling system that conflated English and German, and the fact that the son and scribe died within the same year (sometime around 1431), evidences this son as Kempe's first scribe. Ruth Evans concurs with this judgement in 'The *Book of Margery Kempe*', p. 511.

testimony propels the son towards a literally holy path. He makes pilgrimages in his mother's footsteps to Rome and beyond, signifying a re-production of spiritual growth and progression, and symbolising Kempe's evolving status as a medicating minister. Daniel F. Pigg regards the episode as a structural mechanism for Kempe to re-tell her own experiences, and for her son to relive those experiences, in a 'triumph of narrative in which her participation just as in the Passion sequence of Book One is significant'.[139] Karen Winstead, however, suggests that 'the conversion of Margery Kempe's son has none of the extreme consequences of Margery's own conversion'.[140] On the contrary, I would argue that, given the impact of the *Boke's* religious, historical and literary ramifications (and notwithstanding its subsequent re-drafting), the son's promotion to witness and scribe-recorder of Kempe's revelations locates the event as a crucial facet in the text's testimony to salvation and to production. This scribal intercession symbolises a generative cycle whereby the transgression-conversion-surrogate template is duplicated from mother to son in a fitting moment of textual as well as spiritual reproduction. On the son's final return to Lynn from Danzig, Kempe is approximately fifty-eight years old, and thus her ageing, healing, and the 'writing' of the first draft, converge.[141]

Transitional Pain: From Wife to Widow

When Kempe's husband, John, falls down the stairs and sustains life-threatening injuries to his head, which was 'greuowsly brokyn & bresyd', the

[139] Pigg, p. 338.
[140] Winstead, p. 11.
[141] Hope Emily Allen suggests the year of the son's death to be in 1431 (*BMK*, p. *l*), and Sebastian Sobecki has discovered a letter prepared in Danzig for one John Kempe on 12th June 1431, to take leave to help recover debts from England. This enables us to fairly accurately date Margery Kempe's age at this point. See Sebastian Sobecki, '"The writyng of this tretys:"', pp.5-6.

period of his sickness is so extended that ‘men wend þat he xulde a be deed’ (179). In a reciprocal retribution, the neighbours who discover John ‘half on lyfe’ and covered in blood, demand that Kempe should be hanged if he dies; for she has reneged her wifely duties because she has not ‘kept hym’ (179) and should therefore be sent to death with the man to whom she is matrimonially tied. Such a shared termimus – or ‘death surrogacy’, the notion of which will be developed later – is testament not only to the social expectation that a wife must care for her husband without fail, but also that her life holds an interchangeability with his to the ultimate degree. Kempe’s role as healer in this episode, then, not only involves John’s palliative care over many years, but represents an urgent moment whereby she must save herself as well as her patient. She knows only too well the heavy weight of community and clerical challenge: threats to her life have been made with terrifying reality previously in her *Boke*.[142] Therefore, the nursing of her now-elderly husband affords her an opportunity to negotiate her life in the wake of his, and to find hope within the pain, on the cusp of liberating widowhood.

Kempe expounds carefully to her audience the rationale behind her absence from the home in which John was injured; an extended justification which is a further indication of the social pressure which she necessarily manoeuvres. Their prior vow of chastity has precipitated a physical separation – to ‘enchewyn alle perellys þei dwellyd & soiowryd in diuers placys wher no

[142] At Canterbury, Kempe is accused of Lollardy by the monks there, who cry out, ‘Þow xalt be brent, fals lollare. Her is a cartful of thornys redy for þe & a tonne to bren þe wyth’. The people from the town echo these sentiments without hesitation, crying, ‘Tak & bren hir’. Ironically, it is her husband’s protection that she requires, wondering where he had gone. With the help of two young men, she locates John at their hostel, where she finds safety under his spousal defence (28-9). For a discussion of this event, see Tara Williams, ‘“As thu wer a wedow”: Margery Kempe’s Wifehood and Widowhood’, *Exemplaria*, 21: 4 (2009), 345-62, p. 357. In Chapter 53, Kempe is arrested by two yeomen under the accusation of Lollardy once more. As she is escorted through Hessle, men and women come out on the streets – the women still holding their ‘rokkys’ [distaffs] from spinning, indicating the haste with which they rush out to condemn Kempe – and cry, ‘Brennyth þis fals heretyk’ (129).

suspicyon xulde ben had of her incontinens' – because an initial period of cohabitation had resulted in slanderous gossip about their supposed infraction of the vow (179). She clarifies a further reason for her geographical remove from her husband, and that is '& also þat sche xulde not be lettyd fro hir contemplacyon' (180). This personal motive is somewhat at odds with the socio-contractual complexities that she takes several lines to exemplify, evidencing an understandable desire to return some of the blame back to the community from which it emanates, and to downplay the more self-centred motivation of uninterrupted contemplation. As we saw in the second chapter of this study, typical marriage practices are not well disposed towards the singularly pious life, and Kempe now finds herself at a dangerous impasse whereby her chosen route of avowal proves itself at a site of tension with the social obligations that it has compromised. It is repeated, in terrifying emphasis, 'þe pepil seyd, ȝyf he deyid, it was worthy þat sche xulde answeryn for hys deth' (180).

The public outcry at Kempe's perceived repudiation of her wifely duties stems from a vast discourse about the *mulier bona* – or, its inversion, the wicked wife – in the Middle Ages.[143] As Sue Niebrzydowski notes in her illuminating study of medieval wives, '[c]anon and secular law, the marriage liturgy, medical treatises on the female body, sermons, manuals of spiritual instruction, biblical paradigms, conduct books and misogamous writings all endeavour to define and regulate being a wife'.[144] In *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, Jankyn reads nightly from his book of 'wikked wyves', whose

[143] For a discussion of wifely models in Kempe's book, see Hwanhee Park, 'Domestic Ideals and Devotional Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', esp. pp. 2-6.
[144] Sue Niebrzydowski, *Bonoure and Buxom*, pp. 13-4. For detail about conduct literature for wives, see pp. 179-87. See also Anna Dronzek, 'Gender Roles and the Marriage Market in Fifteenth-Century England: Ideals and Practices', in *Love, Marriage, and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Isabel Davis, Miriam Müller, and Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 63-76, at p. 70.

selection of misogynistic stories about non-virtuous wives as opposed to the 'goode wyves in the Bible' sends Alisoun into a paroxysm of rage. After lambasting her husband, she tears pages from the book and eventually (after sustaining a near-fatal retributional blow to the head) effects the total annihilation of this libelous text by 'ma[king] hym brenne his book anon right tho'.[145] Though the male authority in marriage that is prescribed by conduct literature is perpetuated by Jankyn's act of domestic violence, Alisoun's destruction of the book about which she is so affronted and by which her husband's habits are governed, is a rare challenge to the texual construction of wifehood that resists the individuation that women like Margery Kempe strove to forge. Furthermore, the textual construction of Alisoun and Jankyn themselves underscores a literary multilayering which reveals Kempe's neighbours' threats as products of a culturally-enforced code of marital observance.

Kempe's proficiency as a physician is now required, therefore, in order to recover two lives. When Kempe confesses her concern to God that this nursing devotion to John will detract her energies from prayer and contemplation, she is assured of the surrogacy of the endeavour, as her tending to John's pain will be for the love of God:

> Dowtyr, þu xalt haue þi bone, for he xal leuyn & I haue wrowt a gret myrakyl for þe þat he was not ded. And I bydde þe take hym hom & kepe hym *for my lofe*… þu xalt haue as meche mede for to kepyn hym & helpyn hym in hys need at hom as ȝyf þu wer in chirche to makyn þi preyerys' (my emphasis, 180).

The holy value of nursing her husband in his infirmity is thus reinforced by its status of divine labour, upholding the Augustinian rule that 'marriage provides a natural society between the sexes that is not dissolved by sterility or when the

[145] 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue' (ll. 685-816), in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 114-6.

couple is past their reproductive years'.[146] Christ repeats that Kempe's pledge will hypostatize 'þe lofe of me', and situates her forthcoming sacrifice as a correlative gift to John in humble gratitude for his gift to her of chastity and acceptance:

> … for he hath sumtyme fulfillyd þi wil & my wil boþe and he hath mad þi body fre to me þat þu xuldist seruyn me & leuyn chast & clene, and þerfor I wil þat þu be fre to helpyn hym at hys nede in my name (180).

Though John's life has been saved, his condition is grim and Kempe's nursing task is correspondingly arduous. The pain that she experienced over the course of her sexualised marriage, as has already been explored in this study, was alleviated by John's eventual accedence to a vow of chastity. Now, his pain must be adopted by Kempe in return as she substitutes his suffering for her own and reproduces the painful cycle of marital reciprocity and debt that she must withstand until the closure of that marriage in death. Unlike the leper women, whose affliction she embraced in an active identification with other holy women who sought similar encounters, this undertaking is conceptualised as a punishment, albeit one which she gladly accepts as spiritual profit. She feels the heavy penalty of her marriage, both in the returned favour of John's vow of chastity and in the recollection of that fleshly lust which precipitated the vow in the first place:

> Þan sche toke hom hir husbond to hir & kept hym ȝerys aftyr as long as he leuyd & had ful mech labowr wyth hym, for in hys last days he turnyd childisch a-ȝen & lakkyd reson þat he cowd not don hys owyn esement to gon to a sege, er ellys he wolde not, but as a childe voydyd his natural digestyon in hys lynyn clothys þer he sat be þe fyre er at þe tabil, wheþyr it wer, he wolde sparyn no place. And þerfor was hir labowr meche þe mor in waschyng & wryngyng & hir costage in fyryng & lettyd hir ful meche fro hir contemplacyon þat many tymys sche xuld an yrkyd hir

[146] Augustine stipulates that even after a vow of chastity, a dutiful tie between the couple remains: 'the order of charity still flourishes between husband and wife'. See Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 47.

> labowr saf sche bethowt hir how sche in hir ȝong age had ful many delectabyl thowtys, fleschly lustys, & inordinate louys to hys persone. & þerfor sche was glad to be ponischyd wyth þe same persone & toke it mech þe mor esily & seruyd hym & helpyd hym, as hir thowt, as sche wolde a don Crist hym-self (180-1).

In an account that is punctuated much more with the details of domestic work than her narrative usually allows, Kempe juxtaposes fetching and carrying, washing and cleaning, with the anamnestic horror of the sexuality of her younger years. She positions the mundanity of her carer's role not only as suitable penance for her lustful marriage but as a symbol of the menial female-centric housework that she, as a bourgeois citizen and emerging holy woman of God, has hitherto escaped. Beyond the practicalities of conducting her labours, John's condition worsens and his mental deterioration and digestive incontinence manifest as symptoms of a growing 'childisch[ness]': a penitential act of therapy for Kempe, indeed.

The good wife was expected to perform several services within the household, including 'car[ing] for the sick', as David Herlihy has documented.[147] For Felicity Riddy, 'domesticity is a means of identifying the good woman'.[148] Deborah Youngs also notes how 'wives were expected to look after elderly or infirm husbands'.[149] The poet Marbode, bishop of Rennes, wrote in the late eleventh century 'For who would assume the care of a nurse, if not a woman? Without her no one born could prolong his life'.[150] A medieval lyric entitled, 'To unpraise women it were a shame', similarly extols the virtues of the dutiful wife: 'A woman is a worthy wyght, / she seruyth a man both daye and nyght, / therto

[147] David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 116.
[148] Felicity Riddy, '"Burgeis" domesticity in late-medieval England', in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp.259-76, (p.15).
[149] Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe c.1300 – c.1500*, p.182.
[150] From Herlihy, p. 116.

she puttyth all her mygth, / And yet she hathe bot care and woo'.[151] The latter example illustrates what Niebrzydowski sees as a movement towards acknowledging wives' excellence in nursing, healing, and running households.[152] However, it also exemplifies a perpetuality – 'both daye and nyght' – of the wife's duty to her huband and the relentlessness of that endeavour in spite of the woman's own tribulations. This might have been exacerbated by the large age gaps that were sometimes customary in medieval marriages, implying that wives were often carers for their more aged spouses.[153]

Perhaps Niebrzydowski is somewhat lenient when she remarks that Kempe 'remained John's wife, in all ways except sexual, until his death in c.1431'.[154] As Sarah Salih has suggested, Kempe is interested only in housewifery, including the care of her infirm husband, 'when it can be shown to have spiritual significance'.[155] And Mary C. Erler argues that the plethora of Margery's local, instructional visits make use of the domestic, family template to construct a 'broadened definition of the intimate connection provided by family'.[156] We have seen the domestic removal that Kempe engineers in order to secure a modified wifehood of chastity and contemplation, and how that domestic reunion is effected only via social pressure and God's assurance of its

[151] IMEV 3782. Lyric no. 34, in *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Robbins, p. 31. Cited from Niebrzydowski, *Bonoure and Buxum*, p. 22.
[152] Ibid.
[153] 'The large age difference between husband and wife, which had increased since probably the twelfth century, placed the mother midway between the generations of fathers and children'. Herlihy, p. 129. However, Herlihy is an expert on Italy, and it has been argued that in England, in towns especially, couples were often quite close in age. For an alternative view, see, for example, R. Smith, 'Geographical Diversity in Resort to Marriage in Late Medieval Europe', in P.J.P. Goldberg, ed., *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in Medieval English Society, 1200-1500* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 27-46.
[154] Niebryzdowski, *Bonoure and Buxum*, p. 129.
[155] Sarah Salih, 'At home; out of the house', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. 124-40, at p. 124.
[156] Mary C. Erler, 'Home Visits: Mary, Elizabeth, Margery Kempe and the feast of the Visitation', in *Medieval Domesticity*, pp. 274-5.

holy value. Shortly after she narrates her marriage to the Godhead in Rome in Chapter thirty-five, Kempe recounts a revelation that in effect constructs the replacement of John for Christ in the marriage bed and which positions the Christic body as her new spouse, using semiotics of physical conjugality:

> For it is conuenyent þe wyf to be homly wyth hir husbond... Ryght so mot it be twyx þe & me, for I take non hed what þu hast be but what þu woldist be. And oftyntymes haue I telde þe þat I haue clene foȝoue þe alle thy synnes. Þerfor most I nedys be homly wyth þe & lyn in þi bed wyth þe. Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, & þu mayst boldly, whan þu art in þi bed, take me to þe as for þi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, & as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be louyd as a sone schuld be louyd wyth þe modyr & wil þat þu loue me, dowtyr, as a *good [wife]* owyth to loue hir husbonde. & þerfor þu mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi sowle & kyssen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete as sweetly as thow wylt (my emphasis, 90).

Often cited as an example of the Christic eroticism desired by female mystics in their quest for spiritual ecstacy, I wish instead to read this passage in the light of its significance as a hypostatization of Kempe's conceptual manipulation of her status as wife, and the selfhood that is therein constructed. For now that she has achieved the removal of John's spousal body from the marriage bed in a new phase of spiritual wedlock, he is replaced in that same bed by her divine spouse, whose language of the 'homly' intertwines a mystical encounter with a conflation of various familial bonds. Here, Kempe is a wife, a mother and a daughter to Christ, evidencing what Barbara Newman terms the 'incest taboo' of the Holy Family, where mother-bride and father-husband become amalgamated in late medieval iconography, to fantastical ends.[157] Kempe thus imagines herself as part of that holy family in an ontological leap, but also as a corporeal 'good wife', lying with Christ in intimate embrace and replacing in her marriage bed one husband for another.

[157] See Barbara Newman, 'Intimate Pieties: Holy Trinity and Holy Family in the late Middle Ages', *Religion and Literature*, 31, 1 (1999), 77-101, especially pp. 78-80.

To return to Kempe's nursing of the infirm John, and in the spirit of the present focus on her surrogate and substitutional strategies of production during her post-reproductive years, it is worthwhile to consider this passage alongside a much later recollection, in Chapter eighty-four. Here, like God's assurance in Chapter seventy-six that her care of John is directly substitutional for the love of God, her heavenly rewards for that same service are of equal measure to those that she could enact towards Christ's own body:

> And also, dowtyr, whan þu dost any seruyse to þe & to þin husbond in mete or drynke er any oþer thyng þat is nedful to ȝow, to þi gostly fadirs, er to any oþer þat þu receyuyst in my name, þu xalt han þe same mede in Heuyn as thow þu dedist it to myn owyn persone er to my blissyd Modyr, & I xal thankyn þe þerfor (203).

Thus we witness first the replacement of John for Christ, and then of Christ for John, in a placing and re-placing of the husband-subject according to physical need and spiritual necessity. Margery Kempe's wifeliness, therefore, is predicated on divine ordination and not on the edicts of the conduct book or the socio-communal machine. Though Christ has replaced John in the marriage bed, John is now replaced into her care, in God's place. Kempe performs her duties as physician and palliative care-giver with the same adaptability in wifehood with which she approaches the other female-centric roles that she simultaneously embraces and rejects, and which enable her trajectory towards eschatological perfection.

That John is thought to have died in the summer or early autumn of 1431, when Kempe was approximately fifty-eight years old, and that she mentions caring for him for 'ȝerys aftyr as long as he leuyd' (180-1), indicates that these long years of nursing corresponded with her menopausal and post-

menopausal life stages.[158] The pain that she is 'ponischyd wyth' in this protracted task, bears fruit, in the re-productive patterns that we saw emerging in Chapter Three of this study, and in Christ's words that her *phisik* is 'in [his] name' (180). The most fruitful aspect of this palliative sacrifice, however, is the gift of widowhood that is born from John's death; a dichotomous event that brings to a close a seemingly companionate marriage and yet heralds a new – and, we assume, silently longed-for – phase in Kempe's life journey.

Widowhood is a state for which Kempe has been preparing, and has been prepared for, over many years of contemplation. She is told by God that 'þe state of maydenhode be mor parfyte & mor holy þan þe state of wedewhode, & þe state of wedewhode mor parfyte þan þe state of wedlake' (49), establishing the transition from wife to widow as unambiguously advantageous. Widows were accorded a measure of legal independence on a par with men in private law; a connection that is striking in the light of the 'making male' of menopause, as we have seen. Several life options were available to widows, including continuing husbands' commercial enterprises, owning property, or becoming a vowess (a state that Margery Kempe never achieved).[159] In fact, Kempe has been suspended in an existence of quasi-widowhood for some time, despite Augustine's edict that marital dissolution is an impossibility: Christ tells her that 'þu hast þi wil of chastite as þu wer a

[158] Hope Emily Allen notes that since Kempe's daughter-in-law spent eighteen months of widowhood in Lynn, and embarked from Ipswich for her return to Germany in April 1433, the son and father must have died in the second half of 1431. See *BMK*, p. 342, n.225/13-4.
[159] See Barbara Hanawalt, 'Widows', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, pp. 58-69. Corinne Saunders, writing about female power in Romance literature, notes how the widow's status 'of mature independence is consistently crucial'. In 'Middle Age in Romance? Magic, Enchantment and Female Power', in *Middle Aged Women in the Middle Ages*, p. 39. See also Joel Rosenthal, 'Other Victims: Peeresses as War Widows, 1450–1500', in *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe*, ed. Louise Mirrer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 131–52, and 'Fifteenth-Century Widows and Widowhood: Bereavement, Reintegration, and Life Choices', in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 1993), pp. 33–58. Also Marie-Françoise Alamichel, *Widows in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Britain* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

wedow, thyn husbond leuyng in good hele' (161). This impalpable, or surrogate, widowhood, with all its hopeful essence, is no substitute, however, for the concrete state in which she now rests, as liberated relict, finally free to forge a singularly spiritual career and to return Christ, for the final time, to the marital bedchamber. John's demise is reiterated in Book II, when his death is described as following shortly after the son whose transfiguration formed a crucial component in Kempe's healing chronicle: 'In schort tyme aftyr, þe fadyr of þe sayd persone folowyd þe sone þe wey whech euery man must gon' (225).

Tara Williams has suggested that Kempe plays upon ill-defined states of wife and widow in her *boke* 'interlac[ing] the two conditions'; a strategy that is enhanced by the non-chronological temporality of the narrative.[160] John's death, mentioned twice (in Chapter seventy-six of Book I, and Chapter two of Book II), denotes a 'textual resurrection' that illustrates Kempe's strategy, Williams argues, to 'leverage the benefits of each [wife and widow] more directly'.[161] Yet whilst Williams extracts several examples from the *Boke* that usefully evidence Kempe's enacting of a quasi-widowhood during John's lifetime, she does not wholly acknowledge the very significant *fact* of John's death as heralding a literal widowhood, and how that incontestable fact of widowhood is a turning point in Kempe's religious career. Her argument rests to some extent on the understanding that Kempe is controller and manipulator of her own textual destiny, much like Nicholas Watson, who contests the view of John Hirsh and argues for Kempe's authorial control, as does Lynn Staley who regards the scribe as a 'trope' to elevate Kempe's authority.[162] Whilst the complexities of the

[160] Tara Williams, 'As thu wer a wedow', p. 352.
[161] Ibid., p. 353.
[162] Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*', especially pp. 397-400. Lynn Staley, 'The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe'.

narrative temporality and agency of the *Boke* are subjects that must be considered when determining the construction of selfhood in the text (a significant thread of this study), I would argue that this episode transcends such considerations because my present concern is the *life* of Margery Kempe and the *fact* of her widowhood. As Liz Herbert McAvoy suggests, the *boke* is 'based on the patterns laid down by her own body and its lived experience'.[163] The life of *þis creatur*, then, must remain primary to its textual progeny, and her widowhood as a bona fide, catalytic event.

With this in mind, the deaths of Kempe's husband and son in quick succession create not only her transformation to the more 'parfyte' state of widowhood and spiritual elevation, but also signal the practical corollary of the removal of domestic and family constraints, heightening her spiritual freedom yet more. Immediately after the written confirmation of John's death, it is noted that 'Than leuyd stille þe modyr of þe sayd persone, of whom þis tretys specyaly makyth mencyon' (225). Apart from the daughter-in-law who remains with Kempe for eighteen months ('sche þat was hys wife, a Dewche woman', 225), there is no mention of any other offspring or extended family who might influence her future path.[164] Kempe is now situated in isolation – it is she alone who 'leuyd stille' – she is the final legacy of a family that has disappeared, at least from the text. Widowhood, therefore, symbolises Kempe's own healing as she is cured of the marriage that represented a persistent barrier to the life for which she strove. Relieved of the pain of John's punitive care and of the pain of the marital state, the paradox of the husband's death for the wife's restoration becomes a telling metaphor for the reproductive 'death' that Kempe

[163] McAvoy, 'An awngel al clothyd in white', p. 105.
[164] We know of Kempe's granddaughter, but she still resides in 'Pruce' with the friends of her daughter-in-law (*BMK*, p. 225).

experienced in order to re-produce as a surrogate healer of pain. Having practised her medicine in a devotional employment that saw her willing receipt of others' earthly pain, she is now able to focus on the ultimate pain of Christ's Passion, and of the sins of the world, for which she has already been appointed as adoptive intercessor.[165]

As Christ informs Kempe, 'forbearing' (or forgoing) him constructs a route towards pain, whilst joy is borne from *feeling* him ('wetyn what peyn it is for to forbere me, & how swet it is for to fele me' [205]); a potential danger that is reinforced in striking emphasis of the connection: 'And þu maist not, dowtyr, forberyn me oo day wyth-owtyn gret peyn' (205).[166] The solution – or remedy – for Kempe's own pain, therefore, is a perpetual state of oneness, or *feeling*, of God, like the homeliness which she experiences in the marital bed with the bridegroom Christ, and which, in earthly widowhood, she can now experience fully. This totality of widowhood, bypassed in Williams' examination, is reminiscent of the oneing described by Julian of Norwich in her *Showings*, where in one example, a vision of Christ's Passion brings such a sharing of pain that she feels they are as one: 'Here I sawe a grete aninge [oneing] betwyx Criste and us. For whan he was in paine, we ware in paine, and alle creatures that might suffer paine sufferde with him'.[167] For Julian, the passage towards a splicing with the Divine is a pain surrogacy that effectively removes the borders

[165] Kempe asks God to forgive the sins of mankind on several occasions, placing her own need second to the more spiritually pressing issue of worldly damnation. For example, 'Sche seyd, "I aske ryth nowt Lord, but þat þu mayst wel ȝeuyn me, & þat is mercy whech I aske for þe pepil synnys. Þu seyst oftyn-tymes in þe ȝer to me þat þu hast forȝouyn me my synnes. Þerfor I aske now mercy for þe synne of þe pepil, as I wolde don for myn owyn, for, Lord, þu art alle charite, & charite browt þe in-to þis wretchyd worlde & cawsyd þe to suffyr ful harde peynys for owr synnys..."' (141). Further instances of this spiritual intercession can be located on pp. 20, 48, 140, 142, 204, 208, 251.

[166] MED s.v. forbēren (v.); also forbĕr, forbăr(e: 4(a) To forego, relinquish, give up, part with, or lose (something); to become separated from.

[167] Julian of Norwich, Section 10, 'A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman', in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Watson and Jenkins, p. 85.

of self and other, creating an acute amalgamation of experience, not just between herself and Christ but with 'us' all: all Christians in the 'body' of his church. Now initiated through the painful transitions of earthly personae, and having proven her efficacy as God's appointed physician, Kempe's knowledge of the pain of the world will provide the key to her own 'anchorhold' of contemplation, in stark contrast to the keys to the 'botery' which marked the occupation of her younger life, and the juncture between sickness and health.[168] At the age of fifty eight, emancipated from the lacuna of wifehood in which she was suspended for nearly four decades, Kempe will embark on further travels as knowing *eldmodyr*, suffering the new pains of senescence but more fully able to *feel* God through the willing embrace of Christ's tortured flesh.

[168] After her recovery from postpartum illness, Kempe requests the 'keys of þe botery' (8), symbolising her return to health and the duties of the female householder.

Chapter Five: Margery Kempe the Elder: Senescence and the Didactic Function of Pain

A woman is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband die, she is at liberty. (1Corinthians 7: 39)

> That the aged men be sober, chaste, prudent, sound in faith, in love, in patience. The aged women, in like manner, in holy attire, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teaching well: That they may teach the young women to be wise, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, sober, having a care of the house, gentle, obedient to their husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. (Titus 2: 2-5).

> It should be noted that old women who still have their monthly flow, and some who do not menstruate, poison the eyes of children lying in their cradles by their glance, as Albert says in his book *On Menses.*This is caused in menstruating women by the flow itself, for the humours first infect the eyes, then the eyes infect the air, which infects the child. This is the opinion of the philosopher in the book *On Sleep and Waking*. What happens in women who do not menstruate is that the retention of the menses results in an abundance of evil humours, and old women no longer have enough natural heat to digest such matter. This is especially true of poor women who are nourished by coarse food, which contributes to the poisonous matter. Therefore non menstruating women are even more seriously infected, because the menstrual flow has a purgative function.[1]

Medieval constructions of the *vetula*, or old woman, are typically associated with misogynistic portrayals of old, poisonous hags, as this extract from *De Secretis mulierum* illustrates. Yet St. Paul's tenet in Titus depicts an alternative role for Christian women who, in their older years, may enter a phase of teaching and instruction: the wise and mature *anus*, who, in her increased age, has a

[1] *De Secretis mulierum*, p. 129. Helen Rodnite Lemay notes how Albertus Magnus does *not* state that menstrual women are poisonous in *De animalibus.* She also notes that in *On Sleep and Waking*, Aristotle does not make the claim asserted by the pseudo-Albertus in this passage. See p. 178, n 112 and n 113. This distortion of ancient works by pseudo-Albertus suggests a cultural assumption about the dangers of old, post-menopause women.

valuable, potential didacticism. Paul's direction is partly at odds with his own ruling in the Epistle to Timothy – 'I suffer not a woman to teach'.[2] This distinction seemingly resides in the contexts of the public and the private: the aged woman is permitted to teach feminine and domestic virtues in a domestic setting, but not, apparently, to teach in the formal sense or to suppose authority over men. Nevertheless, as scholarship has begun to illuminate, there is a category of medieval women that Anneke Mulder-Bakker terms 'Wise Old Women', who flourish in their senescence by teaching, writing and authorising; a category which represents a stark contrast to the pejorative constructions of the *vetula* that populate so many medieval medical and religious texts.[3]

The end of the previous chapter corresponded with the end of a critical life stage for Margery Kempe, and her widowhood at the age of fifty-eight. That her son and husband die within a 'schort tyme' of each other indicates an intensely painful period of double bereavement and readjustment; a transitional phase of sorts whereby Kempe must reconcile the pain of loss with the fissure of opportunity that that loss affords (225). As Joel T. Rosenthal suggests, '[a husband's] death was accepted with resignation, if not with cheer, and her grief was expected to be measured': the latter a task which is perhaps more achievable when new pathways and metamorphoses are opened up.[4] Whilst

[2] 'I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence' (I Timothy 2:12). There is debate over the authorship of I Timothy. For example, David E. Aune writes that 'While seven of the letters attributed to Paul are almost universally accepted as authentic (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon), four are just as widely judged to be pseudepigraphical, i.e. written by unknown authors under Paul's name: Ephesians and the Pastorals (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus). See 'Introduction', *The Blackwell Companion to The New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 1-14 (p.9). See also Chapter 21, 'Paul and his Letters, Jouette M. Bassler, and Chapter 32, 'The Pastoral Letters: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus', David E. Aune, in the same volume.

[3] Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Renée Nip, eds., *The Prime of their Lives: Wise Old Women in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leuven, Paris and Dudley: Peeters, 2004, p. xiv.

[4] Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Fifteenth-Century Widows and Widowhood: Bereavement, Reintegration, and Life Choices', in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 48.

Kempe's prior vow of chastity had enabled what might be seen as a metaphorical widowhood, the necessity of John's care and his continued status as husband *nomine tantum* position his actual death as the point of juncture for her complete freedom from the 'binds' of marriage and rebirth into the world beyond. This chapter, therefore, concerns that senescence and widowhood, and the ways in which Kempe utilises the pain of old age for didactic merit: both for her own sanctification and for the edification of her growing congregation.

As the passage from Titus suggests, the aged woman – post childbearing – has a vital social role in contributing to the pastoral care of her family and community. This is borne out by the medieval medical text, the *Sekenesse of Wymmen*, which explicates the nomenclature of the female reproductive system by aligning the terms *marice* and *moder* synonymously: '... þe marice... is cleped the moder & nourisscher to þe childern riȝt conceyved in hem. The moder is a skyn þat þe childe is enclosed in his moder wombe... this moder that we clepen the marice'.[5] The naming of the uterus in terms of the woman's social *and* biological functions evidences their cultural assimilation, suggesting that mothering is a transferable activity that can operate both intra-bodily and extra-bodily. In other words, women have integral functions as caregivers beyond their immediate, biological capacity. To extend this metaphor, marked by the *eldmodyr* appellation that Kempe is assigned in her later years, there appears to be a place for the post-reproductive, old woman in medieval society that repositions her literal mothering with one of a wise *grand*mother's didacticism and sagacious pastoral care.[6] As Anneke B. Mulder-

[5] The *Sykenesse of Wymmen*, p. 60. MED s.v: marice 6. a.) the uterus; moder; from the time of conception. Cf. Latin mater / matrix.
[6] The etymology of 'eldmodyr' is explored in Chapter 3, n. 5, of the present study. As well as denoting 'mother-in-law', there is also the signification of a clear, gerontological meaning.

Bakker has emphasised, there exists no menopause in the animal world, nor in the male of the human species. Through a Darwinist lens, old women must therefore offer a second, productive function.[7] In modern theory, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy has argued for 'the grandmother's clock hypothesis': that the human race has been enabled to evolve into an intelligent species because of the grandmother's role in the upbringing of offspring. By gathering food or supporting the care of the young, the grandmother's labours mean that human infants can remain helpless for longer; for Hrdy, 'the long postmenopausal stint is, in fact, an integral part of the human organism's *reproductive* plan'.[8] The *oma erecta* [grandmother erecta], that Mulder-Bakker discusses, then, represents not a figure of withering senescence, but a figure whose contribution to her community is both vital and life-affirming.[9]

Who *was* old in the Middle Ages? Shulamith Shahar remains an authority on this topic, concluding that age sixty appears to be the onset of old age in both women and men, although different writers offer varying age taxonomies.[10] Margery Kempe lived in the direct aftermath of the plague and its aftershock, and so it could be inferred that the advanced years of 'iij score ȝer' (234) that she mentions in her *Boke* symbolise a reasonably rare phenomenon. Petrarch wrote to Boccaccio that young people subtract from their true age whilst old people add to theirs, illustrating a clear pattern of veneration for the old and the

[7] Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *The Prime of their Lives*, p. xii.
[8] Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mother Nature: Maternal Instincts and the Shaping of the Species* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 285. See also Kirkwood and Shanley, 'The connections between general and reproductive senescence and the evolutionary basis of menopause'. Also A. Friederike Kachel, L. S. Premo and Jean-Jacques Hublin, 'Grandmothering and natural selection revisited', *Proceedings: Biological Sciences*, 278, (2011), 1939-1941.
[9] See H. Spiering, 'Oma erecta. De antropologie heeft de grootmoeder ontdekt', *NRC Handelsblad*, Nov. 2002: Wetenschap en Onderwijs.
[10] Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, p. 28. See also pp. 12-18, which exemplify various medieval writers' age categories. For example, Aldebrandin of Siena exacts *Senium* (extreme old age) to be from 60 until death. Vincent of Beauvaix modelled one scheme, following Avicenna, to hold the *Aetas minuendi* (stage of enfeeblement) to be 60 until the end of life.

desire to gain respect in old age.[11] Some writers saw the end of life to be at around sixty, or sixty-four, according to Deschamps.[12] This cultural notion of what age was considered 'old' would have likely meant that Kempe felt at the end of her life when she embarked on her final journeys and experiences: a sense of 'borrowed time', perhaps, and with it a drive to maximise any remaining spiritual capital. Indeed, as Shahar notes, with old age came a further proclivity towards melancholy, and given Kempe's inherent predisposition, as has been argued, such melancholia is perhaps further exacerbated in her elderly years and thus opens up new fissures for mystical enlightenment.[13]

However, the aged body brings a unique opportunity for atonement, as through the pain and suffering of senescence, one can draw closer to God. As Bernard of Clairvaux surmises, 'the body helps the soul which loves God'.[14] Furthermore, '[t]he old person does not need to mortify the body or to pray for illness, like the young ascetics who sought illness and suffering in order to atone for their sins, or the sins of others, and through suffering to draw nearer to God. Old age itself was understood to entail physical suffering and almost to correspond to illness'.[15] Christine de Pizan (1365-c.1429) wrote that 'there is no worse disease than old age'.[16] Trisha Olson has convincingly shown that authorities such as Bonaventure and Aquinas saw the body and the soul as one being; that the pain of the body ignites the disturbance of the soul and vice

[11] Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 29.
[12] Ibid., p. 17.
[13] Shahar, *Growing Old*, pp. 44, 72-3. While Shahar notes that melancholia in old age was considered a failure or even a sin, this overlooks the concomitant notion, which I have argued in Chapter One, that a melancholic disposition brought heightened imaginative faculties and was therefore an efficacious state of being.
[14] From Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 54.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Christine de Pizan, *The treasure of the city of ladies*, *or The book of the three virtues*, trans. Sarah Lawson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 166. In Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe*, p. 166.

versa.[17] For as Olson concludes, '[r]ather than a prison that trapped the soul, the body was both integral to human identity and a conduit of religious experience. Thus in this period, the body in pain spoke to, reflected back, and shaped, the experience of pain in the soul'.[18] Kempe's old-body-in-pain, therefore, offers an opportunity for asceticism beyond any that she has hitherto experienced and thus represents the culmination of the pain-events of her life.

There exists much valuable scholarship about the authorship and authority of Kempe's *Boke*, but little on the significance of the production of the text during her old age.[19] The first scribe's writing was difficult to read (the scribe is thought to be Kempe's son), and so a priest, moved by Kempe's story, commenced the transcription of Book I in 'þe ȝer of owr Lord a m. cccc.xxxvj' (1436), when she was about sixty-three years old (6). On finishing, he commenced the writing of Book II, in 'þe yer of owr Lord m. cccc.xxxviij' (1438), when Kempe was circa sixty-five years old (221). The priest is thought to be Robert Spryngolde, Kempe's confessor.[20] This chapter is therefore also concerned with the meaning attached to the proximity of dictation to those recounted events of later life. In other words, are the journeys and experiences of her older age, recounted mainly in Book II, more authentically 'voiced' because of the immediacy of their dictation? Without doubt, there is less reliance on memory for this section of the *Boke* than the recollections of Book I, which, even when recorded, were distanced by 'xx ȝer & mor' from their first revelation (3). What we have, I argue, in Book II in particular, is the more

[17] Trisha Olson, 'The Medieval Blood Sanction and the Divine Beneficence of Pain: 1100-1450'A, esp. p. 83.
[18] Olson, p. 128.
[19] Liz Herbert McAvoy has addressed the issue of textual production and age in '"[A] péler of holy church": Holiness, Authority and the Wise Woman in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Prime of their Lives*, pp. 17-38. David Wallace discusses the traits of Book II as being more ordered and sequenced in *Strong Women*, p. 85.
[20] See Sobecki, 'The writyng of this tretys'.

authentic voice of Margery Kempe the *elder*, whose dictation is more immediately real, whose choices of narrative content are more meaningful, and whose delivery is enriched by the wisdom and reflection of advanced years.

This chapter, therefore, is focused upon the aged *eldmodyr*, Margery Kempe, and the locus of that old body as a site of tension between medieval constructions of the poisonous yet wise *vetula.* Kempe's pain in old age enables not only the replacement of the bodily penance that characterised her younger life, but draws her closer to a didactic understanding of painful experience which marks a burgeoning closeness with God. It will argue for an *aged asceticism*, whereby old age symbolises an edifying opportunity for amplified pain 'by default', as well as the doubled ascetic value of pilgrimage in old age. And it will consider the authority of Kempe's voice, more noticeably immediate and authoritative in Book II because, firstly, it is predicated on a cache of painful experience which provides the requisite wisdom for teaching as an elder, and secondly, it is recounted more closely to her experiences, both painful and holy.

The Painful Imperative of the Old Woman

Representations of the old woman in the Middle Ages were often based around misogynistic traditions of physically-repulsive, superstitious and garrulous females: women who were the least powerful figures in society yet also the most feared, because their speech and behaviour were seemingly uncontrollable.[21] As Mulder-Bakker has shown, however, an alternative category of 'wise old women' can be identified as an emergent group that

[21] See Jan Ziolkowski, 'Old Wives' Tales: Classicism and Anti-Classicism from Apuleius to Chaucer', *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 12 (2002), 90-113, p. 110.

succeeds in authority and teaching, and whose didactic potentialities resist the pejorative proscriptions of ancient thought: to borrow Alastair Minnis's term, the *auctrice*.[22] Margery Kempe, whose life takes a worldly, commercial and domestic focus prior to her vow of chastity at the age of forty, and whose later life forges a trajectory towards holiness without ever stepping fully into a cloistered existence, takes a different path from the paradigm of the typical female religious. We must therefore not only distinguish between literary and theological constructions of the *vetula* and the evidence that we have of a different type of medieval woman – the 'wise old woman' – but acknowledge Kempe's locus as an old woman as complex in her straddling of the earthly and the religious, in an unusual, but not unheard of, version of holiness.[23] Whilst now, more than ever, she is en route to spiritual satisfaction, she cannot be removed from the cultural significations that define old women as sources of disgust and derision, partly because she insists on remaining in that very world, and partly because, despite her elevated ambitions, her words and her actions are often interpreted misogynously, according to those notions of the dangerous and toxic *vetula*.

The *Ancrene Wisse* portrays the seven deadly sins as married 'hags', advising its anchoritic audience to beware of the sexual temptation to which even they could succumb:

> Now you have heard one part, my dear sisters, about what are called the seven mother-sins, and about their offspring, and about what functions are served in the devil's court by those men who have married those seven hags, and why they are very much to be hated and avoided.

[22] MED s.v. auctrice: A woman whose opinion is accepted as authoritative. See Alastair Minnis, 'The Wisdom of Old Women: Alisoun of Bath as *Auctrice*', in *Writings on Love in the English Middle Ages*, ed. Helen Cooney (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 99-114.
[23] Of course, Kempe does follow in the footsteps of other holy women who also began their religious journey from the point of marriage and / or children, like Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373), Marie d'Oignies (d.1213) and Elizabeth of Hungary (d.1231). See also *Sancity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

> You are far removed from them, our Lord be thanked; but the foul smell of this last vice – that is, of lechery – stinks so very far, because the devil spreads it and blows it everywhere, that I am rather afraid that it might sometimes rise into your heart's nose. Stench rises upwards; and you have climbed high, where the wind of fierce temptations is strong. May our Lord give you strength to stand firm against them! [24]

Even the female enclosed are at risk of submitting to their innate sexual insatiability via these 'hags' which personify everything that is grotesque and wicked about old women. Literary representations often portray *vetulae* as preoccupied with sexual matters, acting as go-betweens in the sexual relations of others like pimps; like the Old Woman, *La Vieille*, in the *Roman de la Rose*, that 'dirty, stinking, foul old woman…who is making me waste away'.[25] And of course, Chaucer's Wife of Bath has been the subject of much scholarship in relation to her sexuality, age, and *auctoritee* (it is striking that her Prologue opens with the word 'Experience').[26] Gretchen Mieszkowski notes a 'deep fear of [old] women's sexual power', and the male resentment of it.[27] According to Herbert C. Covey, 'Sexuality of mature and old women [is] perceived as being grotesque, threatening and inappropriate', which goes some way to explicate the damning portrayal of old women in literature in these very terms.[28] John

[24] *Ancrene Wisse: A Guide for Anchoresses, a Translation*, Bella Millet, Part 4, section 36, p. 83. To corroborate the translated meaning, the Middle English in the edited edition is 'haggen'. See *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 with Variants from other Manuscripts*, Vol.1, equivalent section on p. 83. OED s.v. hag, *hegge* in 13th century: 1(a) An evil spirit, dæmon, or infernal being, in female form. 2. A woman supposed to have dealings with Satan and the infernal world; a witch; sometimes, an infernally wicked woman. 3. An ugly, repulsive old woman: often with implication of viciousness or maliciousness.

[25] *The Romance of the Rose*, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 3rd edition), Chapter 4, ll. 4110-2, p. 91.

[26] See, for example, Lorraine K. Stock, 'Just how loathly is the "wyf"? Deconstructing Chaucer's "hag" in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*', in *Magistra Doctissima: Essays in Honor of Bonnie Wheeler*, ed. Dorsey Armstrong, Ann W. Astell and Howell Chickering (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), pp. 34-42. Also Susan Carter, 'A hymenation of hags', in *The English "Loathly Lady" Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, Motifs*, ed. Elizabeth Passmore and Susan Carter (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. 83-99.

[27] Gretchen Mieszkowski, 'Old Age and Medieval Misogyny: The Old Woman', in *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 2007), pp. 299-319, (p. 309).

[28] Herbert C. Covey, 'Perceptions and Attitudes towards Sexuality of the Elderly during the Middle Ages', *The Gerontologist*, 29, (1989), 93-100, pp. 96-7.

Lydgate's fifteenth-century *Secretum Secretorum* echoes the 'hag' personification via the seasons and according to feminine typologies: in winter, the world is like an old hag close to death.[29] In Guillaume de Deguileville's *The Pilgrimage of Human Life*, the qualities of gluttony, lust, sloth, hypocrisy, envy, heresy, tribulations, disease, old age and death, are personified by ugly old women.[30]

External ugliness is symbolic, of course, of a lingering subtext of old women's internal ugliness. Beyond the disgust over the old female body more generally is the portrayal in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* of the elderly body in terms of mere constituents. The old woman hired to facilitate a liaison between Ovid and a beautiful young girl is described repulsively: 'dirty skin, wrinkled up like a wet purse; her breastless, nippleless, sluggish, hard chest and earth-hard stomach, furrowed as if from a ploughshare; and her dried-up loins, her thighs hollowed out by want, and her swollen knees as hard as stones for making walls'.[31] Here, the *vetula* is a reduced product of corporeality and no more; physically disgusting as well as stricken by poverty and want, a symbol of decay and ultimately, death.

Physical disgust was manifest through the association of old women with the digestive tract – scatological connections that were also commonly applied to the iconography of the devil as a point in case. Medieval proverbs reminded (male) readers of Latin that there was a fine scatological distinction between the old woman, *anus*, and the anus:

[29] From Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 48.
[30] Shahar, p. 48.
[31] Jean Lefèvre, *La Vieille ou les dernières amours d'Ovide*, ll. 3184-98. From Mieszkowski, p. 301.

Dum dormitat anus, velut anser sibilat anus.
Tarde manus appoint anus, dum sibilat anus.[32]

As well as the *base* anatomical parts, the old woman was also connected with the eyes as sources of evil and pathology. We have seen how the author of *De Secretis Mulierum* discusses the toxicity of the aged woman and how her poisonous constitution provokes potentially fatal outcomes, on page one of the present chapter. Commentator B on this treatise develops this exemplum by advising that old women should not be 'permitted' to play with or kiss children, as the vapours that seep from their porous eyes means that those children 'sometimes... die'.[33] The idea of 'fascination' permeated medical treatises from the fourteenth century, as Fernando Salmón and Montserrat Cabré have shown, having their genesis in the works of Pliny, Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians, and Thomas Aquinas.[34] It developed from an asexual framework to a gendered one whereby old women, through their retained menses and cold, increasingly dry constitution, became the logical exempla of the evil eye at work. It is little wonder, then, that a culture of fear developed around the *vetula* and her dangerous body. Her speech, too, was threatening; able to break language prohibitions and engage in bawdy or disruptive talk. According to Ziolkowski, 'Obscenity was all the more aptly vernacular if it purported to come from the mouths of lower-class old women, since no more servile group of

[32] Hans Walther, *Proverbia Sententiaeque Latinitatis Medii Aei: Lateinische Sprichwörter und Sentenzen des Mittelalters in alphabetischer Anordnung*. From Jan M. Ziolkowski, 'The Obscenities of Old Women: Vetularity and Vernacularity', in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998), pp. 73-89 (p. 86).
[33] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 131.
[34] 'O senseless Galatians, who hath bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been set forth, crucified among you?' Galatians, 3:1. See Fernando Salmón and Montserrat Cabré, 'Fascinating Women: The Evil Eye in Medical Scholasticism', in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. Roger French, Jon Arrizabalaga, Andrew Cunningham and Luis Garcia (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 53-84, esp. pp. 58-61.

people could be imagined: poor old women were *vernaculae* par excellence'.[35] In order to uphold the tenet of I Timothy 4, the wives' tales and illogical content of old women's discourse had to be dispelled in favour of the beliefs of the Father. The Church Fathers thus promulgated the use of the term 'oldwomanish' to denote worthless and irrational thought, an insult coined by Augustine as 'anicularia phantasmata' [oldwomanish phantasms].[36] It is easy to imagine how an aged and tattered Margery Kempe, entreating for food during her later travels, might be viewed by suspicious onlookers as an example of this construction, and whose insistence on uttering the word of God occasioned in them fear.

However, there are textual examples where aged female wisdom is heeded and recognised. Albrecht Classen considers the Dame de la Tour in Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre du duc des vrais amans* (1403-1405), concluding that, although the old lady's wisdom is not fully legitimised, '[o]ld age... proves to be instrumental in giving advice and suggesting directions to be taken by young people'.[37] Christine views ageing partly as an intellectual pursuit, characterised by the learning that she was able to undertake once she had become widowed, and the wisdom that accompanies a significant experience of life. In *Le Livre de l'advision Christine*, she elucidates that 'At the time when I had naturally arrived at an age that brings with it a certain degree of understanding, looking back at my past adventures and ahead to the end of things... I embarked on the path to which nature and the stars inclined me, that is, the love of learning'.[38]

[35] Ziolkowski, 'The Obscenities of Old Women', p. 75.
[36] Ziolkowski, 'Old Wives' Tales', p. 102. Like children, in such literature old women are uneducated, illogical, tale-telling and, most importantly, non-reproductive. The *vetulae* therefore become paradoxically disempowered and feared.
[37] Classen, 'Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Also an Introduction', in *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, pp.1-84 (p. 24).
[38] From Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'The Compensations of Aging: Sexuality and Writing in Christine de Pizan, with an epilogue on Colette', in *Prime of Their Lives*, pp. 2-16, (p. 11).

Lucie Doležalová has examined the positive representations of the old woman in the Middle Ages, concluding that such portrayals tend only to be found when the subject is modified via the removal of an aspect of her entirety: her sexuality, the extent of her agedness, or her individuality (being employed simply as a symbol of something else). She identifies the typology of 'saint grandmothers', including St. Ludmila (d. 921) and St. Olga (d. c. 969), who are never addressed as *vetulae*, and never depicted as old. Similarly, there are women who are described in positive terms only when their sexuality is suppressed. The old virgin sister of St. Anthony, for example, educates young virgins. And St. Mary of Egypt is praised for spending so much time in the desert that it was impossible to tell if her body was female or male.[39] As the lives and writings of older women such as Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Birgitta of Sweden and Margery Kempe herself attest, there was a space for the voices of holy women in the Middle Ages, but only when their sexual and reproductive lives had been terminated, and only when they reached enough maturity to be considered somehow less female. The *vetulae* were far, far removed from the images of a young, breastfeeding Virgin Mary that were ubiquitous in medieval iconography. Indeed, Shahar emphasises that 'The old woman whose milk has dried cannot personify Mary the Holy Mother, who suckles her child – the symbol of good and mercy'.[40] Whilst some female mystics like Margery Kempe, as we have seen, adapt to their mature biology through the utilisation of surrogate strategies of nursing, there remains an

[39] Lucie Doležalová, '*Nemini vetula placet?* In search of the positive representation of old women in the Middle Ages', in *Alterskulturen des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: internationaler Kongress, Krems an der Donau, 16. Bis 18. Oktober 2006*, ed. Elisabeth Vavra (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008), pp. 175-182, esp. pp. 176-7.
[40] Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 49.

exclusion paradigm from the model of the Virgin that very old holy women were obliged to endure and to resist.

The pain of this exclusion, and the inevitable awareness of a cultural prejudice against old women in society, creates a hermeneutic of elderly suffering that is also evident in medical texts. Old women's bodies were considered a 'disease' by default, as articulated by Christine de Pizan. I wish now to turn to those medical texts which explain the pain of old women's afflictions and which offer – occasionally – some remedies for relief. First, however, I will locate Margery Kempe's old body-in-pain as a pertinent subject for such medical advice.

Avicenna wrote that old age started at age fifty, because people gradually lose their blood supply.[41] That Avicenna relates blood loss with ageing is suggestive of an acceleration of the female rate of ageing, given that women's production of menstrual blood ceases to regenerate after menopause. Bullough and Campbell's study of medieval longevity concludes that improvements in the medieval diet from the later Middle Ages meant that women suffered from less anaemia (a condition exacerbated by menstruation) and therefore their life expectancy equalised that of men. Dietary improvements included a greater proportion of meat and fish (the latter increasingly popular due to church stipulations over fasting from meat on Fridays in particular).[42] However, since Margery Kempe undertook frequent fasts, and relinquished meat for some time, any broadly social dietary improvements would have

[41] Classen, 'Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Also an Introduction', p. 40.
[42] Vern Bullough and Cameron Campbell, 'Female Longevity and Diet in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 55, 2 (1980), 317-325, esp. pp. 319-24. Deborah Youngs contests this argument, suggesting that complications in childbirth, amongst other factors, evidences a higher rate of female mortality compared to men, during their adult years. See Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe*, pp. 28-9.

assumedly passed her by.[43] It is probable, therefore, that she suffered the after-effects of long-term anaemia following her menstrual span, and also osteoporosis, as will be expounded below: chronic conditions that may have been an integral and accepted facet of her daily life.

Following her return to Lynn in 1418 after a sojourn in London with the purpose of acquiring a letter and seal from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Kempe falls ill with 'many gret & diuers sekenes' for at least eight years (137). She is forty-five years old at the onset, and fifty-three or fifty-four at least, at the terminus of the illness.[44] This period therefore coincides with her older years, probably ending as she approaches her sixtieth year and the onset of her final travels. Kempe is clear that this is a punishment from God, a version of the *aged asceticism* that I shall elucidate below; a pain so great that she was anointed for death:

> She had þe flyx [flux] a long tyme tyl sche was anoyntyd, wenyng to a be deed. Sche was so febyl þat sche myth not heldyn a spon in hir hand. Þan owr Lord Ihesu Crist spak to hir in hir sowle & seyd þat sche xulde not dey ȝet. Þan sche recuryd aȝen a lytyl while. And a-non aftyr sche had a gret sekenes in hir heuyd and sithyn in hir bakke þat sche feryd to a lost hir witte þer-thorw. Aftyrwarde, whan schewas recuryd of alle þes sekenessys, in schort tyme folwyd an-oþer sekenes which was sett in hir ryth syde, duryng þe terme of viij ȝer, saf viij wokys, be diuers tymes. Sumtyme sche had it onys in a weke contunyng sumtyme xxx owrys, sumtyme xx, sumtyme x, sumtyme viij, sumtyme iiij, & sumtyme ij, so hard & so scharp þat sche must voydyn þat was in hir stomak as bittyr as it had ben galle, neyþyr etyng ne drynkyng whil þe sekenes enduryd but euyr gronyng tyl it was gon (137).

The 'flyx' – a condition for which the dragges recipe of f.124v is an apt treatment – causes Kempe so much distress that she expects death to proceed.

[43] In Book I, Chapter 5, Christ tells Kempe to forsake 'þe etyng of flesch' (17). We are told of Christ's relinquishment of this imperative in Chapter 66.
[44] Hope Emily Allen notes that the period of her illness was likely to be 'considerably more than eight years long', and her recovery therefore beyond the year of 1426, when she was fifty-three. See *BMK*, p. 318, n. 137/19-22.

When it does not, a brief recovery is followed by a relapse whereby her head and back are acutely afflicted, causing such mental distraction that it resonates with the early postpartum psychosis that saw her go 'owt of hir mende' (7). Despite this affliction appearing so critical, she nevertheless recovers once again, returning from the brink of annihilation for at least the fourth time in her life, only to then succumb to a further illness in her right side which thereafter lasts for eight years.[45] That the final sickness in her right side marks the onset of the eight year period indicates that the entire duration of illness is far longer; perhaps approaching her seventh decade. The pain of these years is so intense that it is marked by vomiting, groaning and fasting; a half-existence that is seemingly defined by this chronic experience of agony. Kempe exists solely within her pain during this time, evidenced by the mathematical and meticulous notation of the hours of pain that she experiences as all-consuming: the conscious demarcation of being inside or outside the torment.

Kempe's perception of her pain is also measured by its parallelism to Christ's Passion. In her prayers, she acknowledges the inferiority of her own suffering and yet confesses her inability to endure, or bear it:

> A, blysful Lord, why woldist þu be-comyn man & suffyr so meche peyne for my synnes & for alle mennys synnes þat xal be sauyd, & we arn so vnkynde, Lord, to þe, & I, most vnworthy, *can not suffyr þis lityl peyne*? A, Lord, for thy gret peyn haue mercy on my lityl peyne; for þe gret peyne þat þu suffredyst ȝef me not so meche as I am worthy, for *I may not beryn so meche* as I am worthy. And, ȝyf þu wilte, Lord, þat I ber it, sende me pacyens, for ellys *I may not suffyr it* (137, my emphases).

[45] Kempe fears death during the delivery of her first child, summoning a confessor, as we saw in Chapter One of this study. She is hit by a falling beam and stone in St. Margaret's Church in Chapter 9 of the *Boke*, perceiving that she was dead for a little while. She then relays two instances in the present passage in Chapter 56 of the *Boke* where she anticipates physical or mental termination. The pain in her right side could indicate some sort of gynaecological condition, as will be explored below.

Kempe emphasises her inability to suffer the pains with which she is burdened, whilst simultaneously perceiving Christ's pain to be more awesome than ever, juxtaposing 'lityl' and 'gret' several times. In calling for pain removal, or else its endurance because of her human frailty, she situates her position in the world as more indebted to the Christic pain of the crucifixion, and therefore conceptualises her own pain as constructed in terms of its relation to the Passion. In short, her pain takes its meaning from Christ's pain in sharp relief. This hermeneutic is realised later in the episode, when Kempe's contemplations of the Passion during times of sickness create an analgesic effect. The meditative displacement of her pain for Christ's removes all feeling, creating an absence of self-consciousness whereby the eventual and total removal of her pain is predicated directly upon the bodily suffering of Christ.

> Sumtyme, not-wythstondyng þe sayd creatur had gret bodily sekenes, ȝet þe Passyon of owr merciful Lord Crist Ihesu wrowt so in hir sowle þat for þe tyme *sche felt not hir owyn sekenes* but wept & sobbyd in þe mend of owr Lordys Passyon as thow sche sey hym wyth hir bodily eye suffering peyne & passyon be-forn hir. Sithyn, whan viij ȝer wer passyd, hir sekenes scapyd þat it cam not weke be weke as it dede be-forn, but þan encresyd hir cryes & hir wepyngys... (138, my emphasis).

The use of the preposition 'sithyn' denotes a chronological dependence on the Passion meditations for Kempe's renewal and recovery from sickness.[46] These meditations symbolise not only the absolute cure for her illness, but a panacea *totus*, a treatment of sorts with which she will self-medicate as her journey into senescence progresses. As will be developed in Chapter Six, the Passion visions hold an increased significance for Kempe as her elderly body deteriorates, and as her spiritual discernment deepens and intensifies.

[46] MED s.v. sithyn [sitthen]: Continually from (a specified time or event); ever since.

The prolonged and incapacitating pain in Kempe's right side could have been due to a number of conditions, including post-menopausal gynaecological disorders such as fibroids, cysts, or a prolapsed uterus. Other possibilities include diverticulitis (inflamed pouches in the colon which is common in older age), kidney infections or stones, disease of the gallbladder, liver disease or hepatitis. The medical texts for women that form the corpus for this study offer some explanations and treatments for older women's health problems. For example, the suffocation of the womb is a condition whereby the uterus is displaced and moves upwards in the body as a quasi-animated entity, seeking heat from other internal organs ('whan þe matrice rysyth out of hys ryȝht plase & goyth ouer-hy').[47] The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' (which, of course, circulated well in England, as we have seen) emphasises that the condition causes syncope and pain, characterised by gritted teeth and a doubling up of the body, and is most common in celibate women, namely virgins and widows:

> This happens to those women who do not use men, especially to widows who were accustomed to carnal commerce. It regularly comes upon virgins, too, when they reach the age of marriage and are not able to use men and when the semen abounds in them a lot, which Nature wishes to draw out by means of the male. From this superabundant and corrupt semen, a certain cold fumosity is released and it ascends to the organs which are called by the common people the 'collaterals', because they are near to the heart and lungs and the rest of the principal instruments of the voice. Whence an impediment to the voice generally occurs. This kind of illness is accustomed to originate principally from a defect of the menses. And if both the menses are lacking and the semen is superabundant, the illness will be so much the more menacing and wide-ranging, especially when it seizes the higher organs.[48]

Such a disorder is considered both socially and somatically more likely to occur in old women because of their status as widows and because of their lack of menses in the post-menopausal state. 'On Treatments for Women' echoes the

[47] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 50.
[48] 'Book on the Conditions of Women', in *The Trotula*, pp. 84-5.

corporeal peril of the celibate widow: ‘These women, when they have desire to copulate and do not do so, incur grave illness’.[49] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus addresses such a point by suggesting that ‘it is good that these women, whether young or old, often use men, so that this matter [retained menses] might be expelled’: a somewhat audacious recommendation, given that the writer also acknowledges that this goes ‘against custom’, undermining the noble chastity of the widow or the vowess.[50] Since Margery Kempe would be unable to access the ‘cure’ for uterine suffocation owing to her chaste vow, she is precluded from medical advice in another version of the hermeneutic of the *vetula’s* exclusion that was suggested above, rendering the analgesia of Christ’s Passion as even more crucial for her health.[51]

The precipitation of the uterus, or uterine prolapse, is also associated with old women or those who no longer menstruate. Pertinently for Margery Kempe, it causes pain in the side:

> The precipitacion of þe moder is another syknesse whan þe moder fallith fro hir kyndely place into anoþer place & þat may be in two maners: oþer aside other ellis douneward. Yf it fallith asyde men may it knowe by the *greuaunce of þe side*; douneward it may fallen in two maners: other all owte of þe wombe or els nouȝt fully oute. Yef hit falle not fulliche oute, they felen moche greuaunce aboue þe share [genitals] & aboute þe raynes [kidneys]. And yf it goth all aboute, þe woman may sene þat hersylf. This syknesse comyth ofte of witholdyng of blode þat women shuld haue ben ypurged of; or els of corrupt humours that ben in þe moder þat makith hir to fallen a downe or aside; other þe moder fallyth a downe oute att þe wombe for þe paralisi [paralysis] þat þe moder hath caught thorough colde in longe sitting on cold stones or suche oþer wey; other thorough longe abydyng in a colde bath; other for moche drynkyng of cold water.[52]

[49] ‘On Treatments for Women’ in *The Trotula*, p. 120-1.
[50] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 132.
[51] Some other texts suggested alternative treatments for uterine suffocation, including Johannes Platearius’ *Practica*, which recommended remarriage for widows, and other texts which recommended masturbation. See Green, *The Trotula*, p. 219.
[52] The *Sekeness of Wymmen*, p. 98 (my emphasis).

Kempe is implicated in such a condition not only by its association with non-menstruating women and by the indication of pain *of þe side*, but by her propensity for pious travel, in some hardship, and during her sixties. It is easy to imagine the necessity of sitting on cold walls on many an occasion during her late pilgrimages, as her bodily decrepitude would increasingly require, causing the *paralisi* that the text denotes.[53] Strikingly, the *Sekeness of Wymmen* regards the prolapse of the uterus as incurable. Whilst other women 'may be holpen' by the use of ointments, fumigations, the physical reinsertion of the womb and genital *plastre*[s], the old woman's body is beyond repair: 'Also it is to wite þat þe coming out of þe marice in an olde woman is uncurable'.[54] That such a statement is left unjustified is illustrative of an acceptance that the old female body is not only more prone to affliction, but that its remedy is futile. This is reiterated later in the text, concerning cancers and ulcers of the uterus: 'Cancryng [cancers] and festers [festerings] of þe marice comyn of olde woundes of þe marice þat wer noȝt well heled, but þat maner of syknesse we wyl speke but litell of for phisiciens sayne þat cancres þat ben hydde it is better þat þei be vncured than cured or heled'.[55] The advice of doctors to leave such hidden cancers uncured is indicative of the male medical authorities' ambivalence towards the *secretys* of the female body, especially towards *old* uterine injuries which imply an *old*, and thus less valuable, female body. Nonetheless, the treatise does recommend a particular ointment as a treatment, which does not so much subvert medical authority, but appears to seek to

[53] The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' includes an analogous passage that also explains precipitation of the uterus by 'a weakening of the ligaments and an abundance of cold humours inside... if...she has exposed herself directly to cold air, or sat upon a cold stone', pp. 86-7.
[54] The *Sekeness of Wymmen*, p. 166.
[55] Ibid., p. 150.

soothe and comfort its female subjects from their 'ȝiccing [itching] also & blaynes [blisters]' rather than to offer a cure.

Even urinary incontinence – common in older women who have borne children, and Kempe bore fourteen – is addressed in 'On Treatments for Women', though its mention is cursory.[56] Such conditions of somatic decline are perhaps justification for Robert Magnan's assertion that 'old age is both an end and a beginning, but little else, a time of regrets and preparation, but not enjoyment'.[57] Certainly, the afflictions outlined in these medical texts presuppose a pain imperative for the old which not only constructs the life of the *vetula* as one of punitive suffering but of irrevocability. This fact is compounded by the pain of exclusion for the old woman, as outlined above. But through Kempe's reliance on Passion meditations for an analgesia *par excellence* (as we will see in Chapter Six), and through the medieval construction of senescence as 'illness', as we have seen, what I argue to be an *aged asceticism* is born, which imbues the vicissitudes of old age with a unique opportunity for redemption by default. She identifies not with the *vetulae*, misogynistically drawn by male hands, but with the 'wise old women' and religious figures that her *Boke* tells us that she knows. Kempe meets with Bridget of Sweden's maiden (95), and hears Bridget's *Revelations* read aloud by her priest (143). She receives counsel from Julian of Norwich about her tears and her social ostracisation, sometime around 1413, aged forty (42-3).[58] She notes how her priest read to her for seven or eight years, including the Bible, Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, Bonaventura's *Stimulus Amoris*, and Rolle's *Incendium Amoris* (143). When her priest doubts her legitimacy, he reads about

[56] See 'On Treatments for Women', in *The Trotula*, pp. 136-7.
[57] Robert Magnan, 'Sex and Senescence', p. 26.
[58] See *BMK*, ed. Windeatt, p. vii for an explanation of this date.

Mary of Oignies, Elizabeth of Hungary, whose mystical experiences and affective piety convince him of Kempe's authenticity (152-4). It is almost certain that the priest would have relayed the stories of these holy women to Kempe.

Margery Kempe therefore defies this pain imperative of the aged body in multitudinous ways. She defies her somatic decrepitude by travelling on pilgrimages late in her life. She defies cultural representations of the disruptive utterances of the *vetula* by teaching, as a conduit for God's word. She defies her bodily pains by viewing them as mechanisms towards a greater understanding of Christ's suffering. And, crucially, she resists the social paranoia of the old woman's evil eye, replacing this ocular emphasis with holy visions in privileged acts of divine birth. The remaining chapter seeks to examine this defiance.

Painful Journeys

Margery Kempe's overseas pilgrimages to northern Europe are recounted in Book II in 1438, when she is about sixty-five years old. There is therefore an immediacy and authenticity in this narration which rest upon Kempe's elderly stage in the life cycle and her dictation close to these events. These accounts thus, I argue, vividly demonstrate the 'wise old woman' that Kempe has become, and the way in which she now engages in a more reflective process of composition. For not only is the painful *experience* of travel amplified by her more infirm body, but the *articulation* of that pain to her scribal 'pain interpreter' (an issue that I discuss in the Introduction) is underscored by a heightened verisimilitude that makes it a distinctive text to Book I.

Though she is happy to accompany her daughter-in-law to Ipswich to set her on her sea-bound journey home, it is, however, with a heavy heart that Kempe acquiesces to God's command, and embarks on the overseas voyage with her daughter-in-law to Germany. It is 1433, and Kempe is sixty years old: 'a woman in gret age' (228). She has no leave from her confessor for this journey; he was unconvinced that she should even accompany her daughter-in-law to the port at Ipswich, telling her, 'ȝe hirtyd but late ȝowr foote, & ȝe ar not ȝet al hool, & also ȝe arn an elde woman' (226). Kempe's mental resistance to the command she feels in her heart to travel is based on this missing license, as well as the fact that she is 'not purueyd of gold ne of syluer sufficiently for to gon wyth as [she] awt to be' (227). Kempe's economic situation in her widowhood is not fully clear; she is able to pay for a friar's chaperone services, but at other times requires the charity of others for clothing, food and drink. Certainly, it is likely that whatever wealth that Kempe may have possessed was not wholly accessible to her in the required time frame.[59]

Female peregrination, whilst technically as permissible as male pilgrimage, was subject not only to the consent of church and spouse, but was a transgression against the domestic sessility to which medieval women were bound. As Terence Bowers has noted, female travel was 'an offence against

[59] In Calais, a good woman provides her with a new smock and food (241). On her arrival in London, she is scarcely clad, 'for defawte of mony' (243). Although it is likely that Kempe would have inherited John's wealth (and the fact that her daughter-in-law stays with her for eighteen months indicates a retained family home for this to happen [225]), a husband was free to bequeath his property to anyone he chose. Widowhood could therefore bring a woman economic changes. See Janet S. Loengard, '"Which may be said to be her own': widows and goods in late-medieval England', in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 162-176. Some widows were expected to transfer wealth and property to their sons during their lifetime. See Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 140. Joel T. Rosenthal notes how widows as heads of households were, however, a fairly common phenomenon. See *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, p.43.

basic cultural axioms', making Kempe a 'deviant, a threat to Christendom'.[60] Sue Niebrzydowski concurs, suggesting that pilgrimage removed women from the 'male figures to whose authority she would normally defer', and so, concomitant with medieval attitudes towards women, made female pilgrims 'easy targets for misogynistic satire'.[61] However, many women did undertake pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, often with different agendas to their male counterparts, as Susan Morrison has shown in her illuminating study of women pilgrims, noting how 'the proportion of male to female pilgrims varied from shrine to shrine, often due to the type of miracle promised by the mythology of the saint worshipped there'. Furthermore, she argues that 'gender-specific illnesses, mainly having to do with fertility and childbirth, are fundamental to understanding women's relationship to pilgrimage'.[62] Diana Webb has also revealed the popularity of medieval pilgrimage.[63] Cultural anxieties about female travel do, nonetheless, underlie Kempe's prior experience of travel, where, for example in Hessle, she was branded a 'heretyk' and advised to 'forsake þis lyfe þat þu hast, & go spynne & carde as oþer women don' (129). Mary C. Erler has argued, however, that Kempe's English trips are rooted in the popular devotion to the feast of the Visitation, tracing her visits and their domestic guise to be legitimate because they allowed the development of an instructional model 'whose central figure is not the prophet or the preacher or even the missionary,

[60] Terence Bowers, 'Margery Kempe as Traveller', *Studies in Philology*, 97, No. 1, (2000), 1-28, p. 3.
[61] Sue Niebrzydowski, 'The Middle-Aged Meanderings of Margery Kempe: Medieval Women and Pilgrimage', in *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change*, ed. Isabelle Cochelin and Karen Smyth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 265-285, at p. 269.
[62] Susan S. Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 3. See also Morrison's chapter on 'Performing Margery Kempe', pp. 128-41 in this volume. Morrison also discusses Chaucer's Wife of Bath's travel in a literary context.
[63] See Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2000).

but the family member'.[64] It is Kempe's later, foreign peregrinations, however, with which I am here concerned, and which represent an initially unwanted, and systematically painful, challenge to her physical health and mental durability.

Her dismay at God's ordination to travel stems also from fear, and the prior, traumatic experiences of pilgrimage where great storms and tempests endangered her life.[65] She confesses that she did not wish to travel overseas because 'sche had ben in gret perell on þe see a-for-tyme & was in purpose neuyr to comyn þeron mor be hir owyn wille' (226). Her pleas are overruled by God's wandering designs for her, nevertheless, and, despite the 'gret drede & heuynes' with which the prospect fills her, she accepts the mission. Her injured, elderly body, with its damaged foot, must now endure the final, divinely decreed journey of her lifetime; a journey that will prove to be penitential to the highest degree. As an initially undesirable task, therefore, this last pilgrimage is characterised from its genesis by a painful reluctance; reason, perhaps, for Voaden's argument that this journey is an aimless one, 'without clear purpose or destination',[66] and offering further illustration of its unfolding as an opportunity for *aged asceticism*. Signifying a final opportunity for an epic edification, the northern European pilgrimage is, I suggest, an endurance of doubled pain and doubled gain, as Kempe must survive the arduous challenges of any pilgrim but in a position of great agedness, with a body 'diseased by default' and a psyche wracked with anxiety.

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[64] Mary C. Erler, 'Home Visits: Mary, Elizabeth, Margery Kempe and the feast of the Visitation', in *Medieval Domesticity*, pp. 259-276, at p. 275.
[65] The voyage home from Rome, for example, is beset by 'gret tempestys and & dyrke wedyr' (102). Rosalynn Voaden has written on the dangers of sea travel and the risk of shipwreck, in 'Travels with Margery: pilgrimage in context', in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050-1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 177-195, especially p. 181.
[66] Voaden, 'Travels with Margery', p. 188.

Kempe's seafaring fears are proved legitimate when the voyage is beset with 'swech stormys & tempestys þat þei wendyn alle to a ben perischyd' (229). The perilous conditions are so extreme that captaincy over the ship is relinquished, and its fate and trajectory placed into God's hands. Such a violent, terrifying situation causes Kempe to feel at the most desperate turning point of her life, and instigates a crisis of faith that is indicative of an increased vulnerability in her old age:

> A, Lord, for þi lofe cam I hedyr, & þu hast oftyn-tyme behite me þat I schulde neuyr perischyn neiþyr on londe ne in watyr ne wyth no tempest. Þe pepil hath many tyme bannyd me, cursyd me, & warijd [cursed] me for þe grace þat þu hast wrowt in me, desiryng þat I schulde deyin in myschef & gret disese, & now, Lord, it is lyke þat her banning comyth to effect, & I, vnworthy wretche, am deceyuyd and defrawdyd of þe promys þat þu hast mad many tyme on-to me, whech haue euyr trostyd in þi mercy & þi goodnesse, lesse þan þu þe sonar wythdrawe þes tempestys & schewe us mercy. Now may myn enmyis enyoyin [rejoice], & I may sorwyn yf þei haue her intent & I be deceyuyd (229).

Rather than trusting in God's divine plan, this life-threatening event prompts Kempe to revert to worldly fears of the exclusion, despite and curses to which she has been frequently subjected. Her enemies' wishes for death to take Kempe via accident or disease are here more present and more possible than the spiritual gifts towards which she has been progressing for sixty years of her life, testament to her feelings of bodily decay and susceptibility. Fragile and aged, she somewhat boldly accuses Christ of fraudulence and deceit, her terror evoking the infantilised panic of a child rather than the calm assurance of a woman religious, demonstrating what Diane Watt sees as the 'spiritual entropy' of her tested faith.[67] God reassures her, but it is the appearance of the Virgin

[67] Diane Watt, 'Faith in the Landscape: Overseas Pilgrimages in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, ed. Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 170-187, at p. 186.

Mary and the authoritative wisdom of a mother that rings ‘trewe’ to Kempe, and sees her safely delivered to the coast of Norway, vulnerable and shaken.

In a striking juxtaposition of peril and salvation, Kempe arrives in Norway on Good Friday. While her brush with death has potential as an *imitatio Christi* through the anguish of her fear and mortal isolation in parallel with the symbolic day of the crucifixion, she is concomitantly able to be redeemed and reintegrated back into the body of the church on Easter Day, when, on land, she sees the cross raised and experiences intense meditation. Kempe finds resolution through the direct exultation of the Resurrection: an event that is a timely reminder of the analgesia that Christ’s Passion has provided hitherto, and will provide many times again.

It is fitting that, after Kempe’s renewed faith and return to her status as wise elder, the episode closes with the master of the ship’s kind treatment of her ‘as sche had ben hys modyr’ (231). He provides her with clothes from his own possession, realising that she was at risk of hypothermia. This receipt of charity stands both as an affirmation of God’s promise to protect her on her travels and of Kempe’s aged distinction, for in assuming the role of a surrogate son, the master acknowledges her mature station and admirable endeavour as an elderly pilgrim. Such marks of respect are foregrounded by Kempe’s daughter-in-law prior to their departure from Ipswich, when she plans her trip ‘thorw hir eldmodrys consentyng’ (225). Identified now as authoritative widow and die-hard pilgrim, Kempe is renewed in her rank as sagacious matriarch and afforded the validation that will enable her to continue her journey in legitimised senescence.

Kempe is, however, compromised by her aged body when, after securing a guide to accompany her from Stralsund to Wilsnack, she becomes

troublesome to him as his fears of the dangers of war and robbery grow.[68] Her affective responses to Christ's communing cause the 'yrk[ar]' of the man, and he increases his pace so as to avoid her company, going 'so fast þat sche myth not folwyn wyth-owtyn gret labowr & gret *disese*' (my emphasis; 233-4).[69] His impatience creates a magnification of Kempe's already-strained body, as the impact of the pressure to keep up creates a doubling of infirmity where agedness and injury collide:

> …þei passyd forth to-Wilsnak-ward wyth gret labowr. Sche myth not enduryn so gret jurneys as þe man myth, & he had no compassion of hir ne not wolde a-bydyn for hir. And þerfor sche labowryd as long as sche myth tyl þat sche *fel in sekenes* and myth no ferþer. It was gret merueyl & *myracle* þat a woman dys-ewsyd of goyng & also a-bowtyn iij scor ȝer of age xuld enduryn cotidianly to kepyn hir jurney & hir pase wyth a man fryke & lusty to gon (my emphases; 234).

The extent of her 'sekenes' is such that a wain is ordered for her subsequent travel to the shrine of the Blood of Wilsnack, a passage that causes her 'gret penawns & gret disese' (234). That Kempe conflates the *disease* with penance is indicative of the ascetic task that this travail presents, an amplification of the painful process of every step and the stoic endurance that her continuation symbolises.[70] Indeed, the feat is described as nothing short of miraculous; a narrative subtext which clearly seeks to position the northern European expedition as a penitential endeavour of canonising proportions.[71] The *labowr* of

[68] Kempe informs us that 'þer was opyn werr be-twix þe Englisch & þo cuntreys' (233). As Diane Watt has exemplified, there are references to the Polish invasion of the Duchy of Pomerania, and to conflicts between England and the Teutonic Order and Hanseatic cities. Kempe's journey dissected these countries. See Watt, 'Faith in the Landscape', p. 184.

[69] Whilst Kempe continues to 'sobbyn' and 'wepyn' (233) in ardent response to her mystical experiences, she is not described as emitting loud 'cries' in Book II, as these were divulged to cease at around the age of menopause, as we have seen. See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 345, n.233/34, and p. 140.

[70] MED s.v.: disese 1b) that which inflicts hardship, misery or misfortune; grievance, harm, injury, wrong. S.v.: Penaunce 5a) Pain, suffering; affliction, hardship.

[71] There are several other mentions of Kempe's miracles in the *boke*. When she is hit by a piece of wood in St. Margaret's Church in Lynn, she recovers immediately, described by God as 'a gret myracle' (22). In Chapter 67, her prayers avert a fire in the same local church, described as a 'myrakyl & specyal grace' (163). That these 'miracles' occur in her own parish church indicates a desire on the part of her scribe to establish Kempe as a beatified, local figure. On

her progress from Aachen to Calais is similarly repeated, with an increasing sense of Kempe's somatic failure as she admirably attempts to maintain the pace of the party. She lags behind, 'to agyd & to weyke to holdyn foot wyth hem. Sche ran & lept as fast as sche myth tyl hir myghtys failyd' (239). Kempe and the poor friar whose companionship she had bought to secure her improved safety are forced to locate another wain in order that her pained and fatigued body might rest. Such respite is short-lived, however, when Kempe holds misplaced trust in a worshipful woman from London: her expectation for pleasant company results instead in a loss of transport altogether, and she progresses again on foot, when her 'gret diswer & heuynes' is at its greatest extent since departing from England. The asceticism of the travail is aided by the rugged terrain: they went 'wery weys & greuows in dep sondys [sands], hillys, & valleys tweyn days er þei comyn þedyr, suffering gret thrist & gret penawns, for þer wer fewe townys be þe wey þat þei went & ful febyl herberwe [lodgings]' (241). Kempe is eager to communicate the penitential aspect of this journey – the thirst, the laborious hills and the two days of survival in the outdoor elements – a challenging feat for the average pilgrim but a remarkable conquest for an elderly one.

Nowhere is there a more evocative, tormenting episode, than that which describes the party of poor folk that she is compelled to join en route to Aachen, whose lice infestation necessitates a systematic stripping and picking that causes Kempe not only intense humiliation, but a distressing scourge of her own:

> Whan þei wer wyth-owtyn þe townys, hir felaschep dedyn nof her clothys, &, sittyng nakyd, pykyd hem [the lice]. Nede compellyd hir to abydyn hem & prolongyn hir jurne & ben at meche mor cost þan sche

Kempe's saint making, see Katherine J. Lewis, 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England'. Also Diane Watt, 'Margery Kempe', in *Medieval Women's Writing*.

> xulde ellys a ben. Thys creatur was a-bauyd [afraid] to putte of hir cloþis as hyr felawys dedyn, & þerfor sche thorw hir comownyng had part of her vermyn & was betyn & stongyn ful euyl boþe day & nyght tyl God sent hir oþer felaschep. Sche kept forth hir felaschep wyth gret angwisch & disese & meche lettyng vn-to þe tyme þat þei comyn to Akun (237).

Faced with a choice between exposed humiliation or the painful affliction of the bites and stings of multitudinous lice, Kempe opts for physical pain over naked fear; a testament to her aged ability to sustain discomfort and the paradoxical *in*ability to manage feelings of terror, as we saw on her voyage to Norway.[72] Diane Watt views this episode as Kempe 'on the verge of being reduced to little more than an animal', and certainly, the image of this elderly pilgrim on the margins of a group of delousing homo-sapiens emphasises the elemental nature of the travail.[73] However, her elected endurance of this *angwisch* and *disese* also evidences an acceptance of the sacrificial asceticism that has become implicit to the continuation of the journey; a faith in the eventual remedy of the pestilence and an empowering self-exclusion from the group that sets her more fixedly on her path to becoming a wise woman religious.

The effort becomes so intense, nevertheless, that Kempe eventually anticipates death: 'Sche was so wery & so ouyrcomyn wyth labowr to-

[72] The fear of rape and defilement is also a common thread throughout Kempe's later travels, when she appears to feel more vulnerable to attack. On the way to Aachen she encounters priests who insult her and show 'vn-clenly' behaviour, making her have 'drede for hir chastite' (236). On the road to Calais she is 'euyr a-ferd to a be rauishcyd er defilyd' (241). Perhaps her fears are more than justified when juxtaposed with the thirteenth century theorists who debated whether it was more sinful to fornicate with a beautiful young woman or an ugly old hag, 'on the basis of the pleasure quota'. See Dyan Eliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, p. 136. Lois W. Banner writes on the perceived dangers and insatiability of the sexual older woman in *In Full Flower: Aging Women, Power and Sexuality: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), especially pp. 164-384. See also Robert Magnan's discussion of the medieval condemnation of 'the sexuality of senescence', in 'Sex and Senescence in Medieval Literature', p. 19. See also Herbert C. Covey, 'Perceptions and Attitudes toward Sexuality of the Elderly during the Middle Ages', where he notes how medieval culture saw the sexuality of mature old women as 'grotesque, threatening, and inappropriate' (pp. 96-7). Since Margery Kempe would be concerned not with the legal status of rape on her travels but by the infringement of her long-cherished chastity and bodily integrity, and given that her husband is God himself, her fear is a product of the threat to her spiritual flourishing: her very *raison d'étre*. See Chapter Two of this study for a discussion of Kempe's chastity and fear of rape.

[73] Watt, 'Faith in the Landscape', p. 185.

Caleysward þat hir thowt hir spiryt xulde a departyd fro hir body as sche went in þe wey' (241). Her asceticism nearly leads to the ultimate sacrifice when once again she feels on the brink of annihilation, overcome with physical exhaustion and pain; an experience both inside and outside the body, both physical and metaphysical, as her spirit wavers somewhere between life and death. As Niebrzydowski has noted, the point of the expedition is 'the *going* and her *spiritual response* to being there rather than the *seeing* that matters'.[74] Kempe is less concerned with the meticulous notation of places and visits, more with the spiritual process of penitential travel – and its early medieval traditions – as an activity of holy merit in itself.

The pain of Kempe's elderly body during this peregrination can be explained by science, both medieval and modern. Archaeologists have discovered that a large percentage of medieval women of menopausal age or beyond suffered from osteoporosis; a condition that, in fact, began its corrosion of the skeleton between the ages of thirty and forty.[75] Skeletal evidence also shows high rates of osteoarthritis, which indicates that Kempe was more likely than not to have some sort of degenerative condition of the skeleton: a clear reason for the way in which she struggles with walking on her travail. Medieval scientific texts also lay down the conditions for old women's health problems. We have already considered the complications of uterine prolapse, caused by sitting on cold surfaces (an inevitable occurrence during medieval pilgrimage). Other indicators of painful conditions arise from Kempe's post-menopausal age. The retention of the menses after menopause is responsible not only for the pejorative construction of old women as corrupt and poisonous, as I examined

[74] Niebrzydowski, 'The Middle-Aged Meanderings of Margery Kempe', p. 281.
[75] See Classen, 'Introduction', in *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, pp. 41-2.

above, but for physical pain caused by that retention. *The Sekeness of Wymmen*, for example, exemplifies the symptoms of retention as 'ache & dolour [suffering] with greuaunces and hevynesses from þe navel dounward to her prevy member. And ache of her raynes [kidneys] & of her riggebone [backbone] & of her foreheved and of þe necke & of þe eyen [eyes]'.[76] These far-reaching sources of pain illustrate not only a perception that old women are susceptible to multifarious locations and versions of corporeal suffering, but the 'greuaunces' are conflated with *hevynesses*: a word that Kempe employs frequently to describe the burden and discomfort of her final pilgrimage.[77] Her widowhood represents a further health complication, as pseudo-Albertus Magnus indicates that 'syncope', or the weakening of the heart, is common in women who suffer from uterine suffocation – a condition more usual in the chaste. Commentator A develops the exemplar by writing explicitly that 'this affliction happens most often to widows', going on to suggest that another term for 'syncope' [meaning *with incision*, as the displaced womb attacks the heart] is also known as 'ecstasy'.[78] This strikingly connects the pain imperative of the widow with what might be interpreted to be ecstatic, mystical experience, suggesting that Kempe's senescence accords her with a heightened proclivity to pain, as well as that pain providing, or being the same as, rapture, or ecstasy. Such a notion has multiple ramifications. Pain in the aged female (in response to uterine suffocation) can produce rapture. That pain and mystical experience are ontologically interrelated, as I argued in the introduction of this study, amplifies their connectedness as phenomena defined by their private and

[76] *The Sekenesse of Wymmen*, pp. 60-2.
[77] For instance, Kempe feels 'heuy' en route to Aachen, as she is alone (236). She is in great despair and 'heuynes' when she temporarily loses the company of the poor friar on the way to Calais, feeling 'heuynes' again when she has no lodgings available for that night (240). She is 'sory & heuy' when she has no fellowship on her traverse to Canterbury (242).
[78] *De Secretis Mulierum*, p. 132.

esoteric natures. Kempe could thus experience them both most acutely at this elderly stage of her life, when pain increases by default and by widowhood, and when mystical discernment might occur more readily during a modified consciousness, triggered by that pain. The potential association of pain with religious ecstasy and agedness in *De Secretis Mulierum* therefore situates Kempe – whose intense meditations might be considered ecstasies – as a figure of predestined, inescapable pain.

Pain during peregrination occurred in other ways, including plague, famine, malnutrition, tuberculosis and sweating sickness.[79] Some of these conditions would be exacerbated by movement and travel, where high-risk situations and mobility could, according to Deborah Youngs, 'open them up to new infections'.[80] Travel thus posed a danger for health in itself.[81] Old women's movement, made possible by the freedom of widowhood, was regarded as a reason for their tendency towards gossip and meddling, and deemed threatening.[82] This, coupled with the medical notion of the 'wandering womb' which, according to 'On Treatments for Women', caused 'vehement pain', constructs a topos of mobility as inherently dangerous.[83] Margery Kempe appears, therefore, to be in the locus of a suffering imperative, whereby old age, chastity and movement combine to construct an all-encompassing pain hermeneutic.

[79] See Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe*, pp. 26-7.
[80] Ibid., p. 26.
[81] See, for example, Brian Gushulak, 'Globalization, Migration, and Health: The History of Disease and Disparity in the Global Village', and Michel J. Deprez, 'The Pilgrimages of Christianity', both in *Travel Medicine: Tales behind the Science*, ed. Annelies Wilder-Smith, Eli Schwarz and Marc Shaw (Amsterdam and London: Elsevier, 2007), pp. 209-20 and pp. 263-7 respectively.
[82] See Ziolkowski, 'The Obscenities of Old Women', pp. 82-3.
[83] See *The Trotula*, pp. 118-21. The womb is described as a 'wild beast of the forest' (p. 119).

When she arrives at Syon in 1434 or 1435, aged sixty-one or sixty-two, the final destination of Kempe's epic traverse is coupled with a timely affirmation of her didacticism as a wise old woman.[84] When a young man, moved by her affective response in the church there, asks the cause of her weeping, he addresses her 'Modir', and confesses his desire to follow the path of God: 'Schewith modirly & goodly ȝowr conceit vn-to me as I trust vn-to ȝow' (246). This man, in witnessing the spiritual suffering and fervour of an old woman at the close of the most epic journey of her life, recognises in her a matriarch and a teacher. Kempe commends the man, revealing that her tears are the product of dismay at her sins and of the Passion of Christ, whose 'precyows blod schedyng sche was redemyd fro euyr-lestyng peyne' (246). While the memories of the ascetic task of her painful journey are inscribed not only in her mind but in her damaged, weary body, Kempe remains trusting in the promised healing of that pain in heavenly bliss. Like her repeated surrogacy of others' pain, she is now satisfied of the replacement of her own pain in this life in return for its absence in the next. In communicating this message to the young man who trusts in her words, and to the amanuensis who will shortly record her torturous travels in Book II, her status as teacher is validated and sealed at the pivotal juncture of one journey's close and the beginning of another.

Painful Teachings

The very transcription of Margery Kempe's experiences is initially thwarted by God, whose denial of the necessary divine authority for its

[84] The Salthows manuscript has been annotated in red ink in the margin, glossing 'Shene' as 'Syon'. Henry V founded a Carthusian monastery at Sheen, Surrey, and also on the other side of the Thames, a Brigittine house of Mount Syon.These two houses formed a centrepiece of contemplative piety in fifteenth-century England. It is therefore likely that Kempe was at Syon, at this time. See Hope Emily Allen's note in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, n.245/31-32, p. 348. See also Barry Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 418, n.8269.

textualisation renders the timing of the book's production significant: 'sche was comawndyd in hir sowle þat sche schuld not wrytyn so soone' (3). Only twenty years or more, later, when Christ 'comawnded hyr & chargyd hir þat sche xuld don wryten hyr felyngys & reuelacyons & þe forme of her leuyng þat hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle þe world' (3-4), does Kempe employ the services of her first amanuensis (largely thought to be the son who had been living in Danzig).[85] The first draft of Book I, therefore, is also produced during her old age, and revised by a priest (probably her confessor Robert Spryngolde) in 1436.[86] She is, then, imbued with wisdom and suffering enough for God to command her to record textually *the forme of her leuyng þat hys goodnesse myth be knowyn to alle þe world*: it is her *life* which now embodies God's message and which is authorised as a didactic symbol, ripe for pedagogic dissemination to the world.[87] Thus, whilst Book I does not offer that same immediacy of recollection that we find in Book II, it is important that she is authorised by God at this aged point in her life cycle to record her *experientia*, and the cache of pain that she has interiorised.

Liz Herbert McAvoy has argued convincingly for Kempe's 'ageing 'bodylessness'', whereby her mature understanding of the medieval ideologies of the female body enables her to achieve an authoritative and transcendent

[85] See Sebastian Sobecki, '"The writyng of this tretys:" Margery Kempe's Son and the Authorship of Her Book'. Also Roger Ellis, 'Margery Kempe's Scribe and the Miraculous Books'.
[86] See Hope Emily Allen's calculations of the dating of the writings in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, n.6/23 and n.221/7-9. Also Windeatt, *BMK*, p. viii.
[87] Arnold Sanders has speculated that Kempe became minimally literate in the vernacular shortly before the composition of Book II, because she wrote letters to her son in Germany in c.1431. See 'Illiterate Memory and Spiritual Experience: Margery Kempe, the Liturgy, and the 'Woman in the Crowd'', in *Mindful Spirit in Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honor of Elizabeth D. Kirk*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 237-248, at p. 238. Josephine Tarvers has argued that Margery Kempe, was, in fact, literate. See 'The Alleged Illiteracy of Margery Kempe: A Reconsideration of the Evidence', *Medieval Perspectives*, XI (1996), 113-24.

voice.[88] Rosalynn Voaden argues that Wynkyn de Worde's redaction of the *Boke* in 1501, whilst 'insipid', constructs Kempe as a woman religious through its strategy to eliminate the woman herself, who becomes simultaneously invisible yet unambiguously holy in status. The 'revilement discourse' of the *Boke* is removed, Voaden suggests, leaving a 'sanitized' version, regarded as a useful devotional text not only by de Worde, but also by Henry Pepwell in 1521.[89] Barry Windeatt sees the *Boke* as contained within the genre of a 'life', a book of recollected prayers that foreground an extended dialogue with Christ and the 'aftermath' of those prayers: a 'stream-of-consciousness narrative'. Windeatt sees Kempe as more concerned with learning than teaching, undertaking 'inward contemplative communing', a conscious textual edit perhaps consequent of the dangers of making teaching her subject, per se.[90] This view is somewhat at odds with Voaden's later argument that Kempe's English travels represent 'a preaching tour that she believed to be divinely commanded'; her white clothes a bold hermeneutic statement of divine injunction. This preaching tour is, according to Voaden, an 'underground' one which sees Kempe mounting 'an unofficial and invisible pulpit' throughout the English towns that she visits, justifying her exhortations through the tradition of preaching *ex beneficio* as opposed to *ex ordinatio.* [91]

Whilst there is compelling scholarship on Kempe's insistence to preach from her middle age onwards, I propose a new distinction between the

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[88] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "[A] péler of holy cherch': Holiness, Authority and the Wise Woman in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *The Prime of their Lives*, pp. 17-38, at p. 19.
[89] Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbride, Rochester & New York: York Medieval Press, 1999), especially pp. 147-154.
[90] Barry Windeatt, "I Use but Comownycacyon and Good Wordys': Teaching and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden and Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 115-128.
[91] Rosalynn Voaden, 'Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Margery Kempe as Underground Preacher', in *Romance and Rhetoric: Essays in Honour of Dhira B. Mahoney*, ed. Georgiana Donavin and Anita Obermeier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 109-121.

attempted ministry of her middle, or perhaps menopausal years (as have been considered in previous chapters of this study), and the quieter teachings of her more advanced old age, or elderliness, when the 'revilement discourse' to which Voaden points is sidelined in favour of a benign acceptance, and sometimes seeking out, of Kempe's didacticism. Medical theory that posits the aged body as dry, cool, and thus less superfluous and more measured, conflates with cultural emphases on the physical unattractiveness of the *vetula*, and effects the conditions whereby Kempe is *not* removed from her narrative in authorial invisibility, but is, I will argue, made an audible and visible *auctrice* by the aged body whose very corporeality lies at the heart of her final validation.[92]

Pauline authority held that women were forbidden to teach or preach, and such tenets were evident throughout late medieval culture, including in the writings of Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-74), Henry of Ghent (d. 1293), and in the thirteenth-century handbook for anchoresses, the *Ancrene Wisse*.[93] These sources acquired a wide readership, testifying to a plethora of anti-feminist discourse on the illegitimacy of female public didacticism.[94] Aquinas questioned explicitly 'whether the grace of speech, wisdom, and knowledge pertains to women'.[95] As Alastair Minnis has shown, restrictions on female preaching increased during the thirteenth-century, after the Second Lateran Council of 1139, when ecclesiastical ordination was narrowed in concept and the

[92] Thomas Hoccleve viewed the Wife of Bath as *auctrice*. See Alastair Minnis, 'The Wisdom of Old Women: Alisoun of Bath as *Auctrice*', p.100.
[93] See Theresa Tinkle, 'Contested Authority: Jerome and the Wife of Bath on 1Timothy: 2', *The Chaucer Review*, 44, No.3 (2010), 268-293. See also Warren S. Smith, 'The Wife of Bath and Dorigen debate Jerome', in *Satiric Advice on Women and Marriage: From Plautus to Chaucer*, ed. Warren S. Smith (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 243-269.
[94] For further discussion of the cultural attitudes to female teaching, see Liz Herbet McAvoy, '[A] péler of holy cherch', pp. 20-1. See also Rosalyn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, pp. 27-40.
[95] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae.177.2. Cited from Alcuin Blamires, 'Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Saints' Lives', *Viator*, 26 (1995), 135-52, p. 141.

privileges of women reduced.[96] While Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was able to conduct several public preaching tours, by the time of Kempe's life, female didacticism in the public sphere was prohibited. However, the question of prophecy and visionary experience, or 'gifts', posed some difficulties for the medieval church and its stance on female preaching. As Alcuin Blamires observes, spiritual gifts or talents – *gratia* – should, according to Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, be disseminated to others as part of a wider responsibility and recognition of that special grace, embedded in the doctrine of I Peter 4:10.[97] Those select few who were empowered as 'prophetesses' were privileged (*specialiter electae et privilegiatae*). Julian of Norwich clarifies in *A Book of Showings* that she does not teach, but transmits the divine gifts that have been bestowed upon her with *divine* authority.[98] These precise distinctions for religious women's boundaries offer some explanation for the indignant opposition to Margery Kempe's post-conversion exhortations. I wish, therefore, to illustrate some examples of the hostile reception of her attempted *middle aged* didacticism, before offering some contrasting observations about the way in which *old* age brings with it an appeasing effect, as her instructional efforts are met with a more willing acceptance of the wisdom of senescence.[99]

Shortly after her conversion in her early forties, Margery Kempe complains to the anchorite at the Friary in Lynn of her other confessor's lack of belief in her 'felyngys'; such rejection of her newfound raison d'être symbolising a 'gret peyn' to her (44). Though the anchor reassures her that it is by God's

[96] Alastair Minnis, 'Religious Roles: Public and Private', in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c.1100-c.1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 47-82, here, pp. 51-2.
[97] 'As every man hath received grace, ministering the same one to another: as good stewards of the manifold grace of God'. See Blamires, 'Women and Preaching, pp. 140-41.
[98] See Minnis, 'Religious Roles', pp. 59-62.
[99] For a discussion of Kempe's middle aged speech and her 'linguistic life cycle', see Sue Niebrzydowski, '"Late hir seye what sche wyl': Older Women's Speech and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Middle Aged Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 101-114.

ordination that this confessor should be a ‘scharp’ scourge to her on a point of early spiritual benefit, such wariness of Kempe’s discernment is similarly apparent when she attempts to minister to a widow about her own choice of confessor. The woman ‘wold not levyn hir wordys’, and rejects any future visitation from Kempe (45). Whilst God directs Kempe to continue in her pastoral exhortation via dictated, written correspondence, and whilst the process and fulfilment of this instruction indeed comes to pass twelve years later, the hostile reception and conflict that frames this episode is indicative of several strained attempts at spiritual exhortation during her middle years.

It is probably during the autumn of 1417 when Kempe is aged 44, that she engages in her infamous conversation with the Archbishop of York at Cawood, who demands that she agrees that ‘Þow schalt sweryn þat þu xalt techyn ne chalengyn þe pepil in my diocyse’ (125-6).[100] Her refusal is pointed and tenacious, using semantic differentials to justify the continuation of her *speaking* of God and biblical knowledge in referencing Luke’s description of the woman whose devotion earned her Christ’s blessing and validation.[101] When accused of defying Paul’s edict, she responds, ‘I preche not, ser, I come in no pulpytt. I vse but comownycacyon & good wordys, & þat wil I do whil I leue’ (126).[102] In measured retaliation, Kempe denounces the very terms of her indictment, removing the spatial enclosure of the pulpit from the minds of her accusers and instead replacing it with the innocent ‘good wordys’ that, by their very nature, cannot be reasonably contested; a strategy that Alastair Minnis sees as evidencing the way that Kempe ‘makes a considerable show of staying

[100] For a detailed exemplification of Kempe’s whereabouts and their timings, see Hope Emily Allen’s exegesis in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 312, n.119/23-24, n.120/11-12, and n. 122/31.
[101] Luke II: 27-28.
[102] I Timothy 2: 11.

within [the limits]'.[103] After relaying a lengthy parable about a priest and a bear (which McAvoy regards as drawing on the discourses of Christ as preacher and the apostolic role of Mary Magdalene), Kempe's sagacity renders the clerk who had condemningly examined her, to be lost for words: a paradox indeed.[104] The ability to turn situations around through systematic argument and biblical expertise is evidential of the difficulty experienced by her community in understanding and interpreting Kempe and her determined role in the social arena. For though her position is orthodox in its devotion and intent, her operation outside the usual margins of convent or anchorhold, and her affective piety (read by many onlookers as boisterously unruly and threatening), explain the objective suspicion of her peers and clerics, who must have viewed her performances – given that she is in an early phase on the spiritual road – as ambiguously fraught.

Nowhere is sceptical reception more vivid than during the aftermath of Kempe's arrest for Lollardy at the Humber, in the same year. After her release and subsequent travel to London to acquire a letter and seal from the Archbishop of Canterbury, she returns to Lynn via Ely (and another, aborted arrest), and experiences once again the community of spite and retribution that is symbiotically concomitant with her religious persona. She suffers 'meche despite, meche reprefe, many a scorne, many a slawndyr, many a banning, & many a cursyng' (137). In a climactic account at the close of the chapter, however, comes the description of a man so incensed by Kempe's reputation as

[103] Minnis, 'Religious Roles', p. 58. A similar episode occurs in Chapter 53, where Kempe is locked up in the upper room of a house in Beverly. In defiance, she leans out of the window and calls out to passers-by, 'tellyng many good talys' (130). Kempe appears to be careful to employ a language of domesticity – the tales of the gossip or the housewife – so as not to come under further accusation. Nonetheless, as McAvoy has argued, the physical locating of Kempe at the window evokes a 'preacher in the pulpit', and 'firmly regenders both orthodox preaching practices and the location of those practices'. McAvoy, '[A] péler', p. 32.
[104] McAvoy, '[A] péler', p. 26.

a speaker of God and potential heretic, that he 'wyth wil & wyth purpose kest a bolful of watyr on hir heuyd comyng in þe strete' (137). Windeatt has noted how this incident has parallels with a similar experience of Bridget of Sweden, which, when considered in this broader religious context of holy-woman-emulation, gives a gravity to the event that is otherwise missed in the *Book*.[105] This is explanatory, perhaps, of Kempe's dignified smugness when she retorts 'God make ȝow a good man', thanking God as she processes past the doubtless throngs of locals who stand in voyeuristic judgement of her claim as a conduit for God's words. Certainly, Kempe makes characteristic use of the reproof that she has become accustomed to, by an immediate subversion of the assault into an opportunity to edify the man whose action is thus rendered farcical. This instinct for responsive ministry denotes an opportunism that has the dichotomous effect of both offering out her didacticism and transforming her ridiculed self into one of divine elevation and spiritual knowledge. Yet her task is not made easy by the congregation of unwilling recipients who resist and deny Kempe's quasi-ministry, illustrating a tension between the divine authority of which she has assurance, and the social license to speak, which is evidently much more difficult to muster.[106]

The physiological drying and regulating of the female body as it ages, however, established in Chapter Three of the present study, may be regarded as synthesising with the simultaneous growth in spiritual experience that Kempe

[105] Windeatt, 'I Use but Comownycacyon and Good Wordys', p. 127.
[106] Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker suggests that female knowledge in the Middle Ages was gained by imitation and listening and that this knowledge was practical wisdom, preserved in the heart. Any subsequent transmission of this knowledge, or wisdom, should be done so 'modestly but adequately', in answer to the questions of visitors. In other words, women were not supposed to offer out their knowledge without prior invitation. See 'The Metamorphosis of Woman: Transmission of Knowledge and the Problems of Gender', *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 642-664, especially p.644. See also Brad Herzog, 'Portrait of a Holy Life: Mnemonic Inventiveness in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Reading Memory and Identity in the Texts of Medieval European Holy Women*, ed. Margaret Cotter-Lynch and Brad Herzog (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 211-233.

embodies in her old age. This is encapsulated by *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, which posits that women beyond fifty do not menstruate 'because they be so dryed þat þe hote of þe blode is distroyde þat no superhabundant humvre may ryse in hem ne passe'.[107] The topos of superfluity is doubled in relation to women religious, whose devotional activities conflate to create a somatic equilibrium whereby bodily matter is digested and utilised without waste or excess: '[women who do not menstruate include] tho þat syngvn & wake mekyll, as do þes religios, for of her wakynge & travelynge in syngynge her blode wastyth [diminishes] & defyet [digests] well here repast'.[108] The term 'travelynge', in Middle English, denotes hard physical labour or toil, especially in relation to a burden assumed for spiritual purposes.[109] The implication is that religious effort uses up superfluous waste in the body, thus rendering older, devout women as doubly efficient. This adaptation of the female body to its drier, aged biology by the triggering of menopause and by behavioural exertion is illustrative of an advanced stage of corporeal maturation: the absence of waste and excess is manifested by Margery Kempe and those other holy women whom she emulates, whose measured teachings are received with more acceptance as they progress into old age because of the cultural understandings of medical ideas.

In addition to this reduced somatic excess and drying – a reduction of the 'flux' with which Kempe has hitherto been associated – old age can also provide a fissure of opportunity for the woman religious to use her voice, rather than

[107] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 48. The 'Book on the Conditions of Women' states that menstruation occurs 'Because there is not enough heat in women to dry up the bad and superfluous humours which are in them', in *The Trotula*, pp. 72-3. As women age and dry, therefore, this purgation is less necessary as the body naturally digests the toxic superfluity.
[108] *Knowing of Woman's Kind*, p. 48.
[109] See MED s.v. 'travel(e). For further discussion of the medical and spiritual excesses of the female body, see Chapter One of the present study.

succumb to the sealed-off silence that is more traditionally advised for the virtuous female. The *Ancrene Wisse* stipulates, 'You should not rebuke any man, or reproach him for his sin, unless he is over-familiar. *Holy old* anchoresses may to some extent, but it not a safe thing to do, and is not appropriate for the young'.[110] An aged authority is therefore potentially possible for Kempe, if her visions can be validated by male channels and if she can align with the reserved anchorite or with the measure of holy women like Bridget of Sweden, her lifelong model.[111] Her journey towards requisite 'knowing' is characterised by God, after the window-preaching episode and during her continued incarceration in that upstairs room[112] (which symbolises Kempe's sealing-off, if not its literal accomplishment) as efficacious through its painfulness: the scorn, spite and *disease* that she suffers for her pious exhortations are the route to her ultimate edification, and further amplification of her aged asceticism:

> Dowtyr, it is mor plesyng vn-to me þat þu suffyr despitys & scornys, schamys & repreuys, wrongys & disesys þan ȝif þin hed wer smet of thre tymes on þe day euery day in sevyn ȝer. An þerfor, dowtyr, fere þe nowt what any man can seyn on-to þe, but in myn goodnes & in thy sorwys þat þu hast suffryd þerin hast þu gret cawse to joyn, for, whan þu comyst hom in-to Heuyn, þan xal euery sorwe turnyn þe to joye' (131).

Equivalent to seven thousand, six hundred and sixty-five repeated decapitations, the pain of Kempe's shame and reproof is monumental in its efficacy, for each suffering will translate to a heightened joy in heaven. Such are the painful teachings that she herself must endure, and which foster the necessary knowledge and experience that will authorise her ministry as she

[110] My emphasis, *Ancrene Wisse: A Translation*, Millet, Part 2, sec. 18, p. 29.
[111] See, for example, Rosalyn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1999), esp. pp. 73-108 on Bridget of Sweden as 'exemplary'.
[112] See p. 353, n. 103 in this chapter.

continues into old age. *Experientia* is regarded by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker as a central source of learning for the illiterate woman: this acquired wisdom is *sapientia*, not *scientia*, or the scholarly knowledge of books.[113] Margery Kempe's progression into senescence thus illuminates a growing usage of the knowledge that she has internalised over many years of listening and living, a semi-literacy that is born of practical experience and learning via the textual recitation of the priest or the confessor and which enables her broader resistance of the structures of antifeminist ideology.[114] Such emphasis on experience is foregrounded, of course, by Chaucer's Wife of Bath, who privileges experience over authority as a legitimised means to access agency in the patriarchal milieu: 'experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for me'.[115] Alisoun's 'power' is a topic of scholarly debate, illustrated by Mary Carruthers' study which situates the Wife's domestic experience within a westcountry cloth-making locale in comparison with her 'exegetically skilled' and 'polemically successful' discourse, as well as by Alastair Minnis, in arguing that Alisoun 'can talk like a *doctrix* rather than a *magistra amoris*'.[116]

In contrast, then, to now travel fifteen years through Kempe's holy trajectory and into her old age, and into the different tone of Book II, we find her en route to Aachen, during the northern European peregrination, and at a church of friars, where she sees the Sacrament exposed in a crystal. Her

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[113] See Mulder-Bakker, 'The Metamorphosis of Woman', p. 644.
[114] For further discussion of the interplay between orality and literacy in the *boke*, see Diana R. Uhlman, 'The Comfort of Voice, the Solace of Script: Orality and Literacy in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, *Studies in Philology*, 91, (1994), 50-69.
[115] *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 105.
[116] Mary Carruthers, 'The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions', *PMLA*, 94 1979, 209-22, at p. 211. See also Carruthers' 'Afterword' in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and all her Sect*, ed. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), pp. 39-53. Alastair Minnis, 'The Wisdom of Old Women: Alisoun of Bath as *Auctrice*', p. 103.

subsequent weeping and affectivity angers the monk and chapmen, who consider her a hypocrite. Her response, however, takes an erudite tone that is now more aligned with learned clerks than with the uncontrolled vetula that such clerks would have her to be. She justifies her weeping with Latin scripture – 'Qui seminant in lacrimis' [They that sow in tears] and 'euntes ibant & flebant' [When they went and wept] – and when the men attempt her ejection from their party, she continues in a measured tone in her pleading (235-6). Though her words do not prevent her eventual elimination from the group, they are emblematic of a progressive, anamnestic understanding of scripture and the Psalter, the Latin quotation symbolic of her embarkation into the world of patriarchal learning and disruption of its guarded ownership. This senescent understanding and progress towards spiritual maturity is illustrated through her response to John, the guide who forsook her: 'Iohn, ȝe forsakyn me for non oþer cawse but for I wepe whan I se þe Sacrament & whan I thynke on owr Lordys Passyon. And, sithyn, I am forsakyn for Goddys cawse, I be-leue þat God xal ordeyn for me & bryngyn me forth as he wole hym-selfe, for he deceyuyd me neuyr, blissyd mote he be' (236).[117] The causative effect of Kempe's simple explanation for John's rejection of her is to render him illogical and over-reactive. In insisting on the presence of tears as a signifier of divine grace and of her privileged discernment of Christ's Passion, Kempe re-engineers the confrontational dynamic with her own elderly domination, replacing her earthly guide with God himself, who will instead 'bryngyn [her] forth'. The mystery of her compact with God functions as a means of creating a cognitive gulf between herself and her male onlookers, illustrating a zenith of assurance in her faith in God's plan. Her

[117] This passage provides evidence of Kempe's continued meditation on Christ's Passion, into her elderly years. This is germane for my argument in Chapter Six on the significance of the Passion visions for Kempe's old age and progress towards death.

clerkly companions might have power to tangibly remove her from their retinue, but they are powerless to prevent this aged woman religious from stepping tenaciously into the realm of learned hegemony, or from directing their own sanctified discourse back at them in defiant acuity.[118]

When Kempe returns to London in 1434, she is subject once again to accusations of hypocrisy, this time, the story of the woman from Lynn who would not eat 'reed herring' but instead 'good pike' (244).[119] By the time of her accusation the tale has become proverbial, indicative of a regional mythology determined to construct her as a figure of unstable reliability, of 'womanish' indecision. Her response, now, as a sixty-one year old, home from the travails of pilgrimage and spiritually reassured of Christ's satisfaction in her pains of despite, exemplifies a spirit of authority as she addresses her indicters with a tone of didactic chiding: '*ȝ*e awt to seyn no wers þan *ȝ*e knowyn & *ȝ*et not so euyl as *ȝ*e knowyn' (244). Her instruction is heeded, prompting a continued boldness as she speaks out against sinners throughout London, a pedagogic maturation that becomes textually validated as, finally, Book II makes clear the spiritual profit that these 'parishioners' experience:

> Whan þei beheldyn hir not meuyd in þis mater [on eating meat and fish], no-thyng repreuyng hem, desiryng thorw þe spirit of charite her correccyon, [þei] wer rebukyd of her owyn honeste, obeyng hem to a-seeth [compensation] making. Sche spak boldly & mytily wher-so sche cam in London a-geyn swerars, bannars, lyars & swech oþer viciows pepil, a-geyn þe pompows aray boþin of men & of women. Sche sparyd hem not, sche flateryd hem not, neiþyr for her *ȝ*iftys, ne for her mete, n[e] for her drynke. Hir spekyng profityd rith mech in many personys (245).

[118] Anne Clark Bartlett sees Kempe's 'incomplete literacy' as disrupting the antifeminist textual tradition, as it 'garbles the message, and robs it of its authoritative status'. Bartlett terms such activity as 'strategic ignorance'. See *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 19-23, (p. 23).

[119] See David Wallace's discussion of this London residency in *Strong Women*, pp. 122-128.

It is Kempe's resoluteness here that stirs the people to remorse and the desire for her correction. The tone of the passage evidences her new authority as chastiser and pedagogue: her 'correccyon' is requested, she 'rebukyd' the company, they 'obey[ng]' her instruction for penitential activity ('a-seeth). Such acceptance of Kempe's didacticism by these self-appointed congregationers underlies what they must perceive to be her aged authority; a recognition of faith and wisdom born through a diachronic journey of suffering and spiritual education. This growing confidence as an elder to the universal church enables Kempe to practice these chastisements elsewhere in the city as part of the seven spiritual works of mercy, focusing particularly on the sins of people's abuse of language: their swearing, cursing and lying.[120] That she refuses to moderate her exhortations, speaking plainly ('sche flateryd hem not'), illustrates not only an outspokenness born from her hard-earned experience, but also a dismantling of the powerful words of slander that have frequently blighted her community-interactions, and which have caused her great pain.[121] Now, she subverts that destructive language with an antithetic language of fruitful instruction where her pointed words of disapprobation are instead transformational, as significations of spiritual profit for the people. Painful slanders are thus paradoxically analgesic, reworked as opportunities for the aged asceticism that permits Kempe the sufferer to metamorphosise into Kempe the didactic elder.

[120] The Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy are teaching, counselling, chastising, comforting, suffering patiently, forgiving, and praying for enemies. Mary Beth L. Davis notes how Kempe suffers considerably for her chastisements. See '"Spekyn for Goddys Cawse": Margery Kempe and the Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy', in *The Man of Many Devices who Wandered Full Many Ways... Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, ed. Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebök (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999), pp. 250-265.

[121] Kempe's susceptibility towards slander is discussed in Chapter Four of the present study.

This newly-efficacious speech stimulates God's increased pleasure in her works, a blessing that instigates the revival of her boisterous sobbing and therefore the renewed irritation of the 'curatys & preistys of þe chirchis in London' (245). This ecclesiastical denial of her access to the worship-places of their jurisdiction evidences the wariness exposed in the clerics when this holy woman veers from her practised rationality and slips into the gendered arena of excess emotion and superfluity. While her battle with the churchmen perpetuates, however ('Þei wold not suffyr hir to abydyn in her chirchys', 245), the common folk relate to her human emotive responses, applying instinct and trust to the words and tears of the rejected woman-of-God who dares to speak his word: 'Mech of þe comown pepil magnifijd God in hir, hauyng good trost þat it was þe goodnes of God whech wrowt þat hy grace in hir sowle' (245). Kempe's apotheosis by her accepting audience evidences the faith required by a congregation in its teacher. The reception of her words as edifying is testament to the 'apostolic vocation' to which Mary Erler refers, as she draws on discourses of the holy mother and the exacting disciple in her unyielding chastisement of the people. Medieval female saints like Catherine of Siena, Margaret of Cortona and Sibillina of Pavia attracted bands of followers as a type of spiritual family. The saints referred to their followers as their 'children'. In imitating the domestic role of the disciplinarian-mother, then, Kempe is able to bypass anxieties over public teaching and instead find faithful followers in the folk who recognise in her a holy wisdom: an auctrice.[122]

[122] Erler, 'Home Visits', p. 275. Aquinas regarded private teaching between a mother and her child as quite permissible. St. Anne was traditionally regarded as a maternal teacher. See Minnis, 'Religious Roles', p. 48. For further discussion of holy mother saints teaching, see David Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, pp. 122-24.

This is why, I contend, at Syon in July 1434, the young man who addressed Kempe as ‘Modir’, begs to learn of her devotion. This final didactic episode is situated at the near-close of Book II as an emblematic lesson in Kempe’s journey towards, and final arrival at, a position as God’s authorised representative on earth: an elder in the church of the world. Even so, on her return to Lynn, she is subject to the customary chastising of her confessor, who is affronted at her failure to gain his license for her overseas pilgrimage. Such a conclusion to the entire narrative is appropriate in its resonance as an example of the book’s reworked pattern of clerical chiding and Kempe’s subsequent overcoming, as her actions are repeatedly framed by the patriarchal disapproval of her increasingly publically-exhortational words. Book II ends on a note of reconciliation, nevertheless, where, with the ‘Lord[‘s] halpe’, she regains the love of her confessor and friends (247), and is, we assume, authorised once again, beyond the leaves of her manuscript, to go out and speak those ‘good wordys’ that ‘spekyn of God’ (126).

Chapter Six: The Passion of Death Surrogacy

This final chapter stands outside the life cycle paradigm. In examining the Passion Visions as ultimate exemplars of pain, Kempe's deathbed vigils in the parish, the medical understanding of death signs and prognostication, and Kempe's faith in her posthumous trajectory, I will show that the surrogacy hermeneutic that has characterised much of this study continues to the point of Kempe's willing surrogacy of death. The chapter thus continues with my emphasis on physiology and mysticism, and the *experientia* of Margery Kempe in matters of death and dying. The argument for Kempe's predisposition to the black bile of melancholia, mourning, and mystical perspicacity with which this study began will come full circle; revealing itself through the intense verisimilitude of her visions of Christ's Passion and evidencing a climactic tone. Vision, I will suggest, has both medical and mystical significations. In moving towards the materiality of Kempe's own death and burial, the study concludes with a consideration of the fecund flourishing that has been a central development in Kempe's life cycle, and the multivalent forms of resurrection with which she is bestowed. The topoi of fecundity, mourning, pain and piety that have been central to this study, therefore conflate here to offer some final conclusions about the medical metaphors and interpretations that underlie Kempe's experience. Such a conflation is aptly illuminated by an image of a garland in *The Pore Caitif*, which holy devotees should wear on the head of their soul, and which combines the blackness of mourning with the green regeneration of flourishing: 'And so beringe bifore crist ȝoure garlond, þat

corown bitokeneþ: with *knottis of mournyng* for synne as of *blak* silk & *with grene wouun togidir*.[1]

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Dyan Elliott, in writing about the living mystic as 'between two deaths', argues that the visionary discernments and miracles of living saints are congruous with a death of sorts, bringing new meaning to the phrase 'dead to the world'.[2] Elliott posits that the 'passing of the orthodox martyr corresponded to the rise of the living saint', often bearing somatic signs of injury or decay that denoted a bodily state that hovered between the corporeal and the spiritual worlds. Mystics such as Lydwine of Schiedam (d. 1433), whose living, disintegrating body was rotten and infested with maggots, and Vanna of Orvieto (c. 1264) who, during rapture, would seem so death-like that flies settled on her half-open eyes, demonstrated physical afflictions or lifeless behaviours during rapture that were interpreted as liminal in their life-death state and were thus either reified as holy or interrogated as heretical.[3] James of Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré had both made claims for a 'grey zone between two deaths on behalf of their holy clients' (claims made only after the individuals had died, due to the heretical danger of venerating a person as a saint while they were living).[4] The liminality of female mystics-in-rapture prompted various strategies by the church which sought to interrogate the validity of such insensible behaviour. Some of these strategies, or tests, were painfully cruel. Margaret of Cortona (d. 1297) experienced an ecstasy during a vision of Christ's Passion, and was thrown around the room by the Franciscans who watched and

[1] My emphasis; 'Þe Myrour off chastite' in *The Pore Caitif*, p. 197.
[2] Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman*, pp. 180-230, esp. pp. 180-193.
[3] Ibid., p.183 and p. 189.
[4] Ibid., p. 181.

doubted. Douceline of Digne (d. 1274) endured being jabbed with nails and chisels, and had molten lead poured over her feet. Frances of Rome's (d. 1440) confessor, John Matteotti, ordered Frances' spiritual daughter to 'torture her harshly'. Still, Frances remained static, although she mentions in a subsequent, conversant, rapture, that she did feel the ill-effects of the experiments 'after the fact'.[5] Such painful tortures and inquisitions seem not only to reveal the obvious need of the church to prove or disprove spiritual discernment, but also allude to the fears of hegemonical representatives where the very private, enraptured locus of female vision threatens the status of patriarchy as keeper of knowledge and wisdom.[6] Indeed, the very image of these clerics and confessors interrupting, invading and hurting the mystical body signifies a paradoxical desire to make public and accessible that which is necessarily private and privileged. Painful visionary experience, however, whether drawn from the vision itself (as we will see through Kempe's Passion visions) or from sources of external torture and inquisition, offers an opportunity for the mystic-in-pain to reorient the pain as, rather, a site of sanctification and transcendence. In her study of painful performances, both medieval and postmodern, Marla Carlson argues for the existence of a 'loophole through which women using pain as a means to alter consciousness create a way to speak within regimes that would silence them'.[7] If we might interpret visionary experience as an already altered state of consciousness, then the addition of pain as an added factor in the temporary existence of these women in an esoteric state may well indicate a position where female mystics can find access to another space between 'two deaths': to transcend instead of to submit.

[5] See Elliott, *Proving Women*, pp. 184-5.
[6] See Caciola, *Discerning Spirits.*
[7] Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain*, p. 79.

The mystical death experienced by Catherine of Siena evidences such an altered consciousness. Catherine recounts several death-like episodes in the 1378 *Il Dialogo della Divina Provvidenza*, including an experience of prayer resembling death: she had been 'feeling a disposition coming, like the one she had felt at the time of death', where her soul and body felt altogether separate: 'this was in a new way, as if the memory, intellect, and will had nothing to do with my body'.[8] Catherine later dictates a full out-of-body experience which her confessor, Raymond of Capua, would later clarify as a mystical death. She describes being 'immediately thrown down. And as I was thrown down, it seemed to me as if the soul had left the body... I did not seem to be in the body, but I saw my body as if I were someone else'. She recounts that she was inanimate for 'a very long time, so long that the *famiglia* cried over me as if I had died'.[9] In his *Legenda Major*, Raymond of Capua seeks Catherine's canonisation in part by elaborating on this mystical death as an early turning point in her sanctified life; in describing this temporary physical annihilation, Raymond is able to imply that Catherine was thereafter dead to herself and completely possessed by God. He notes that God allowed her to suffer more and more of Christ's Passion, before her heart was literally wrenched in two: 'there was created in her heart such a violence of charity and love that her heart was not capable of remaining whole without being entirely broken in two'.[10] This event was witnessed by the women of the neighbourhood, lasting for four

[8] Catherine of Siena's *Il Dialogo* was translated into Middle English for the Syon nuns in the early fifteenth century, and later printed as *The Orcherd of Syon* by Wynkyn de Worde in 1519. Her *Life* was also known and owned in various religious houses. See C. Annette Grisé, 'Catherine of Siena', in *The History of British Writing, 700-1500*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 216-222 (p. 217-8).
[9] From Karen Scott, 'Mystical Death, Bodily Death: Catherine of Siena and Raymond of Capua on the Mystic's Encounter with God', in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 136-167, at p. 152 and p. 159.
[10] Ibid., p. 165.

hours. Later, Catherine revealed to Raymond that her soul had indeed 'been separated from her body and that she could still feel physically the pain of her broken heart'.[11] I wish to argue that the Passion visions experienced by Margery Kempe represent a similar experience, in symbolising an extreme, altered state of consciousness whereby she experiences a pseudo-death as both a surrogate and a disciple through a painful intensity and desperation that is unequalled elsewhere in the *Boke.* As I will exemplify below, in meditating on Christ's tortured body and wounds, Kempe is disassembled, too, running wildly and prostrating herself as if her heart, like Catherine's, is also broken.

Karen Scott suggests that Raymond of Capua 'shaped Catherine's life according to a theological scheme of general spiritual stages, in which the soul's progressively greater openness to God brings her closer and closer to death; then she experiences a mystical death manifesting conclusively her death to self and her life in Christ'.[12] Kempe's painful life experiences and progress towards old age, examined hitherto in this study, illustrate a comparable journey towards death as a route to God. This notion is enriched by an acknowledgement of Thomas of Cantimpré's discussion of the 'seven ages of man', where death is incorporated as a distinct stage, or corporeal age.[13] Patrick Geary regards this conceptualisation of death as 'a transition, a change in status, but not an end. The dead were present among the living through liturgical commemoration, in dreams and visions, and in their physical remains, especially the tombs and relics of the saints'.[14] From the deathbed activities of

[11] Karen Scott, 'Mystical Death', p. 165.
[12] Scott, 'Catherine of Siena', p. 163.
[13] Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*,1.78-84. From Katherine Park, 'Birth and Death', p. 17.
[14] Patrick Geary, 'The Uses of Archaeological Sources for Religious and Cultural History', in *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 2-3. Cited from Park,'Birth and Death', p. 27. See also Clive Burgess and Caroline M. Barron, eds., *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England* (Donington: Tyas, 2010).

last rites, communion and extreme unction, and the full Christian burial – all of which symbolise the 'good death' to which all medieval Christians aspired – to the putrefaction of the corpse in the tomb, death represented a continued process, deserving of its own clear stage in the life cycle.[15] Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that the medieval emphasis on a 'personal death valorized individual experience', as well as bodily suffering; that redemption is founded on a 'psychosomatic unity, a person, fully individual both in its physicality and its consciousness'.[16] Death was thus as significant for the soul as it was for the body: a synchronic event with eternal ramifications. Taking this notion as my starting point, I will explore this final stage: the meaning of death and dying to Margery Kempe, her privileged role as a death prophetess, and her intense meditations on Christ's Passion, which, I argue, symbolise to the greatest degree her spiritual maturation and desire to become the ultimate surrogate for the death of Christ himself.

My analysis of the Passion visions in *The Book of Margery Kempe* occurs in the final part of this study for several reasons. First, it is apposite to locate a discussion of death and the terminus of man's earthly existence in a chapter which seeks to explore Kempe's elderly years. Second, while the chronological occurrence of Kempe's visions is notoriously fluid in the text, and whilst she mentions in Chapter 85 that 'þes maner of visyons & felyngys' (208) occur soon after her conversion, there is ambiguity in the phrase 'þes maner' which is suggestive that such intense visions of Christ's Passion are just as

[15] Most Christians in fact believed that putrefaction in the grave was not the end of the human body, as it would be reborn at the end of time, at the Last Judgement, when body and soul would finally reunite. This event is viewed by Katherine Park as an eighth stage of human existence, in extension to Thomas of Cantimpré's seven stage model. See Park, 'Birth and Death', p. 36.
[16] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Death and Resurrection in the Middle Ages: Some Modern Implications', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 142, 4 (1998), 589-596, at p. 594.

likely to have occurred later in her spiritual journey as earlier.[17] Certainly, the Passion visions are located towards the end of the Book I with a distinctively climactic feel: the climax, in fact, of the first draft of the text. And athough Kempe makes efforts to emphasise her spiritual progression from her devotion to the Manhood to the Godhead, there is little evidence to suggest that she deviates from the Christocentric focus to which she has always been partial.[18] Kempe also mentions to her forsaking guide, John, when en route to Aachen, that she 'wepe[s] whan I se þe Sacrament & whan I thynke on owr Lordys Passyon' (236), explicitly stating that she continues to meditate on Christ's Passion during her old age. This, along with the implicit suggestion in the text that such visions represent a devotional zenith, the exegetical positioning of these visions within a consideration of Kempe's later stage in the life cycle seems appropriate. Since her final amanuensis revises Book I in 1436, when Kempe is sixty-one years old, we might assume that such revisions took place under Kempe's authorial supervision, meaning that during her elderly years she relives and re-imagines the Passion visions that characterise her spiritual progress, effecting their textual and phenomenological resurrection.[19] Finally, in a study which seeks to extrapolate the meaning and value of pain and painful experience to Kempe, it would appear apt to situate her meditations on the very root of Christian pain – Christ's Passion – at the terminus of my discussion as well as at hers.

[17] Kempe envisions Christ standing over her one day, as if in 'very flesch & bon'. Subsequently, 'thorw þes gostly sytys hir affecyon was al drawyn in-to þe manhood of Crist & in-to þe mynde of hys Passyon' (208).
[18] '...owr Lord of hys hy mercy drow hir affeccyon in-to hys Godhed, & þat was mor feruent in lofe & desyr & mor sotyl in vndirstondyng þan was þe Manhod' (209). This fervour is never fully revealed in the *Boke*, however. I am grateful to Professsor Barry Windeatt for sharing with me his thoughts about the dating of the Passion visions.
[19] See Roger Ellis, 'Margery Kempe's Scribe and the Miraculous Books'. Also Watson, 'The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*'.

Kempe's intercessory role in matters of death and dying is foreshadowed early in the text. Chapter 22 is dedicated solely to the communication of Kempe's prophetic powers; she is increasingly sent God-given word about the prospects of the sick and of those in Purgatory. These examples are offered in antithetic mode to the strategies of Catherine of Siena's hagiographer, however, as here, narrative brevity takes precedence over the accumulation of multitudinous evidence of beatified activity: Kempe is clear to dictate how 'Many mo swech reuelacyons þis creatur had in felyng; hem alle for to wryten it xuld be lettyng perauentur of mor profyte. Þes be wretyn for to schewyn þe homlynes & þe goodlynes of owyr merciful Lord Crist Ihesu & for no commendacyon of þe creatur' (54). She is aware, we assume, of the inherent danger in intimating a saintly predisposition. The revelations also appear to represent an early stage in Kempe's spiritual career; there is a sense of burden as she feels 'gret peyne & ponyschyng' at the discernments, especially those which reveal those who are 'to be dammyd' (54), and she struggles at times to understand, gaining relief only when she unravels true meaning. Kempe becomes the privileged prophet of death, as God communicates to her the fate of many people, bestowing in her not only the deific power of the knowledge of life and death, but providing a 'litmus test' of sorts that will enable her to judge the efficacy of her revelations as time passes:

> As þis creatur was in a church of Seynt Margarete in þe qwer wher a cors was present, & he þat was husbond of þe same cors whyl sche leuyd was þer in good hele for to offeryn hir Messe-peny aftyr þe custom of þe place, owyr Lord seyd to þe forseyd creatur, "Lo, dowtyr, þe sowle of þis cors is in Purgatory, & he þat was hir husband is now in good hele, & ȝet he xal be ded in schort tyme". & so it be-fel as sche felt be reuelacyon (53).

In development of her appointment as a *death prophetess*, Kempe is requested by God to pray on behalf of the dying, amplifying her privilege from knowing

holy woman to operational healer, as we saw in Chapter Four of this study: ‘Thys creaturys gostly fader cam to hir, mevyng hir to prey for a woman whech lay in poynt of deth to mannys syghte. & a-non owyr Lord seyd sche xuld levyn & faryn wel, & so sche dede’ (54). There are many similar examples in the chapter, although not all prove Kempe’s intercessory success, as the case of the litster [dyer] suggests: ‘An-oþer good man whech was a lyster lay seke also, &, whan þis creatur preyd for hym, it was answeryd to hir mende þat he xulde languryn a whyle & sythen he xuld ben ded wyth þat same sekenesse. & so he was in schort tyme aftyr’ (54). Whilst Kempe’s prayerful healing is not adequate in this instance, she remains privy to a divine understanding of the man’s demise, drawing her closer and closer to a perceptivity of the fragile and celestial liminality that is the divide between life and death, and an acute insight into her own mortal precipice.

An extension of these prophetic events occurs later in the narrative, when Kempe reveals how her growing holiness prompts the lay people of her community to seek her comfort on their deathbeds:

> Also þe sayd creatur was desiryd of mech pepil to be wyth hem at her deying & to prey for hem, for, þow þei louyd not hir wepyng ne hir crying in her lyfe-tyme, þei de[sir]ryd þat sche xulde bothyn wepyn & cryin whan þei xulde deyin, & so sche dede. Whan sche sey folke be a-noyntyd, sche had many holy thowtys, many holy meditacyons, &, ȝyf sche saw hem deyin, hir thowt sche saw owr Lord deyin & sum-tyme owr Lady, as owr God wolde illumyn hir gostly syth of vndirstondyng. Þan xulde sche cryin, wepyn, & sobbyn ful wonderfully as sche had be-heldyn owr Lord in hys deying er owr Lady in hir deying (172-3).

Though there is satirical potential in the desire of the people to reclaim Kempe’s bothersome crying performances and to utilise this ebullience for their own dramatic end (quite literally), and Kempe clearly happily complies, the language of this illustration denotes the regularity of her deathbed vigils. That ‘mech’ pepil request her service and that ‘*Whan* sche sey folke be a-noyntyd’, suggests a

plurality of activity, perhaps because her prophetic sensibilities had become known, or perhaps simply because her devout presence and affectivity in the locality gave way to a growing trust in her wisdom and power to soothe. Certainly, to watch the corporeal expiration of these people unfold, time and time again, would provide her with a familiarity with that ultimate transition from this world to the next, greater even than the average medieval person, whose contact with death was ordinarily frequent.[20] And as Peregrine Horden has argued, 'Spiritual medicine is genuinely medicinal, not just in theological but also in medical terms. It is another kind of medicine without doctors. Anything that promotes medicine for the soul – sacraments, devotional images and the like – can be seen as altering the accidents of the soul'.[21]

The *Artes moriendi* – the texts that depict the art of dying well – have been shown by Amy Appleford to be implicated in the process of laicization after the Great Schism of 1376. Whilst sacraments such as the Eucharist and confession required the involvement of a priest, 'good deaths' did not: according to a range of deathbed manuals, 'laymen could and should attend the deathbeds of other laymen'.[22] Texts such as *The Book of the Craft of Dying* offered instructions for the deathbed custodian on dying well, and interrogations, obsecrations and prayers for the dying person.[23] Significantly for Margery Kempe, an important aspect of deathbed activity was the support of

[20] See, Pamela Nightingale, 'Some New Evidence of Crises and Trends of Mortality in Late Medieval England', 33-68.
[21] Peregrine Horden, 'A Non-Natural Environment', p. 142.
[22] Amy Appleford, *Learning to Die in London, 1380-1540* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 11. The forthcoming volume, *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), especially the chapter 'Death and the Culture of Death: Universal Cultural-Historical Observations, with an Emphasis on the Middle Ages', by Albrecht Classen, pp. 1-58, will be a fruitful resource.
[23] See *The Book of the Craft of Dying: And other Early English Tracts Concerning Death*, ed. Frances M. M. Comper (New York: Arno Press, 1977).

the dying person's neighbours, or 'euen-cristen', 'whose role as witnesses was understood to have both personal and communal values and who had always directly participated in the ritual at various levels'.[24] The greater, officiating role of the lay householder that was promoted in texts such as the *Visitation of the Sick* (c.1380), may be consequent of the dearth of priests after the Black Death, but there was value also in the edification to be gained from visiting the sick and dying, a work of mercy necessary for one's own salvation as well as that of the afflicted.[25] The equality of all Christians in the face of death and thus the import of death-attendant praxes is a notion utilised by Julian of Norwich, who ontologically unites herself with her community: 'Alle that I saye of myself, I meene in the persone of alle mine evencristen', revealing a nexus between all Christians in matters of living and dying.[26] Julian herself is anointed for death on the fourth night of a bodily sickness so acute that she and 'they that were with me' perceived the outward signs of dying, as she herself was attended by others.[27]

Signs of Death

The physiological signs of death, or *signa mortifera*, were commonly known in the Middle Ages, largely due to the collection and editing of texts by Hippocrates and Galen by monastic scribes and compilers.[28] The primary

[24] Appleford, *Learning to Die in London*, p. 25.
[25] On the manuscript versions of the *Visitation of the Sick* and their wide pastoral usage, see Appleford, *Learning to Die*, Chapter One, esp. pp. 23-6.
[26] Julian of Norwich, *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*, p. 73. Cited from Appelford, *Learning to Die*, p. 25. See also Amy Appelford, 'The 'Comene Course of Prayer': Julian of Norwich and Late Medieval Death Culture', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 107, no. 2 (2008), 190-214.
[27] Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love*, ed. Watson and Jenkins, p. 129-131.
[28] For an index of all known references to Signs of Death in medical and scientific texts, see the eVK2 database (2014): An expanded and revised version of Linda Ehrsam Voigts and Patricia Deery Kurtz, *Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference* CD (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), <http://cctr1.umkc.edu/search>.

medical text on prognostication was the Hippocratic treatise *Prognosis*, translated from Greek into Latin in southern Italy in the fifth or sixth century. Short treatises based on translations of the *Prognosis*, named the *articella*, were produced at the medical school at Salerno for teaching purposes, and thereafter formed the centre of curricula in the high and late Middle Ages.[29] The Middle English translation of a Latin commentary on the *Prognosis* – the first substantial instance of a Hippocratic text in the English vernacular – advises that some of the outward signs of death are that 'his nose be sharp or his nosethrilles sharp, holow eyed, playn tymples, colde eeres and streighte, and the pulpis of hem turned inward, and the skyn which is vpon the forhed drie, hard, and straight, and the colour of the face al grene or blac'.[30] The text emphasises the importance of the tightening and contracting of the skin and features, with the 'holowe eyed' as the most deadly sign as it indicates 'sharp fevers [that cause] consumpcioun of moisture of the lacerates conteyneng the eyen'.[31] The eyes appear frequently as signs of near-death; sometimes bulging: 'the eyen bien set vpon the mowth of hollowness mediatly, with suche a fatnes that thei bien nat hurt with the hardnes of the bon', sometimes 'fleen from light', and sometimes black with cold and impending death: 'dymnes and blaknes fallen in eyen whan thei colden. And thei colden nat but whan deth fallith vnto hem and for that thiese colours bien alwey noyous and wikked'.[32] If the

[29] Frederick S. Paxton, '*Signa Mortifera:* Death and Prognostication in Early Medieval Monastic Medicine', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 67, (1993), 631-650, at pp. 632-3. For a detailed discussion of prognostication in university teaching, see Luke E. Demaitre, 'The Art and Science of Prognostication in Early University Medicine', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 77, (2003), 765-788.

[30] 'Commentary on the Hippocratic *Prognostics,* Part I', ed. M. Teresa Tavormina, in *Sex, Aging, and Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium: Trinity College Cambridge MS R. 14. 52, Its Texts, Language, and Scribe*, Volume 1, pp. 373-434 (p. 397). The usage of the term 'sharp' occurs frequently, sometimes indicating the acuteness of the sickness, and sometimes suggesting a contracting of the flesh. MED s.v. sharp: 4(a) Of physical pain, sickness, hunger, etc., acute, intense, severe; a high fever.

[31] 'Commentary on the Hippocratic *Prognostics*', p. 397. MED s.v. lacertes: muscles.

[32] 'Commentary on the *Prognostics*', p. 398, p. 402 and p. 404 respectively.

‘eyeliddis’ are ‘intorned’, and only the ‘white of the eyen in sleep appieryng’ and that ‘he seeth nat and so of other’, then, along with the failure of hearing and smell, death is ‘in the yaatis and at the dore’.[33]

The colour of the dying person’s face is of importance as well, of ‘grene or blac or pale or leedissh of colour’. As is made clear, the worst alteration is ‘to blac, forwhi it is made of superfluite ovircomyng of cold vpon the bloode’: a striking image when considered in concomitance with the black bile of Kempe’s melancholia and the coldness of her aged body.[34] The *Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac* makes a similar diagnosis – ‘Blak colour and grene, asky and of dyuers coloures is euel, and it bytokeneth rotynge of þe humoures’, which, unless purgation occurs, ‘her state is perilous’.[35] In a version of the *Prognosis*, entitled *The Ivory Casket* or sometimes *The Secrets of Hippocrates*, which was widely diffused in early medieval manuscripts, signs of death are often determined by pustules on the body, but other signals include cheeks that are solid pink and swollen, stomach pain, foamy blood running from the nose, pain in the nose and hernia.[36] A pseudo-Galenic manuscript from Echternach states: ‘Galen observed: These are the signs of approaching death in the human body. In the human body, the forehead breaks out, the eyebrows are skewed. The left eye is smaller than the right. The bridge of the nose is white. The mind fails. The pulse runs ahead. The feet are cold. The bowels empty themselves. Young men lie awake and the old sleep. These are the signs of approaching death’.[37] A similar image of the sharpened nose appears during the description of

[33] Ibid, p. 406.
[34] Ibid., p. 401.
[35] *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, p. 545.
[36] See Faith Wallis, *Medieval Medicine*, pp. 43-45.
[37] From Paxton, ‘*Signa Mortifera:* Death and Prognostication in Early Medieval Monastic Medicine’, p. 637. For a book-length discussion of the legal context for death (accidental, deliberate and natural), see Sara M. Butler, *Forensic Medicine and Death Investigation in Medieval England* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015).

Falstaff's death in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, where 'his nose was as sharp as / a pen' and his feet were 'as / cold as any stone'.[38] All of these signs are combined in the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, which states:

> When his browes heldes down, the left eghe es mare þan þe reghte eghe, the nose ende waxes sharpe, his eres waxes calde, his eghne waxes holle, the chyn falls, his eghne & his mouthe are opyn when he slepes bot he be wonut þer-to, her ere lappes waxes hethy, his fete waxes calde, þe wambe falles a-waye, if he pull þe strase or þe clathes, if he pyk at his nose thirlles, his forheuede waxes rede, ȝong man ay wakande, alde man ay slepande, his ij membres caldes agayn es kynde & hides þam, if he rotell, thiese are þe takynynges of dede.[39]

These signs are strikingly similar to those in the popular mid fourteenth-century poem the *Pricke of Conscience*, which lists the tokens thus:

> His fronnt bygynneth doun to falle
> And his browes goon doune with alle;
> His lyfte yghe semeth welle lesse
> And narower then the ryght yghe esse.
> His nese cop is sharpe with alle,
> Then bygynneth his chin to falle,
> His pouns ben stille with out styryng,
> His feet gyn coolde his body gyn clyng,
> And yif ny deth is a yong monne
> He waketh and may nought slepe thon.
> Bot an oolde mon to deth drawynge
> May not wake bot is ay slepyng.
> Men sayen that alle thes tokenes sere
> Ben of a mon when deth is nere.[40]

Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 513, a mid fifteenth-century medical manuscript, also contains a 'Treatise on the Signs of Death'.[41] If, for example,

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[38] William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act 2, scene 3, in *The Arden Shakespeare: King Henry V*, Third Series, ed. T.W. Craik (London: Thompson Learning, 2005 reprint).
[39] The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, ed. Ogden, p. 58.
[40] The *Pricke of Conscience*, ll. 816-29. From TEAMS Middle English Texts at <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/morey-prik-of-conscience-introduction> [accessed 16th June 2016]. The poem has traditionally been attributed to Richard Rolle. There is a new edition of the text which supersedes Richard Morris's 1863 edition: *Richard Morris's* Prick of Conscience: *A Corrected and Amplified Reading Text*, ed. Ralph Hannah and Sarah Wood, EETS O.S. 342 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[41] The digitised and transcribed MS, Hunter 513, is part of the online repository of 'The Málaga Corpus of Late Middle English Scientific Prose', <http://hunter.uma.es/>. The 'Treatise on the Signs of Death' occurs on ff. 105r-107v, transcribed and described by Teresa Marqués Aguado.

the patient's urine is 'blake and medelyd wyth blode þe viii day he schall dye'.[42] Furthermore, 'yf the seke Caste blood and there waxe blacke spottes þoroughe owte his body…he dyethe for sothe'.[43] If 'þe erynn of the seke be colde and his teþe Colde and the typpe of his nose and his Chynne hang dunward he schall dye with in v dayes'.[44] And 'yf a man haue me chill rottyn filþe at his mouthe þat sygnyfieth þe myddrem [diaphragm / spleen] to be perisshed'.[45] The ubiquity of the medically accepted signs of death is evidenced by their appearance in literary texts such as this medieval lyric: [46]

Whanne mine eyhen misten,
And mine eren sissen,
And my nose koldeth,
And my tunge foldeth,
And my rude slaketh,
And mine lippes blaken,
And my mouth grenneth,
And my spotel rennet,
And min her riseth,
And min herte griseth,
And mine honden bivien,
And mine fet stivien —
All too late, all too late,
Whanne the bere is ate gate.

Thanne I schel flutte
From bedde to flore,
From flore to here,
From here to bere,
From bere to putte,
And the putt fordut:
Thanne lyd min hous uppe min nose.
Of all this world ne give ic a pese.

[42] MS Hunter 513, f.106v.
[43] Ibid., f. 106v.
[44] Ibid., f. 107r.
[45] Ibid., f. 107v. MED s.v. miggern, middrin, etc. (a) Diaphragm; also, spleen; (b) the fatty membrane covering the bowels.
[46] IMEV 3998 in *The Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, ed. Linne R. Mooney, Daniel W. Mosser and Elizabeth Solopova, <http://www.dimev.net/>. Also in Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman, *Middle English Lyrics* (New York and London: Norton, 1974), no. 234, p. 224. For an analysis of medieval lyrics about death, see Rosemary Woolf, 'Lyrics on Death', in *Middle English Lyrics*, pp. 290-308.

A version of the *Fasciculus Morum* (1313-1317), from an early fifteenth-century collection of mystical verse and prose in Longleat MS 29, illustrates the conflation of medical and religious practice, as each physiological sign of death is directly connected to Latin rubrics that advise which religious act should occur according to the medical signs of death:

When þi hede quakes	Memento
And þi lyppis Blakes	Confessio
When þi brest pantes	Contricio
When þy wynde wantes	Satisfaccio
When þi lymys ryveleth	libera me domine
When þi nose keleþ	þen miserere
When þyn eyȝen holeweth	Nosce te ipsum
ffor þan deth foleweth	veni ad Iudicium [47]

Robbins notes how the well-known signs of death also appeared in prose sermons, including those of Bromyard, Wimbledon and Myrc, thus evidencing the permeation of medical knowledge into religious texts. Indeed, Frederick S. Paxton argues for a connection between spiritual and medical understandings of death and dying which might indicate a broad circulation, through his study of the dissemination, editing and arrangement of ancient medical texts by monastic scribes in the west, and the way in which this indicates the appeal of such medical texts in monastic practices of health and the care of the dying. This is illustrated by the scribal annotation of pseudo-Galenic signs in the margins of a manuscript on unrelated material and particularly through an anonymous treatise from Saint-Bernigne, which blends Hippocratic and spiritual ideas in relation to death signs: ‘That which is called life relinquishes the spirit, and, the bile of the blood of the whole body and the phlegm of all the flesh

[47] IMEV 4035. Longleat MS 29, from Rossell Hope Robbins, ‘Signs of Death in Middle English’, *Mediaeval Studies*, 32 (1970), 282-298 (p. 293).

having been changed, they die'.[48] Such notions permeated parish life in the form of ritual booklets and handbooks for parish priests, illustrating the clerical desire to have sufficient medical understanding of *signa mortifera* that their parishioners would not miss out on the vitalities of deathbed liturgy and rites. Lay parishioners like Kempe would have therefore witnessed not only the corporeal decline of those *euen-cristen* over whose bodies they held vigil, but those physical signs were likely to be reinforced by preachers in religious services.[49]

Hildegard of Bingen, writing earlier in *Cause et Cure* (c.1151-8), suggests the signs of death to include a hoarseness, or loss of voice, because the voice is the result of 'knowledge... humans are wise'. Watery eyes are another sign of dying, as they indicate 'the fire of the soul is extinguishing its flames because it will soon leave the body'. Finally, a loss of reason, when a person is 'constantly confused in his infirmity', illustrates that 'the soul withdraws the wings of rationality and prepares for its exit'.[50] Hildegard thus also conflates the corporeal signs of dying with their spiritual ramifications, emphasising the transition from the earthly to the heavenly worlds. Similarly, Julian of Norwich reveals her scientific learnedness through her descriptions of Christ's dying

[48] From Paxton, '*Signa Mortifera:* Death and Prognostication in Early Medieval Monastic Medicine', p. 646.
[49] Robbins references G.R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*. See Robbins, 'Signs of Death in Middle English', pp. 296-7. See also Alan J. Fletcher, 'Death Lyrics from Two Fifteenth-Century Sermon Manuscripts', *Notes and Queries* n.s. 23 [221] (1976), 341-2. More recently, see Alan J. Fletcher, 'The Lyric in the Sermon', in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 189-209, and Fletcher, *Late Medieval Popular Preaching in Britain and Ireland: Texts, Studies, and Interpretations* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), esp. Chapter 9, 'Literature and Pulpit: The Lyric in the Sermon', pp. 273-305. See also Julia Boffey, 'Some Middle English Sermon Verse and its Transmission in Manuscript and Print', in *Preaching the Word in Manuscript and Print in Late Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Susan Powell*, ed. Martha W. Driver and Veronica O'Mara (Turnhout, Brepols, 2013), pp. 259-275. For an index of verse in Middle English sermons see Veronica O'Mara and Suzanne Paul, *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), IV, 2894-95.
[50] Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from 'Cause et cure'*, translated from Latin with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay, Margret Berger (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 118-9.

body, including the changing colours of his face, the ‘spreding of the forehede’ and the ‘nose [which] clongen togeder and dried’.[51]

But perhaps most striking of all is the way in which the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis* advises the use of women’s milk in order to determine impending death in a patient. The surrogacy hermeneutic with which this study has been frequently concerned thus operates right up until the end of life itself, the multipliable and esoteric properties of breastmilk symbolising new life in synchronicity with matters of death and dying. ‘For to wiete if a seke man or a woman sall lyfe or dy’, the physician should ‘Tak þe seke mans pys & late a woman mylke þer-on &, if þe mylk falle to þe grounde, he sall dy &, if it flete, he sal lyfe’.[52] Another method is to ‘Tak his water & menge it with a womans mylke þat hase a knaue childe &, if þat gange to-gedir, he sal lyfe &, if þay depart, he sall dy’.[53] That the products of the maternal body have symbolic value for the entire duration of the human life cycle in such medieval imagining adds weight to the argument of this study, that substitutional or surrogate activity, with all of its transferrable power, has both medical and religious potential. With the ubiquitous iconography of the Virgin nursing the Christ-child and the concomitant notion of the Christic body as providing eternal sustenance for the world, it is little wonder that the metaphor of the mother’s milk holds such resonance in medieval culture for determining the existence or denial of human life itself.

[51] *A Revelation of Love*, Chapter 7, p. 145 and Chapter 16, p. 179.
[52] The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, p. 58.
[53] Ibid.

Dead to the World

I wish to contend that the interiority of Kempe's understanding of death is not only based upon medical and deathbed experience, but is also established early in the text by Christ himself, who situates his own tortured body within hers by enclosing his crucified self *inside* her own: 'I haue oftyn-tymes seyd to þe þat I schuld be newe crucified in þe be schrewyd wordys, for þu shalt non oþer-wyse ben slayn þan be schrewyd wordys sufferyng' (85). In explaining the salvific value of the slander and despite that Kempe suffers throughout her life, Christ's assurance that it will figure as both her demise and her salvation gives spiritual weight to the anguish and emphasises the centrality of the Christic body as a source of Kempe's devotion. That Christ will be crucified in her again and again is indicative of the surrogacy of her religious proclivity and also the strategic transitioning from the pain of hatred to the pain of hope. Such ascetic profit is made more explicit when she is conceived by Christ as a fleshly sacrifice to be consumed and martyred in what is a notable example of quasi-eucharistic substitution: 'Þow xalt ben etyn & knawyn of þe pepul of þe world as any raton knawyth þe stokfysch' (17). Kempe therefore reveals her conceptualisation as a willing sacrificial lamb early in her recollections, deliberately foregrounding her embodiment in vulnerable human flesh at the same time as insisting on the amalgamation of Christ's painful torture with her own; both humanising and elevating her trajectory. It is little wonder, then, that this sixty-one year old woman, fatigued and pained from pilgrimage, oversees the transcription and revision of the end of Book I with a seeming emphasis on her visions of Christ's Passion, and the out-of-body existence to which they point.

A preoccupation with her own death is visible throughout the *Boke*, but is most acute when in response to meditations on Christ's dying body. Such reflections on the image of the crucifixion were conventional facets of Eucharistic devotion, and were an important aspect of deathbed rituals. Julian of Norwich, for instance, experiences an intense reaction to the crucifix during her near-death encounter.[54] Directly after her intercessory prayers effect the quenching of the fire in Lynn in 1420, Kempe escapes to the prior's cloister (where her cries will not be vilified), and experiences a 'gret mende of þe Passyon of owr Lord Ihesu Crist & of hys precyows wowndys' (164). In pained response, Kempe loses control of her body, unable to restrain herself, crying, 'Take a-wey þis peyne fro me, for I may not beryn it. *Þi Passyon wil sle me*' (my emphasis;164). As a textual foreshadowing of the recollection of further, intensely-experienced Passion visions, Kempe prophesies her own death by signalling the inextricability of Christ's Passion from her own suffering, and her conception of Christ's death as equivalent to her own. In employing the future simple tense – 'Þi Passyon wil sle me' – the certainty of the manner of her terminus is signified, creating a binary effect which describes not only Kempe's current pain, which she cannot bear, thinking it lethal, but also the future repetition of such experience. We are told of the frequency, in fact; that 'Swech gostly syghtys had sche euery Palme Sonday & euery Good Fryday, & in many oþer wise boþe many ȝerys to-gedyr' (190). This conception of the Passion as the source of Kempe's multiple deaths evokes the mystical state of being 'between two deaths', as Kempe, like Catherine of Siena, knows that she will

[54] See *A Revelation of Love*, Chapter 3, ed. Watson and Jenkins, p. 129-135. See also R. N. Swanson, 'Passion and Practice: the Social and Ecclesiastical Implications of Passion Devotion in the Late Middle Ages', in *The Broken Body*, ed. A.A. MacDonald et.al., pp. 1-30, esp. pp.22 and 23. See also Vincent Gillespie, 'Strange Images of Death: The Passion in Later Medieval English Devotional and Mystical Writing', esp. pp. 131-43.

die over and over again. The infiniteness of these replicated deaths is testament not only to the inscription of Christ's life and death in her own body, but of the inadequacy of this life-sacrifice in repaying a debt that she conceives as impossible to fulfil: 'Þerfor, Lord, þei I wer slayn an hundryd sithys [times] on a day, ȝyf it wer possibyl, for thy loue, ȝet cowde I neuyr ȝeldyn [pay back] þe þe goodness þat þu hast schewyd to me' (184). Kempe's deaths must, then, recur forevermore.

The vision recounted in Chapter 79 is predicated on Kempe's maternal identification with the Virgin Mary and the cues that she takes from the Virgin's desperate sorrowing. Before Christ has even been arrested, Mary offers her own life for his: 'I wolde, Sone, þat I myth suffir deth *for þe* so þat þu xuldist not deyin' (my emphasis;187).[55] The centrality of the mother-figure to the crucifixion is brought into sharp focus through Christ's words of comfort, which align the maternal role as giver of flesh and substance (as medieval medical theory also proposes, in contrast to the male contribution of the child's 'spirit', as we have seen), with the concomitant destruction of that flesh, according to God's will: 'Modyr, I pray ȝow blissyth me & late me go do my Fadrys wille, for þerfor I cam in-to þis worlde & toke flesch & blood of ȝow' (188). The dichotomy of Christ's birth with God's plan for his demise is hinged on the term 'þerfor'; implying, in the medieval understanding, a consequential benefit to mankind, reliant, as it transpires, on the maternal body.[56] The Virgin atones for this complicity in her

[55] Meech and Allen state 'xuldist' to denote 'schal' in the Glossary of the edition used in this study. This interpretation suggests a shift of meaning. An alternative derivation might be the conditional, 'should' (OED: to express a tentative suggestion; expressing the conditional mood in the first person). The Glossary derivation favours the stronger meaning, 'shall' (OED: expressing the future tense or emphatic intention; expressing a strong assertion or command rather than a wish'). This is suggestive of the Virgin's desperation, hinged on her assertion that her death would be an effective substitution for her son's.

[56] MED s.v.: therfor(e) 'With ref. to a person, a body, or an institution presented as the beneficiary of some action: for the benefit of him, it, or that, on his or its behalf'.

son's destiny by falling to the ground, 'lying stille as sche had ben ded': a substitutional death, if not a mystical one (189). The Virgin's lamentation over her dead son was depicted variously in pietà, mystery plays and in literature in the later Middle Ages as part of the burgeoning cult of the *Mater Dolorosa*.[57] Kempe experiences a mystical experience in Chapter 60, which is inspired by her seeing a pietà in Norwich – 'a fayr ymage of owr Lady clepyd a pyte' – and falls to the ground 'as þei sche xulde a deyd' (148).[58] The Passion treatise beginning 'Quis dabit capiti meo aquam', by Ogier Locedio (d. 1214) was one of the most widely circulated devotional texts in the later Middle Ages and appears to be addressed to women. In one passage, Mary laments Christ's death, wishing to join him on the cross. In another, she is described as *emortua mater* (dead mother): 'Viuebat moriens, et viuens moriebatur. Nec potuit mori, que viuens mortua fuit' ('Dying she lived; and living, she died. Nor could she die, who was a living dead person').[59]

As Kempe witnesses the parting exchange between Christ and his mother in this vision, her integration within the scene unfolds. Immediately falling at Christ's feet in an *imitatio Mariae*, she also offers her own life,

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[57] For a discussion of the widespread iconography of the Virgin in the *Planctus Mariae*, *Stabat Mater*, and *Pietá*, see Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'The Role of the Virgin Mary and the Structure of Meditation in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (1999), pp. 169-192, (pp. 175-82). On Margery Kempe's identification with the Virgin, see Alexandra Barratt, 'Spiritual Virgin to Virgin Mother: Confessions of Margery Kempe', *Paregon*, 17.1 (1999), 9-44. The tradition of the *Mater Dolorosa* began in the East, particularly following the Crusades. Here, representations of Mary are unmeasured; she shrieks and mutilates herself in her grief. See Karma Lochrie, *Translations of the Flesh*, pp. 167-202. See also Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex*, pp. 206-23. Also Miri Rubin, *Mother of God*, pp. 243-8. Liz Herbert McAvoy traces Kempe's emulation of the Virgin and the paradigm of maternal sacrifice in *Authority and the Female Body*, esp. pp. 39-50. Alexandra Barratt considers female responses to the Passion in relation to male textual meditations used by women in '*Stabant matres dolorosae:* Women as Readers and Writers of Passion Prayers, Meditations and Visions', in *The Broken Body*, pp. 55-71. For a queer reading of the compassion between women in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, see Kathy Lavezzo, 'Sobs and Sighs between Women', pp. 187-91.

[58] See Laura Varnam, 'The Crucifix, The Pietá, and the Female Mystic: Devotional Objects and Performative Identity in *The Book of Margery Kempe*'.

[59] London, British Library, MS. Cotton Vespasian E.i, fol. 200r. From Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, pp. 127-131.

imagining an existence without him as a fate worse than death: 'I had wel leuar þat *þu woldist sle me* þan latyn me abydyn in þe worlde wyth-owtyn þe' (my emphasis;189). Here, as Kempe requests an active death in the form of being killed, as opposed to the passive *suffering* of death that the Virgin offers above, she supersedes Mary in the dramatic potential of the scene and underscores her understanding that, ultimately, she *will be* slain for Christ's Passion. This willing pain surrogacy is rooted in the tradition of the Virgin's grief and inspired by guidebooks such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, translated by Nicholas Love as *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*.[60] In Love's work, Christ emphasises the Virgin's inextricability from her son as he cries, 'I sholde onely be crucified & not shee. But loo now she hangeþ on the crosse with me'.[61] When the soldier spears Christ's side, Mary 'felle done in swowhen half dede'.[62]

Kempe's own 'sorwe & gret peyn' is evident as the Jews' torture of the Christic body begins before the helpless gaze of the Virgin and her 'vnworthy handmaydyn for þe tyme' (190). As Christ's body is bound to a pillar and beaten, buffeted and struck with whips and scourges, Kempe and the Virgin weep in painful identification, emblematic of the pain surrogacy that is entrenched in a maternal construction, as I have argued, and resembling a dichotomous subtext whereby Kempe must endure the multiple pains of both Christ and his mother. This endurance functions also as a divinely-ordained anguish, as God imparts his will that she will be an aural and kinaesthetic symbol of his grace:

Sum-tyme I ȝeue þe gret cryis and roryngys for to makyn þe pepil

[60] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Sargent. Sargent describes Love's *Mirror* as 'the most important literary version of the life of Christ in English before modern times' (p. ix). It is inconceivable that Kempe was not read this text by her confessors.
[61] *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, Capitulum xliij, p. 176.
[62] *Mirror,* Capitulum xlv, p.180.

> a-ferd wyth þe grace þat I putte in þe in-to a tokyn þat I wil þat my Modrys sorwe be knowyn by þe þat men & women myth haue þe mo compassyon of hir sorwe þat sche suffyrd for me (183).

Not only is Kempe given deific license to *know* the Virgin's grief, but her roars and shrieks in response to visionary experience denote an inscription of Christ's suffering in her own body that give her the privileged embodiment of spectator and spectacle converged.[63] In this way, Kempe's response to the scourging of Christ and the agony of Mary – a pseudo-usurpation of the Christic mother through her amplified, vocalised pain – constructs a means through which she can partake in the tragedy as it inevitably unfolds, and thus experience the Passion performatively, just as she would have witnessed mystery play performances.[64] Yet such potential complicity makes this argument more complex because of the liminality of the spectator as a possible co-persecutor, as Marla Carlson has considered, and also as an intrinsic sufferer.[65] Though Kempe's re-enactment of the Passion has the effect of repeating and reliving the pain, in so doing she both reworks medieval traditions of Passion devotion, and ensures that she gains a place in the ordered narrative of Christ's crucifixion.[66] The popular series of devotional prayers memorialising the Passion, *The Fifteen Oes*, traditionally attributed to Bridget of Sweden, suggest

[63] For a discussion of the transformative effects of performative mysticism on audiences with relation to the Passion of Christ, see Carolyn Muessig, 'Performance of the Passion: the enactment of devotion in the later Middle Ages'.
[64] Hope Emily Allen notes that Kempe had 'almost certainly' been to the York plays in June 1413, and there had been plays in Lynn in 1385 and in 1409-10. See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 333, n. 187/19. Claire Sponsler discusses the vibrant performance tradition in East Anglia, arguing for the influence of the cycle plays on Kempe's emotive gestures and performances during her visionary experience. See 'Drama and Piety: Margery Kempe', in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 129-144.
[65] See Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain*, esp. pp. 92-3.
[66] Kempe's Passion meditations demonstrate the influences of mystics such as Richard Rolle and Elizabeth of Spalbeck. See Alexandra Barratt, '*Stabant matres dolorosae*: Women as Readers and Writers of Passion Prayers, Meditations and Visions', esp. pp. 64-66.

the way in which Christ's wounds become inscribed in the body of their 'reader', who is thus complicit in his crucifixion:

> O Blessed myrrour of trouth, token of Unyte, & louesoom bonde of charite. Have mynde of thyne Innumerable peynes and woundes, wyth the whiche fro the toppe of thy hede to the sole of thy fote thou were wounded, And of the wicked Jewes thou were all to torne and rente, And all thy body thou suffredeste to be rede wyth thy moost clene blessed blode, The whiche grete sorrow Jhesu in thy clene virgynall body thou suffredest. What myghtest thou do more for us than thou dydst. Therfore benygne Jhesu for the mynde of this passion wryte al thy woundes in myn herte wyth thy precious blode that I may both rede in theym thy drede and thy loue And that I may contynue in praysing & in thankynge the to my liues ende. Amen. Pater nostre. Aue maria.[67]

This is a prayer that would have been known to Kempe, and made more precious because of its Brigittine connection.[68] That it calls for Jesus to 'wryte al thy woundes in myn herte wyth thy precyous blode' illustrates a corporeal inscription into the hearts of the devotees who will 'rede' them, recalling Christ's words to Kempe that he will be 'crucified in þe' (85). Through the dramaturgy of these visions, Kempe is also able to inculcate the very process and rupturing of the crucified Christ into her body and into her text, preparing the way for her passage towards mortal end and the 'good death' that she seeks.

Chapter 80 opens with the graphic imagery of torture. In what must resonate with Kempe as a reliving of her own binding and imprisoning during

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[67] My transcription. 'O Jhesu endless swetnes of louying soules…' [The Fifteen Oes no.12], (Westminster: William Caxton, 1491), (STC 20195) in EEBO <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctxver=Z39.882003&resid=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99836861>. Image numbers 5 and 6. *The Fifteen Oes,* is also available as a translation by Rebecca Krug, in *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett and Thomas H. Bestul (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 107-117.

[68] Some scholars have argued that the *Oes* were composed by the Brigittines at Syon Abbey. On the authorship, see Rebecca Krug, in *Cultures of Piety*, pp. 107-12). Also Claes Gejrot, 'The *Fifteen Oes:* Latin and Vernacular Versions. With an Edition of the Latin Text', in *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars*, ed. Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 213-38. Gejrot argues that whilst the attribution of the text to Bridget has been largely discredited, she was still considered to be the author by the fifteenth-century readership of the prayers.

her postpartum episode, she envisions Christ as bound to a pillar once again, his hands bound above his head.

> And þan sche sey sextene men wyth sextene scorgys, & eche scorge had viij babelys of leed on þe ende, & euery babyl was ful of scharp prekelys as it had ben þe rowelys of a spor. & þo men wyth þe scorgys madyn comenawnt þat ich of hem xulde ȝeuyn owr Lord xl strokys. Whan sche saw þis petows syght, sche wept & cryid ryth lowed as ȝyf sche xulde a brostyn for sorwe & peyne (191).

Her attempt to calculate the number of strikes inflicted and therefore the number of wounds created by these multiple weapons – a popular medieval devotion – indicates the desire to reveal the magnitudinous extent of Christ's injuries and the inconceivable level of pain levied. Christine Cooper-Rompato suggests that, in fact, Christ's wounds in this example are 'largely immeasurable', and that the resistance of such enumeration is intended to encourage 'extended contemplation of Christ's ultimate sacrifice'.[69] And Vincent Gillespie argues that, in imagining the metaphor of Christ as a book, 'The suffering Christ is abstracted and dismembered to facilitate concentrated analysis'.[70] Kempe's response echoes such dismemberment and evokes Catherine of Siena's broken heart, as she self-conceives as corporeally fragmented – fractured and exploded – and weeps so boisterously that it was 'as ȝyf sche xulde a brostyn for sorwe & peyne' (191).[71] The ocular vividness of her contemplation continues through amplified descriptions of the *unmade* body of Christ; as he is skinned, leaked and punctured:

> And þan sche sey þe Iewys wyth gret violens rendyn of [from] owr Lordys precyows body a cloth of sylke, þe which was cleuyn & hardyd

[69] Christine Cooper-Rompato, 'Numeracy and Number in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VIII, Papers read at Charney Manor, July 2011*, ed. E. A. Jones (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 59-73, at p. 71.
[70] Gillespie, 'Strange Images of Death', p. 122.
[71] Again, if Meech and Allen's interpretation of 'xulde' is to be upheld, the derivation of 'schal', or 'shall', indicates an emphatic inevitability, here.

> so sadly & streitly to owr Lordys body wyth hys precyows blood þat it drow a-wey al þe hyde & al þe skyn of hys blissyd body & renewyd hys preciows wowndys & mad þe blod to renne down al a-bowtyn on euery syde. Þan þat precyows body aperyd to hir syght as rawe as a thyng þat wer newe flayn owt of þe skyn, ful petows & rewful to be-holdyn. And so had sche a new sorwe þar sche wept & cryid ryth sor. & a-non aftyr sche beheld how þe cruel Iewys leyden hys precyows body to þe Crosse & sithyn tokyn a long nayle, a row [rough] & a boistews, & sett to hys on hand & wyth gret violens & cruelness þei dreuyn it thorw hys hande. Hys blisful Modyr beheldyng & þis creatur how hys precyows body schrynkyd & drow to-gedyr wyth alle senwys & veynys in þat precyows body for peyne þat it suffyrd & felt, þei sorwyd and mornyd & syhyd ful sor. Than sey sche wyth hyr gostly eye how þe Iewys festenyd ropis on þe oþer hand, for þe senwys & veynys wer so schrynkyn wyth peyne þat it myth not come to þe hole þat þei had morkyn þerfor, & drowyn þeron to makyn it mete wyth þe hole. & so her peyne & hir sorwe euyr encresyd' (191-2).

Like a skinned animal ready for consumption, Christ's raw and mutilated body, his wounds renewed and multiplied by the tearing of the cloth, causes Kempe a 'new sorwe': her weeping is 'sor' [sore]. That Christ's 'senwys & veynys wer so schrynkyn wyth peyne' reveals Kempe's understanding of medical knowledge and previous witnessing of dying bodies, the 'sharp' contracting and drying of the skin indicating signs of death. As she recounts each act of violence and its subsequent damage to Christ's body, she intersperses her own agonised reaction, juxtaposing the pained, crucified Christ with her surrogate suffering. When Christ's hand is drawn excruciatingly to the hole on the cross, so her 'peyne & hir sorwe euyr encresyd'. This image alludes to descriptions of the Passion in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, where Christ's body is pulled in order to fit nail holes made too far apart.[72] The sense of painful progression that Kempe relays, the deadly torture of the Christic body represented graphically and simultaneously to her own agony, highlights how she wishes to exemplify her dying with Christ's; a slow and torturous unfolding of the destiny of which

[72] Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 44.

she feels a part. When she cries out to the Jews, ‘Sle me raþar & late hym gon’ (192), she articulates an ultimate willingness for death surrogacy, her torment so visible and physical that the spectators in the church where this rapture occurs ‘wondryd on hir body’ (192). Her own corporeality, then, has merged with Christ’s in an out-of-body experience that finds her at once embodied and disembodied; her consciousness altered to the point of willing, mortal sacrifice, yet her body mirroring the ‘schaky[ing] & schoder[ing]’ of Christ’s, as it writhes in near-death. As Kempe describes Christ’s ‘precyows wowndys ronnyn down wyth reuerys of blood on euery syde’ (192), she is anxious to parallel her own pain and seepage, as she has ‘mor wepyng & sorwyng’: his blood for her tears (193). This reworked pattern of her reciprocation and reply to Christ’s suffering body continues throughout the episode, a dialogic exchange of Christic pain and mystical affectivity which implicates her into the scene as an active death surrogate. Never diluting the methodicalness and corporality of the Jews’ torture of Christ’s flesh, Kempe’s account insists on a textual immediacy that allows her to re-live, *or re-die*, each time she recollects the visions, just as she assumedly hopes her readers will be similarly edified by their infiniteness as sources of ongoing meditation. As Kempe dies with Christ with every blow and incision that he endures, she fulfils the prophecy that his ‘Passyon wil sle [her]’ (164), joining the other holy women whose liminal existence leaves them ‘dead to the world’, and closer to God in the next life than in this one.

Such emphasis on the draining of Christ’s body of blood (which ‘renne down al a-bowtyn on euery syde’, 192), and Kempe’s of tears, connects to the late medieval stress placed upon Christ’s complete exsanguination, and the significance that Kempe places on his shrivelled veins: ‘hys precyows body schrynkyd & drow to-gedyr wyth alle senwys [sinews] & veynys in þat precyows

body for peyne þat it suffyrd & felt' (192). As Caroline Walker Bynum shows, however, though Christ's body is portrayed as fully emptied, 'the blood that flowed was understood to be alive'.[73] Theologians argued that the 'gushing forth of water and blood in 'living' streams' was by a special, or 'second miracle', which proved that Christ's death was voluntary and life-giving, because blood in dead bodies coagulates and is stagnant.[74] The monk of Evesham (late 12th century) claimed to see, in a vision of the Passion, 'blood flowing from the side of the image on the cross, as it does from the veins of a living man when he is cut for blood-letting'.[75] This conceptual concomitance with the medical procedure of phlebotomy illustrates how exsanguination in the medieval understanding was not always associated with the loss of life, but also with the purgative function of medical procedures. In the monk of Evesham example, Christ's blood loss is equated with the purgation that corresponded to health and to healing, just as the crucifixion symbolises the universal healing of all Christians on earth.[76] Yet whilst that blood purgation might signify an efficacious activity, it simultaneously results in a loss of moisture that, in the context of senescence, characterises somatic deterioration and a drawing towards death. This is emphasised by the advice of Aldobrandino of Siena, who advises that, 'should one happen to pass sixty-five years of age, one should avoid purging and blood-letting unless the need is very great', lest the elderly individual becomes lethally dry.[77] Julian of Norwich describes the dying Christ in her own vision of the Passion; a face that was 'drye and blodeles', changing in colour

[73] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 166.
[74] Ibid., p. 167.
[75] Ibid.
[76] For a discussion of the advice of the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* for anchorites to undertake quarterly blood-lettings in order to be cleansed and healed (both physical health and salvific healing), see Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Bathing in Blood: The Medicinal Cures of Anchoritic Devotion'.
[77] Trans. Faith Wallis from Middle French, from *Le regime du corps de Maître Aldebrandin de Sienne*. In Wallis, *Medieval Medicine: A Reader*, p. 499.

from fresh and fair to brown and black, 'into drye dying', and where 'Blodlessehed [bloodlessness] and paine dried within'.[78] However, Christ retains 'a moister' in his 'swete flesh', a striking conflation of Julian's medical and theological understanding that at once upholds scientific understanding of moisture meaning life, and of the Christian teaching of Christ's transcended humanity. Though Margery Kempe may now be too senior in years to benefit from the prophylactic practice of phlebotomy, her intense meditation on the Passion visions during the later revisions of her book can be explained by the increased importance of the image of the dying, drying Christic body for her own slow dehydration and progress towards death, a process through the life cycle that, as we have seen, she increasingly embraces. Excluded from the purgative function of menstruation in her old age, and from the similarly restorative practice of blood-letting, Kempe's *lost blood* is absorbed rather than released, while nevertheless resonating as a further means through which to achieve an *imitatio* with the dying, drying, Christ.

The moment of Christ's actual death is reported in the episode with shocking brevity: '& þerwyth he deyid' (193). In antithetical action, Kempe becomes uncontrollably animated. While the Virgin lies in disconsolate prostration, 'as sche had ben ded' (193), Kempe runs 'al a-bowte þe place as it had ben a mad woman, crying & roryng' (193), agitated by the potential of a twofold loss.[79] Though she is able to speak soothing words to the static Mary, emphasising that her son is now out of pain, her own wild frenzy depicts a bursting, a paroxysm of grief borne from the loss of the Christ whose body she

[78] *A Revelation of Love*, Chapter 16, ed. Watson and Jenkins, p. 179. See also Gillespie, 'The Colours of Contemplation'.
[79] We might compare this disordered running and uncontained activity with the medieval medical concept of the 'wandering womb' (see n.80 of this chapter). This example provides an exception to the otherwise more measured and less excessive behaviour of her older years; evidence of Kempe's extreme distress in this visionary experience.

was told would ‘be newe crucified in [her]’ (85). This internalisation of the crucified Christic body has ignited a perpetual death in Kempe; a death that will replay until her final transition out of this world.

The final cessation of Christ’s pain marks an ultimate union between Kempe and the Virgin – these two holy mothers – as Kempe surrogates Mary’s pain in the aftermath of her son’s demise: ‘ȝowr sorwe is my sorwe’ (193). Such a pain surrogacy evokes Simeon’s prophecy to Mary that ‘thy own soul a sword shall pierce’ (Luke, 2:35), a topos replayed habitually, for example, in a medieval lyric which laments: ‘My child is outlawed for thy sinne; / My childe is bete for thy trespasse; / Yet prikketh mine hert that so ny [near] my kinne / Shuld be diseased [distressed]’.[80] As the revelation of suffering comes to pass, the sword’s work is complete only after the subsequent piercing of Christ’s own side by the soldiers, told through John’s gospel, when Mary’s figurative rupture becomes her son’s literal one.[81] When Christ’s fractured body is brought down from the cross, Mary ‘wept so plentyuowsly ouyr hys blissyd face þat sche wesch a-wey þe blod of hys face wyth þe terys of her eyne’ (193). In a reversal of maternal activity, the mother’s gestational blood is transformed into tears, which literally cleanse Christ’s own spilled and life-giving blood and echo the ceremony of Purification after childbirth, which is notably recounted just two chapters later, and which inspires a similar affective response in Kempe. As we saw in Chapter Four of this study, Kempe experiences a near-physical collapse at her vision of the Christ-child being offered to Simeon at the temple as she contemplates the intractable joy of Jesus’ birth and her own sword of sorrow: her own bleeding tears.

[80] From ‘In a tabernacle of a toure’, IMEV 1460. No. 196, in *Middle English Lyrics*, p. 187-9.
[81] ‘But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side, and immediately there came out blood and water’ (John, 19:34).

As the Christic body begins to fail, Kempe generates an agonised conversation with Christ that merges the physical and metaphysical to other-worldly ends. His torture is reciprocated by her utterances of anguish, and yet this dialogue is extra-linguistic, taking place through the contemplative medium of the mystic's mind where the body-soul divide becomes metaphysically blurred. As the scene progresses, Kempe's speech gives way to the non-verbal in an atavistic reaction to her grief; she runs frantically to and fro as if she were a woman 'wyth-owtyn reson', disorientated and weeping so greatly that 'hir thowt þat sche wolde a deyid': fearing death from the pain which disrupts her bodily integrity and the borders of self and space that evidence Carlson's notion of an altered consciousness (194).[82] Later, when Christ is finally buried, she wishes to 'a-byden stille be þe graue of owr Lord', unable still to be separated from Christ's body to the extent that she desires a joint burial: 'Hir thowt sche wolde neuyr a partyd þens but desiryd to a deyd þer & ben berijd wyth owr Lord' (194). As Christ's bride, Kempe enacts a vigil over the grave in her longing to be reunited and entombed with her divine spouse, enjoined in corporeal death as well as in eternity; as Bynum puts it in 'an effort to plumb the depths of Christ's humanity at the moment of his most insistent and terrifying humanness – the moment of his dying'.[83] Perhaps Kempe has finally reached the point of changed perspective, which Gillespie has considered in relation to medieval theology, where it is necessary to transform from 'the death of the self' to 'the dead stillness of contemplative attention to God'.[84] Yet Kempe's driving need for

[82] On Carlson, see p. 365, n.7 of this chapter.
[83] Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 131. Kempe may have been familiar with the story of Ananias and Saphira, whose sin resulted in the husband's death followed closely by the wife's. Saphira was buried next to Ananias (Acts 5:1-10). Charles J. Reid notes how medieval culture largely expected husbands and wives to be buried together, in *Power over the Body, Equality in the Family: Rights and Domestic Relations in Medieval Canon Law* (Michigan and Cambridge: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), p. 133.
[84] Gillespie, 'Dead Still / Still Dead', p. 66.

immolation as an inevitable state of grief does not easily reveal such a transition. It evokes the mystical conversation between Christ and his mother, relayed by Vanna d'Orvieto to her prioress, following the revelation of her impending death: '"Mother I am dead". And the other, pierced through, answered: "Woe is me, daughter, what are you saying?" The Virgin answered: "Mother, I am entirely dead".[85] To all intents and purposes, Margery Kempe, suspended here at Christ's graveside, is also 'entirely dead'.

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Conclusion

Somewhere in the space beyond Kempe's final prayer to her adopted children of the world is her physical death: silent and invisible, and disembodied from her book. The absence of a real-death-narrative allows her to achieve a paradoxical permanence in her absence and a strategic drifting into the spiritual ether. The prayer that wishes for the salvation of the souls of all mankind is her final voice and the ultimate act of surrogacy; a call, in her extreme old age, for the spiritual work of her lifetime to be utilised and for her fruitfulness to be efficacious even beyond the grave. How fitting, then, that Margery Kempe's final utterance is this prayer to the world: unconcerned with her own bodily decrepitude, her voice becomes a universal wisdom removed from the confines of her painful embodiment and left to resonate in the realm beyond the leaves of her manuscript.[86] As her corporeality finally fails her to completion, and she transitions to the next stage – beyond the realms of the human life cycle – the

[85] Giacomo Scalza, *Leggenda latina della B. Giovanna detta Vanna d'Orvieto del Terz' Ordine di S. Domenico* c. 10. From Elliott, p. 180.
[86] Windeatt has noted that the influential set of prayers, *The Fifteen Oes*, which were often erroneously attributed to Bridget of Sweden, may have offered Kempe an example to emulate here. See Windeatt, *BMK* p. 421. Also see *The Fifteen Oes*, this chapter, pp. 386-7, n.68.

wisdom and discernment that she gained on her journey will enter a new phase of ‘knowing’; a heavenly perspicacity from which she has hitherto been separated.

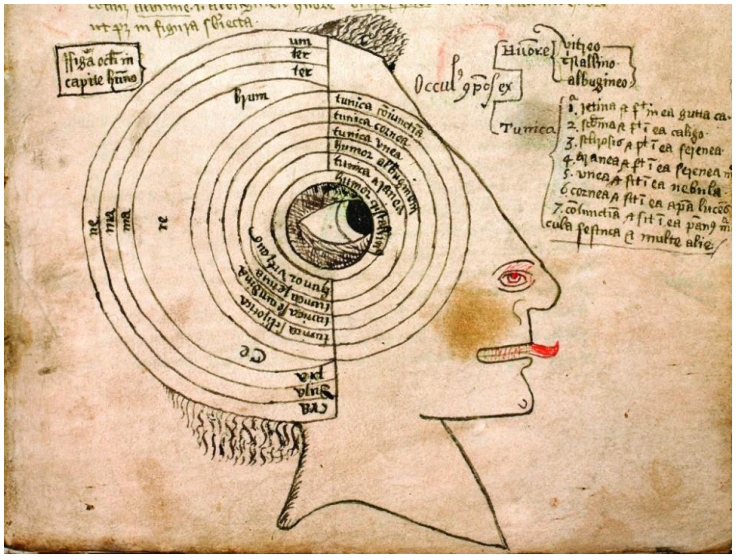

Figure 4: British Library Sloane 981 f. 68: Medical Miscellany, including the ‘book of Macharias on the eye called Salaracer, or secret of secrets’. Detail of a diagram of the seven tunics and three humours of the eye and the skull, labeled from the conjunctiva, cornea, uvea, albugineus (aqueous) humour, tunica aranea (interior capsule of the lens), cystalline humour or lens itself. Origin: England, last quarter of 14th century or first quarter of 15th century.

Figure 5: Pierpont Morgan Library ‘Devotional Miscellany’, MS M.489 f.4v. Bridget of Sweden at Alvastra Monastery receiving inspiration from Heaven. Rays extend from the hands of Christ

and the Virgin Mary to St. Bridget's head (eyes) during the priest celebrating Mass. The rays are Bridget's nimbus; she holds a book in her left hand, symbolising received knowledge. Origin: Naples, Italy, last quarter of 14th century.

These two images, from a late fourteenth-century medical miscellany and a late fourteenth-century devotional miscellany, encapsulate the dualistic workings of Margery Kempe's bodily eye and ghostly eye. The eyes, of course, have been Kempe's primary signifiers of pain as her weeping dominates the Book. Not only does the physiology and spirituality of her sight conflate through her experience, but that experience emanates materially, in the painful, stigmatic tears of her mystical vision.

Hippocratic and Galenic traditions held sight as the noblest of senses.[87] Augustine elevated intellectual vision over physical and spiritual vision; a topic that Thomas Aquinas took up in parts of the *Summa Theologiae* where he concluded that the 'best class of vision should not be corporeal'.[88] In fact, the medievals received from Platonism, and later Aristotelianism, 'philosophical systems that privileged visions above the other senses'.[89] Some aspects of visionary perceptivity were explored in Chapter One of this study. Dallas G. Denery suggests, 'The intellect and its capacities…are modelled after vision. Knowing something is somehow analogous to seeing something'.[90] Susannah Biernoff argues that 'the devotional relationship – as a form of visual and bodily

[87] Monica Azzolini, 'In Praise of Art: Text and Context of Leonardo's *Paragone* and its Critique of the Arts and Sciences', *Renaissance Studies*, 19 (2005), 487-510 (p. 504).
[88] Janet Soskice, 'Sight and Vision in Medieval Christian Thought', in *Vision in Context*, ed. T. Brennan and M. Jay (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 29-44 (p. 31). See also Dyan Elliott, '*Raptus* / Rapture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticisim*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 189-99 (p. 190).
[89] Soskice, 'Sight and Vision', p. 31. On Aristotle and sense perception, see Richard Sorabji, 'Intentionality and Physiological Processes: Aristotle's Theory of Sense-Perception', in *Essays on Aristotle's* De Anima, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amèlie Oskenberg Rorty (Oxford Scholarship Online: online publication 2003), pp. 1-52 <DOI:10.1093/019823600X.003.0013>.
[90] Dallas G. Denery, 'Introduction: Vision and Visual Analogy during the later Middle Ages', in *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World: Optics, Theology and Religious Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-18 (pp.4-5). For a useful survey on the physiology of medieval optics, see A. Mark Smith, 'What is the History of Medieval Optics Really About?', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 148 (2004), 180-194.

communion – can be distinguished from verbal or psychological *communication*'.[91] John Mirk claimed that whoever *saw* a priest carrying the host would be safe from death and *blindness* for that day.[92] Hugh of St Victor even questioned whether will we be able to open and close our eyes after resurrection.[93] As Jeffrey F. Hamburger suggests, 'Mysticism, at least mysticism understood as the experiential cognition of God ("cognitio Dei experimentalis"), cannot, it turns out, be imagined without recourse to the visible, however it is defined'.[94] Vincent Gillespie, in exploring the visionary epistemology of Julian of Norwich's experience, argues that contemplative aspiration sought to 'escape from the dark confines of corporeality and materiality and to aspire to the full light of illumination in union with *lux*'.[95] The connection between vision, physiology, mysticism, life cycle and resurrection are therefore central to the final assimilation of this study's findings about Margery Kempe's experience.[96]

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 clearly stated that we are resurrected with our own bodies:

> He will come at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, to render to every person according to his works, both to the reprobate and to the elect. *All of them will rise with their own bodies, which they now wear*, so as to receive according to their deserts, whether these be good or bad; for the latter perpetual punishment with the devil, for the former eternal glory with Christ [my emphasis].[97]

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[91] Suzannah Biernoff, Chapter 6, 'Ocular Communion', in *Sight And Embodiment In The Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 133-162 (p. 134).
[92] John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock, EETS O.S. 31 (London: Oxford University Press, 1868: 2000 reprint), p. 10.
[93] Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis*, bk. 2, pt. 18, c.18, PL 176, col. 616. Cited from Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 243 and p. 395 n.11.
[94] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, 'Mysticism and Visuality', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticisim*, pp. 277-93 (p. 284).
[95] Vincent Gillespie, 'The Colours of Contemplation: Less Light on Julian of Norwich', p. 13.
[96] On visionary epistemology see also David Lindberg, *Roger Bacon and the Origins of Perspectiva in the Middle Ages*: *A Critical Edition and English Translation of Bacon's* Perspectiva *with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) and Rudolph E. Siegel, *Galen on Sense Perception: His Doctrines, Observations and Experiments on Vision, Hearing Smell, Taste, Touch and Pain, and Their Historical Sources* (Buffalo, New York: Karger,1970).
[97] From The Fourth General Council of the Lateran, 1215 AD. 21: '1. Confession of Faith', in *Papal Encyclicals Online* <http://www.papalencyclicals.net> [accessed 8th May 2016]

The *Ancrene Wisse* reflects this doctrine in its ruling that 'Our old garment is the flesh, which we have from Adam, our ancestor; we shall receive the new one from God, our rich father, at the resurrection on the Day of Judgement, when our flesh will shine brighter than the sun, if it is torn here with suffering and with pain'.[98] While medieval scholasticism struggled with the notion of Platonic dualism (that the person is the soul, to which the body is attached), the Aristotelian definition of the soul as a form of the body, the person as human, not spiritual, helped to resolve such debates, although there remained much discussion about how fragmented pieces of the body would be reassembled on entering heaven.[99] As wrote John of Damascus (d.749), who, in echoing St. Luke that 'a hair of your head shall not perish', and who was quoted by many medieval theologians, said 'it is not a *re-surrectio* unless the same human being rises again'.[100] St. Paul taught that our bodies will be transfigured: 'We shall all indeed rise again: but we shall not all be changed…the dead shall rise again incorruptible: and we shall be changed', a passage which has been intricately analysed by Vincent Gillespie.[101] Some theologians were certain that the body was so necessary for resurrection that it was *natural*. Peter of Capua (d.1214), suggested that it was a consequence not of divine grace but of the structure of human nature that body returned to soul after the Last Judgement.[102] Thomas Aquinas theorised the human being as a hylomorphic (form/matter) union of soul and body: a victory over Platonic dualism: 'the soul…is not the whole

[98] *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses*, A Translation, Bella Millet. Part 6, sec.7, p. 137.
[99] See Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 254-5.
[100] Luke 21: 18. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 258.
[101] I Corinthians 15: 51-53. See Gillespie, 'Dead Still / Still Dead', p. 57-8.
[102] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 254.

person, and I am not my soul'.[103] And Bernard of Clairvaux stated how 'the sick, dead and resurrected body is a help to the soul who loves God'.[104]

As Katherine Park has shown, sanctified holy women in the Middle Ages were often subject to unusual deaths, their bodies embalmed and seen to be incorruptible, like Margaret of Cortona (d.1297), or relics discovered within their bodily organs upon post-mortem dissections, like the example of Chiara of Montefalco that was discussed in Chapter One.[105] Another holy ecstatic and visionary, Margherita of Città de Castello (d.1320), was opened immediately after her death, and several stones with impressed images of Mary, the Christ Child, and others, were discovered. Whilst these practices of opening holy women's bodies after their deaths was not always successful for the purposes of canonisation (Chiara was canonised only in 1881 and Margherita remains a *beata* to this day), Park notes the 'special meaning' attached to holy women's bodies and the possibility of holy objects interiorised within them.[106] Processes for canonisation became like a 'trial', and the church's authorities' need for physical proof illustrates what Park sees as 'the predominance of women among holy visionaries and male hagiographers' persistent tendency to translate the internal mystical experiences of their female subjects into perceptible corporeal signs, such as stigmata, bleeding wounds, lactation, and other paramystical phenomena.[107] Marie d'Oignies reportedly 'castigated the prior of Oignies' for cruelly extracting the teeth of a holy cadaver. After her *own* death, Marie apparently clenched her teeth when the same prior attempted to

[103] Aquinas, *In epistolam I ad Corinthios commentaria*, ch. 15, lect. 2, in *Opera omnia*. From Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 255.
[104] Ibid., p. 156.
[105] See Katherine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, especially Chapter One, pp. 39-76.
[106] Park, *Secrets of Women*, pp. 49-52.
[107] Ibid., pp. 58-9.

extract them as relics; when he asked for her pardon, she shook out a few teeth from her jaw for his use.[108] As told in hagiographies, the relic of Marie d'Oignies' finger supposedly healed others after death like her physical presence healed people in life.[109]

Though medieval theology held saints' relics as problematic according to the issue of corporeal fragmentation and resurrection, stories, folktales and some 'science' held that the body was in a sense alive after death; hagiographers describe dead saints sitting up to revere the crucifix, or exuding oil or milk to cure the sick.[110] We do not have such legends for Margery Kempe's afterlife. Does this important omission of either a death or posthumous narrative render claims for her sanctification more problematic? Though she was effusive throughout her life, there are no such descriptions of any beatific emanations or post-mortem narratives.[111] After her admission to the Guild of the Trinity of Lynn in 1438, Kempe would have been guaranteed prayers to be said for her soul, as well as the possibility of having her name entered onto a bede roll – a list of names of the benefactors of a church – to be read out at Requiem masses and obits and thus facilitating a continuous presence in the memory of the community.[112] It is likely that these readings would have occurred in the

[108] Pope Boniface VIII's bull, *Detestande feritatis* of 1299, stipulated that no separation of bodily parts or evisceration after death was tolerable, although by the fifteenth century its provisions had been 'virtually forgotten'. See Elizabeth A. R. Brown, 'Death and the Human Body in the Later Middle Ages: The Legislation of Boniface VIII on the Division of the Corpse', *Viator*, 12 (1981), pp. 221-269 (p. 247 and p. 269).
[109] Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 285.
[110] Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 266.
[111] Julian of Norwich, for example, would have been buried in an unmarked grave, as was customary for anchorites / anchoresses. However, there exists a shrine and a statue of Julian in Norwich to honour her life. See Appendices, Figures 7 and 8, for images.
[112] Individuals could also ensure their posthumous remembrance by purchasing a specified number of masses. Donors could have their names engraved on plates, chalices, vestments, windows, church roofs and floor tiles. The wealthy elite could commission tomb effigies (including, in England and elsewhere in Europe) 'transi tombs' which rather gruesomely depicted the cadaver in a state of decaying decomposition, or the 'double-decker' tombs which depicted the decaying body beneath a sculpture of the living body. See Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe, c.1300-1500*, pp. 206-8.

chapel of the Holy Trinity Guild attached to St. Margaret's Church in Lynn.[113] She may have been buried in a tomb within St. Margaret's Church, however, after a storm in 1741 when the south-western tower and spire crashed onto the nave and aisles, much of the interior of St. Margaret's was destroyed and rebuilt in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[114] There is no record of her burial of which I am aware.

However, there was local excitement in King's Lynn in 2014 when workmen who were laying new gas mains in the Saturday market place, discovered the bones of a child, dating from the twelfth to thirteenth century, when St. Margaret's Church was being built.[115] This led to a further discovery later in 2014, close to the north-west tower of St. Margaret's Church, during regeneration works. A chapel named St. John's, and its subterranean charnel house were discovered, which had occupied the site from 1364-1779.[116] Since the nineteenth-century, historiography has mostly only identified two other chapels in Lynn – St. James and St. Nicholas – which lie some streets away from St. Margaret's Church, and to which Kempe refers in her *Boke* (58-9).[117] However, the newly-discovered chapel and charnel house of *St. John* are *adjacent* to St. Margaret's, in the Saturday market place. In 1844, W. Taylor

[113] Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, p. 80 and p. 89.
[114] Ibid., p. 80.
[115]<http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/mystery_of_the_child_s_bones_found_by_workmen_in_king_s_lynn_1_3446350>
[116] W. Taylor, *The Antiquities of King's Lynn, Norfolk* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1844), p. 62, in Antony R.R. Mustchin (report author), Kathren Henry and Gareth Barlow (fieldwork archaeologists), *Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn, Norfolk: Monitoring of Works under Archaeological Supervision and Control and Recording of Exposed Remains. Research Archive Report* (Archaeological Solutions, Ltd. Report no. 4718, November 2014), p.3 and p.6. Also see: <http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/photo_gallery_roadworks_reveal_the_remains_of_old_chapel_in_king_s_lynn_1_3791282>
[117] See for example, Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and her World*, pp. 82-3, and the map of St. Margaret's and the locations of the chapels of St. James and St. Nicholas on p. xv of Goodman's book. Also Katherine L. French, 'Margery Kempe and the Parish', in *The Ties that Bind: Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, ed. Linda E. Mitchell and Katherine L. French (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 159-74 (p. 171-2).

noted that 'The super-structure was a chapel dedicated to St. John, and the basement story was the charnel, a consecrated vault, in which were carefully and decently deposited, the bones of the dead, disturbed in forming new graves, in the then extensive cemeteries of St Margaret's Church.'[118] A local archaeological company was recruited to excavate, and local archaeologist, Dr. Clive J. Bond, was asked to interpret the findings.[119] Bond notes that 'The only record of the construction of the Lynn charnel house was drawn from the Trinity Guild, then Corporation muniments, dated 14th February 1325: …"On the same day the brethren ordained that the scabins (treasurer) pay to the custodians of the charnel for the fabric of the same £4."'[120] The endowment of the charnel priest at St Margaret's was recorded in the will of Thomas Thoresby, merchant and former mayor, dated 1510.[121] Part of the original archaeological report notes that 'It is thought that L1030 may have represented the surviving section of an inhumation burial within a brick and limestone 'box' tomb...This interpretation remains tentative, however.'[122] It is not only an exciting event that the charnel house has been discovered, but there is an intriguing (and speculative) possibility that the aforementioned brick and limestone 'box tomb'

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[118] W. Taylor, *The Antiquities of King's Lynn, Norfolk* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1844), p. 59. From Clive J. Bond, *Interpretation of the Chapel of St. John and Charnel House Excavated at the Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn*, p.4. Unpublished Client Report: Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk, Apr 1, 2015, available at <https://www.academia.edu/18772746/Interpretation_of_the_Charnel_House_Saturday_market_Place_King_s_Lynn>

[119] My grateful thanks to Clive Bond for supplying his report. The charnel house was, apparently, full of bones, which were not excavated. Given that the cemeteries of St. Margaret's Church became very full, and that bones were moved to this charnel house (see n.29 above), there is a possibility that Kempe's remains lie here.

[120] 'Eodem die confrates ordinaverunt quod scabini liberent custodibus carnerum ad fabricam ejusdem £4. From E. M. Beloe, *Our Churches: King's Lynn, Norfolk* (Cambridge: Mackmillan & Bowes, 1899), p. 77, taken from Bond, *Interpretation*, p. 4.

[121] W. Page, *A History of the County of Norfolk: Volume 2*, p. 454-5. From Bond, *Interpretation*, p. 4.

[122] Antony R.R. Mustchin (report author), Kathren Henry and Gareth Barlow (fieldwork archaeologists), *Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn, Norfolk: Monitoring of Works under Archaeological Supervision and Control and Recording of Exposed Remains. Research Archive Report* (Archaeological Solutions, Ltd. Report no. 4718, November 2014), Section 4.12, p. 14.

contains the remains of Margery Kempe. Given her extremely close involvement in the parish of St. Margaret's throughout her lifetime, it seems highly probable that she is buried either within the church, grounds, or charnel house.[123]

Figure 6: Photograph depicting human bones (vertebrae) next to a void which entered into the charnel house in the Lynn Saturday market. Photograph courtesy of Dr. Clive Bond.

This information raises many questions about the location of Margery Kempe's body. Where, indeed, are Margery Kempe's bones? A future project investigating such an issue would be an exciting one, and I have been in contact with Dr. Clive Bond and the local historian, Dr. Paul Richards, about such a possibility.[124]

[123] On Kempe's close ties with the parish of St. Margaret's Church, see Katherine L. French, 'Margery Kempe and the Parish', and Laura Varnam, 'The Importance of St Margaret's Church in *The Book of Margery Kempe*: A Sacred Place and an Exemplary Parishioner', unpublished article, currently under consideration by *Nottingham Medieval Studies*.

[124] As Santha Bhattacharji has suggested, it is possible that Kempe *did* withdraw to an anchorhold, as suggested by Henry Pepwell by referring to Kempe as a 'deuoute ancres' in his 1521 redaction of the *Book.* See Bhattacharji, *God is an Earthquake*, p. 23. Also Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"Closyd in an hows of ston": Discourses of Anchoritism and *The Book of Margery Kempe*'. For the 1521 Pepwell redaction printed by Wynkyn de Word, see Meech and Allen, *BMK*, pp. 353-7 (p. 357). My thanks to Diane Watt for an informal conversation on such an issue. Anthony Goodman notes how All Saint's Church in south Lynn (within easy walking distance of St. Margaret's Church) had a long-established anchorhold attached to it. See

What we do have, however, is the book of her life, *The Book of Margery Kempe*; the story of her body as a pain-surrogate and healer, the 'very trewth schewyd in experiens' (220); a written experience for which she is thanked for undertaking by Christ, the Virgin, and many saints (219) and a *Boke* which is therefore sanctified. But perhaps most importantly of all, Kempe is written into another *Boke* – the sacred 'Book of Life' – which, I argue, might be regarded in fact as Book III of *The Book of Margery Kempe* itself as her final rebirth in body, soul, and heavenly text:

> …anon aperyd verily to hir sight an awngel al clothyd in white as mech as it had ben a lityl childe beryng an howge boke be-forn hym. Þan seyd þe creatur to þe childe, or ellys to þe awngel, 'A', sche seyd, 'þis is þe Boke of Lyfe'. And sche saw in þe boke þe Trinite & al in gold. Þan seyd sche to þe childe, 'Wher is my name?' Þe childe answeryd & seyd, 'Her is þi name at þe Trinyte foot wretyn', & þerwyth he was a-go, sche wist not how (206-7).[125]

As Christ then discloses in this magisterial vision, 'þi name is wretyn in Heuyn in þe Boke of Lyfe' (207). Margery Kempe has therefore *already* entered heaven, been resurrected through the gilded illumination of the 'Boke of Lyfe', and resides in hypostatic status beneath the names of the Trinity. While we know of at least two, if not three scribes of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (her adult son, the priest who was probably Robert Spryngolde, and the copier, 'Salthows'), I suggest the existence of a fourth scribe, God himself, as author of this 'Boke of Lyfe' and, as I contend, of a sort of Book III, which utilises her painful knowledge, in *imitatio Christi*, to fulfil the teleology of her life as 'unworthy' yet 'knowing' *creatur*.

Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, p. 81-2. It is not inconceivable that Kempe did live out her days there as a 'deuoute ancres'.

[125] On the significance of the 'Book of Life' in relation to the child-image of the angel, see Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"[An] awngel al clothyd in white": Rereading the Book of Life as *The Book of Margery Kempe*', pp. 117-8.

Furthermore, in 1997, Margery Kempe was entered into the first edition of the new *Calendar of the Church of England* as 'Margery Kempe, Mystic, c.1440 (E)'.[126] She is therefore now commemorated on 9th November each year, observed usually by 'a mention in prayers of intercession and thanksgiving'.[127] Though she has not ascended to the status of saint, and is therefore not commemorated in the General Roman Calendar, this ecclesiastical recognition of Kempe's significance as a figure of religious merit and authority, and her annual commemoration in the official prayers of the Church, symbolise a posthumous permanence. This is also an inscription into a fourth book – perhaps even Book IV of *The Book of Margery Kempe* – as her life and, importantly, her mystical authentication, are immortalised in national commemoration, and in equal status to that of her enduring life model, Bridget of Sweden.[128]

[126] *Exciting Holiness: Collects and Readings for the Festivals of the Calendars of The Church of England, The Church of Ireland, The Scottish Episcopal Church and The Church in Wales*, ed. Brother Tristam and Simon Kershaw (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 3rd edition, 2007), p. 9. 'The Calendar' can be found on pp. 15-26 of this volume. The entry for 'Margery Kempe, Mystic, c.1440 (E)' is located on November 9th, p. 25.
[127] *Exciting Holiness*, p. 11.
[128] Bridget of Sweden is also *commemorated* (the 'lowest' of the four observances, which include Principle Feasts, Festivals, Lesser Festivals and Commemorations) in England on 23rd July each year. Other commemorated visionaries include Walter Hilton on 24th March, and Mechtild of Madeburg, on 19th November. Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, and Elizabeth of Hungary achieve the higher remembrance of 'Lesser Festival'. See 'Calendar', in *Exciting Holiness*, pp. 15-26.

Figure 7: Hans Memling, 'Last Judgement', triptych, 1467-71, Bruges, distemper, oil on panel. At the National Museum, Gdansk. At the top, Christs sits on a throne in a rainbow, accompanied by the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, and the Apostles. To the right, devils push the sinners to Hell. On the left, those who are just calmly wait for their entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven, welcomed by St. Paul at the foot of crystal stairs leading to the gates of heaven. *All figures are fully embodied on entering heaven.*

The *Book of Margery Kempe* itself is thus Margery Kempe's apostolic gift to the world – her own embodied relic – and a way of sharing her mystical and painful knowledge. Just as her *euyn-crystyn* and her readers attempted to understand her pains, and just as one annotator has offered us a recipe as a cure, we are left to make sense of this *experientia* nearly 600 years later. This thesis has provided some strategies through which to do this.

> Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.[129]

As the melancholy Jaques claims in *As You Like It* some 160 years later, old age descends into an oblivion where the senses are obliterated and there

[129] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, scene vii, in *The Arden Shakespeare, As You Like It*, ed. Juliet Dusinberre (London: Thompson Learning, 2006).

remains a nihilistic nothingness. For Kempe, the opposite is true: such a state is not her final scene. This final stage of 'life'; the ultimate transition, as was discussed in Chapter Five, and perhaps an eighth stage, as Katherine Park suggests, will happen at the end of time at the Last Judgement when body and soul are reborn.[130] This was an 'emancipation from temporal order which men and women achieve rarely and by special grace, eternal beings possess by right'.[131] Most escaped the '*cursus aetatis* only after death…in which all differences of age are left behind'.[132]

Kempe has nonetheless transitioned to the fruition of her vision, and according to medieval theology, retains her bodily and ghostly eyes. Now free of pain, the life-long 'pain event' that she has endured has been written into the *Book of Margery Kempe* and the 'Boke of Lyfe' as 'illness narratives' of sorts and which will endure far beyond the realm of her corporeal spirituality and her ghostly or bodily ocularity, towards a knowledge far beyond her earthly *experientia*.[133] This is the epistemology that Margery Kempe has gained, and which leaves its legacy in the pages of the manuscript, and in the curative *dragges* recipe that will soothe the most tumultuous of flux. As *The Manere of Good Lyvyng* attests, 'In dyeng in the paynes of this lyfe, all paynes be gon'.[134] Kempe has achieved, we hope, the 'good' death that underpinned the activities of most medieval people; a death which has been foretold by God to be free of pain now that her painful investments are finally consolidated: 'it xal be cawse

[130] Katherine Park, 'Birth and Death', p. 36.
[131] J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 103.
[132] Burrow further discusses this eschatological doctrine and the scriptural complexity of the 'ideal' age of the resurrected body. See *The Ages of Man*, pp. 103-5.
[133] On the epistemology of vision in the Middle Ages, see Carolly Erikson, *The medieval vision: Essays on History and Perception*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1976). Also Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto and London: Univeristy of Toronto Press, 2004).
[134] *The Manere of Good Lyvyng*, XLIII exhortation, p. 127.

þu xalt no peyn felyn whan þu art comyn owt of þis worlde & also þat þu xalt haue þe lesse peyn in thy deying, for þu hast so gret compassyon of my flesche I must need haue compassyon of þi flesch' (183).[135] Whilst her voice fades out after the final orison of hope, it remains as an everlasting echo in the legacy of her rediscovered book: and Kempe's second resurrection.

S. Benjamin Fink asked, 'do we know pain'? Like the mystical knowledge that Kempe acquires, her pain is hers alone. Having given birth fourteen times in an age before anaesthesia, having struggled with the pains of chronic illness, spiritual agony and barrenness, the pains of old age, and the infinite mourning of grief and sorrow for the Christ whose body freshly bleeds before her eyes, it seems safe to conclude that Margery Kempe 'knows' pain. And it is this knowledge of pain that provides her with a route towards God – through that same ontological understanding of mystical privilege. As Esther Cohen emphasises, 'in this period the valuation of pain depended upon its utility'.[136]

This thesis has therefore closed the gaps between many disparate strands of criticism in Margery Kempe studies. It has revealed the content of the elusive recipe in Add MS 61823. Through the lenses of medieval medicine and culture, it has explained her crying and perpetual mourning of Christ as melancholic, stigmatic symbols, along with her unpopularity and her pain. It has argued for the inescapable medical and spiritual pains of chastity and the analgesic resolution of mystical marriage. It has offered explanations for her emphasis on pain substitution and surrogacy throughout various stages of her

[135] On the differences between good and bad deaths and the ramifications for the pestilent or contagious corpses which did not achieve a 'good' death, see Stephen Gordon, 'Disease, Sin, and the Walking Dead in Medieval England c.1100-1350: A Note on the Documentary and Archaeological Evidence', in *Medicine, Healing and Performance*, ed. Gemi-Iordanou et. al., pp. 124-58.
[136] Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*, p. 8.

adult life, exploring the value of gendered blood and its symbolic absence. It has revealed Kempe as a great healer of bodies and souls, as a lover of lepers and the sick. It has shown how the *aged asceticism* which characterised Chapter Five has had a powerful influence on the retrospective dictation of her life, particularly on Book II. And it has concluded here with a conflation of the medical, mystical, mourning and surrogate praxes that have underlined the study, revealing new information about Kempe's potential resting place. It has offered not a 'diagnosis', but a medical reading of Margery Kempe's phenomenology; physiological understandings that help us to grasp her experience in medieval terms instead of retrospective terms. And it is an illustration of the way in which an interdisciplinary approach to medieval studies can offer a fuller, macrocosmic view of one holy woman's marvellous experience, which resists diagnosis just as much as she resists any other type of categorisation, and gives back to the *Boke* an authentic *truth* that Kempe herself communicates as *verily* as she perceives it.

With the newly-deciphered recipe of folio 124v as the finale of Kempe's story, she has journeyed from sickness to health and been 'restoryd her a-geyn, as it' has 'openly be shewed aftyrward' (1-2). Without a medical reading of Margery Kempe's *experientia*, we overlook a critical strand in her book and in so doing, she is unrealistically disembodied, just as the De Worde redaction undertakes in removing Margery Kempe almost entirely from the text, as the Introduction suggested.[137] Though her authorised voice continues beyond the pages of her book, to be heard and interacted with by the future annotators and readers of her text, it is a voice which emanates through a body and a life *through which* she experienced the world. It is this body, in all its painful

[137] See Introduction, p. 70.

fecundity, through which she was able to receive God's voice and translate its healing message to the world. In her final prayer to the world, she continues in her quest to heal the pain of 'alle þat arn seke specialy, for alle laȝerys, alle bedred men and women', and for those 'þat arn in peynys of Purgatory'. For her own pains, in this prayer, she is grateful, 'I thank þe þat þu woldist letyn me suffryn any pane in þis world' (251). This thesis has been the exegesis of that journey towards knowing pain; the 'shew[ing]' of Margery Kempe's healed body and soul. She has, indeed, transformed her pain.

Perhaps one day we might reunite her bodily remains with her textual relic. In the meantime, and in her resurrected state, Margery Kempe can now fully 'see' Christ, and complete the flourishing in which much of her adult life was spent, as she sought the gifts of vision, healing, and medicine.

> In the words of Isaiah, 'You shall *see* and your heart shall rejoice, and your *bones shall flourish like an herb*'.[138]

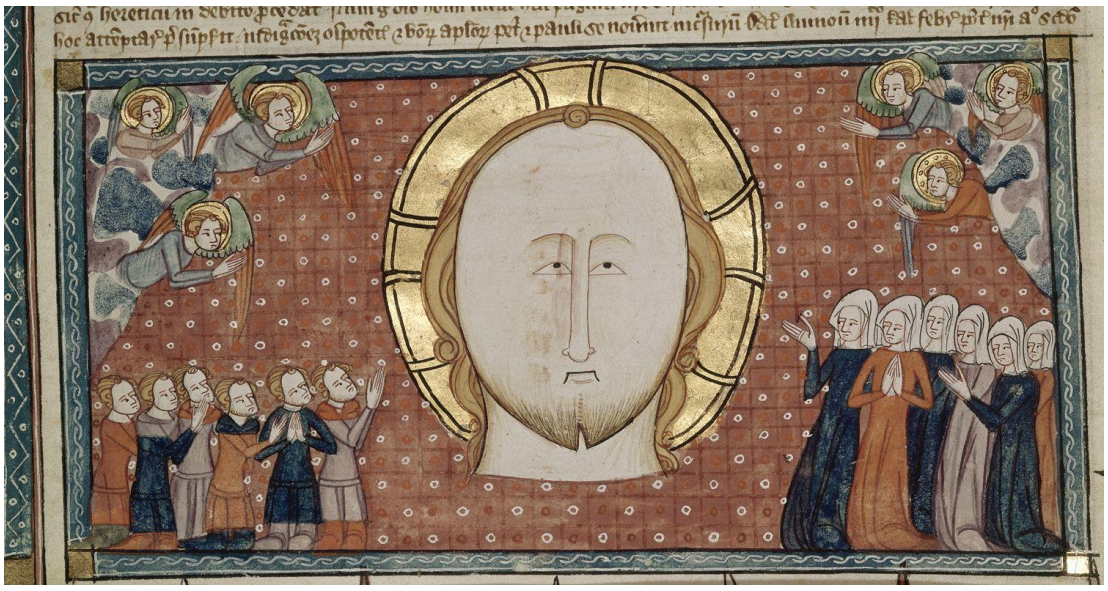

Figure 8: Detail of a miniature of the Holy Face envisioned and adored by angels and groups of men and women from the beginning of the Constitution of Benedict XI on the Beatific Vision.

[138] My emphasis. Isaiah 66:14.

British Library MS Royal 6 E VI f.16v from James le Palmer's 'Omne bonum', c. 1360. Origin: England (S.E.). See Appendices for the full folio 16v.

Appendices

Figure 9: Shrine of St. Julian of Norwich in St. Julian's Church, King's Street, Norwich

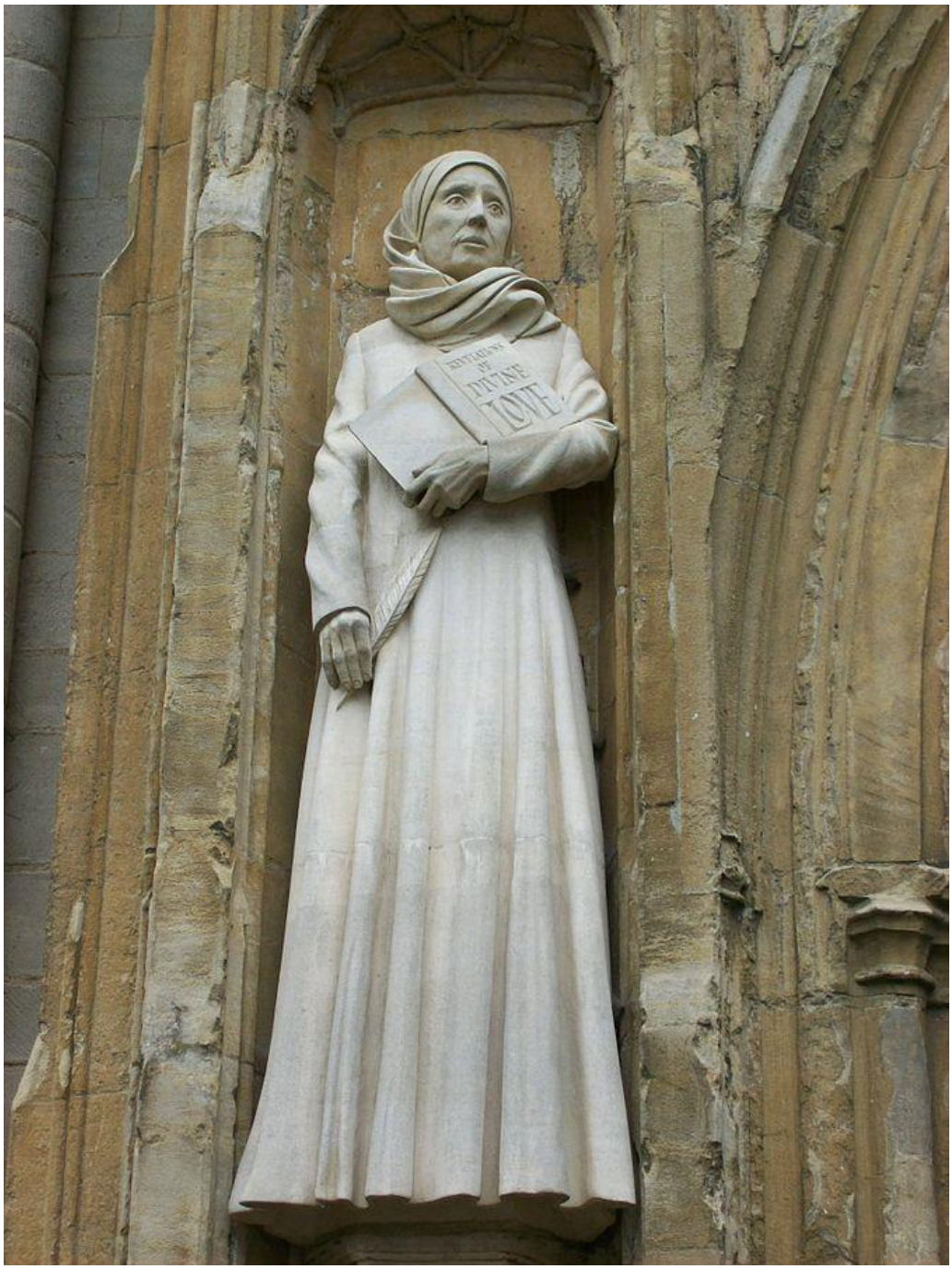

Figure 10: Modern statue of Julian of Norwich holding the ‘Revelation of Divine Love’, by David Holgate, situated in an original niche on the left of the west porch of Norwich Cathedral.

Figure 11: British Library Royal 6 E VI f.16v; full folio of Benedict XI issuing decrees and the Beatific Vision from James le Palmer's 'Omne bonum', c. 1360.

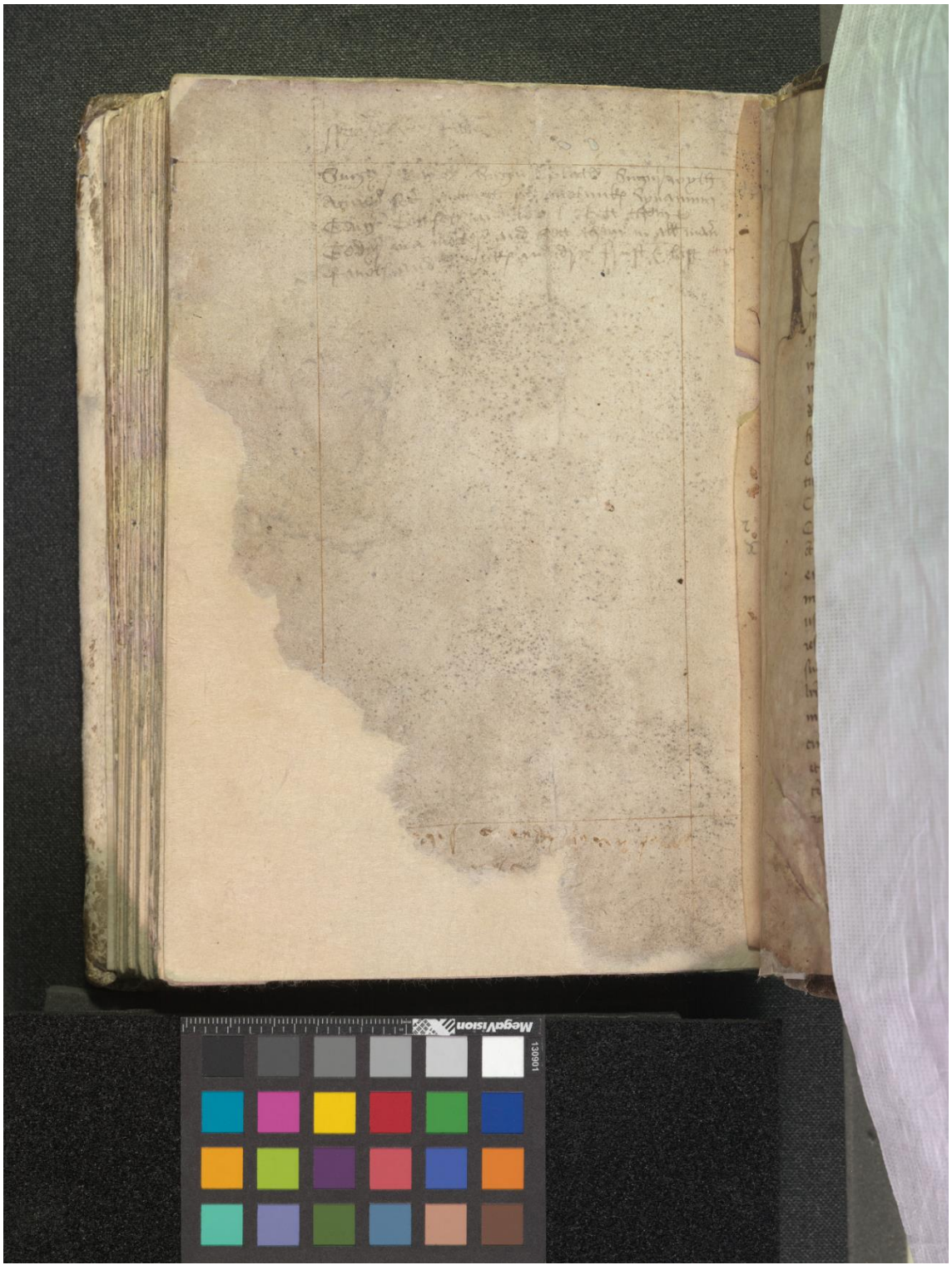

Figure 12: One of a selection of colour and multispectral images of folio 124v. of Add. MS 61823, courtesy of the board of The British Library.

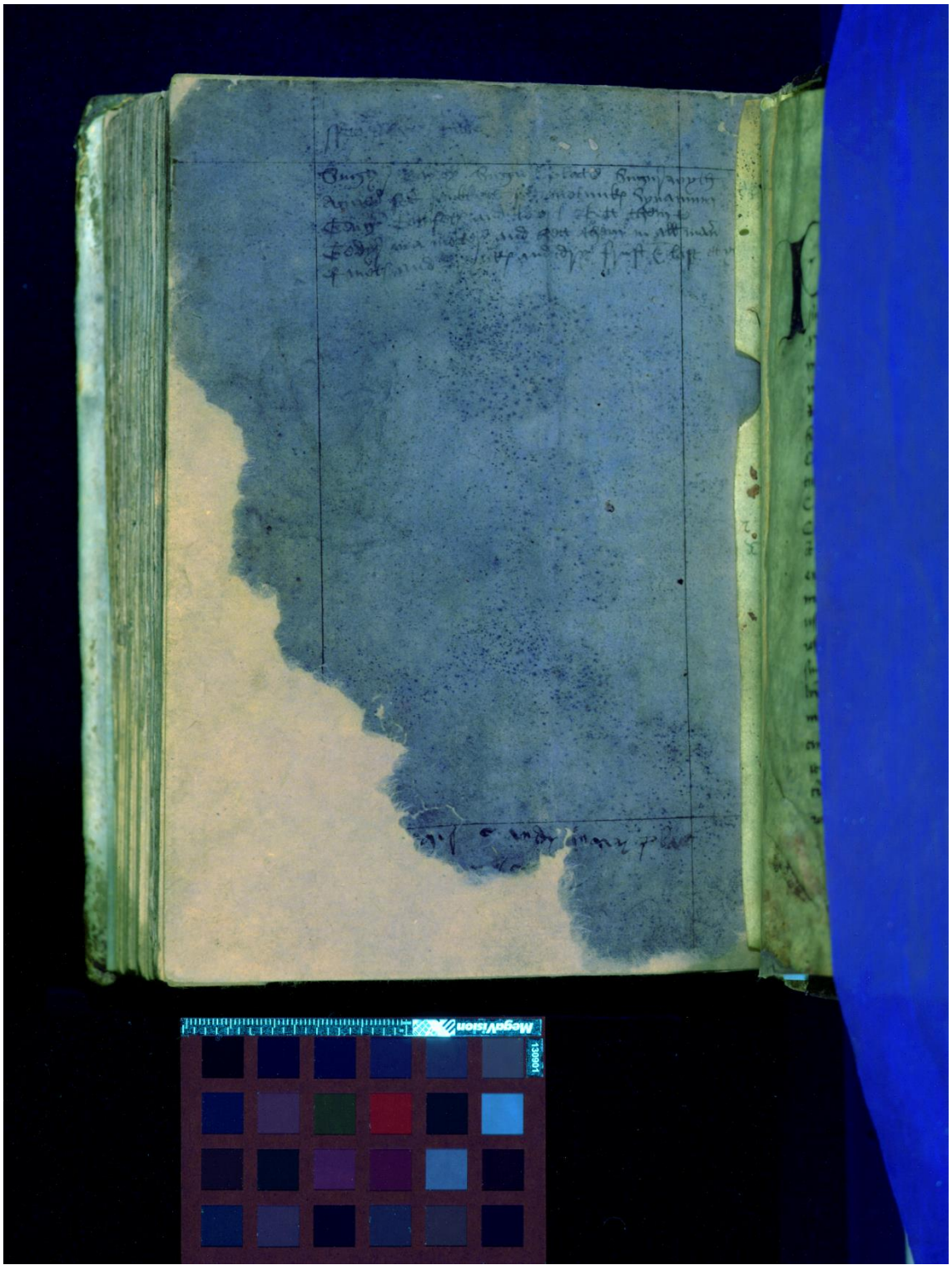

Figure 13: UV Composite image of folio 124v from Add. MS 61823, as before.

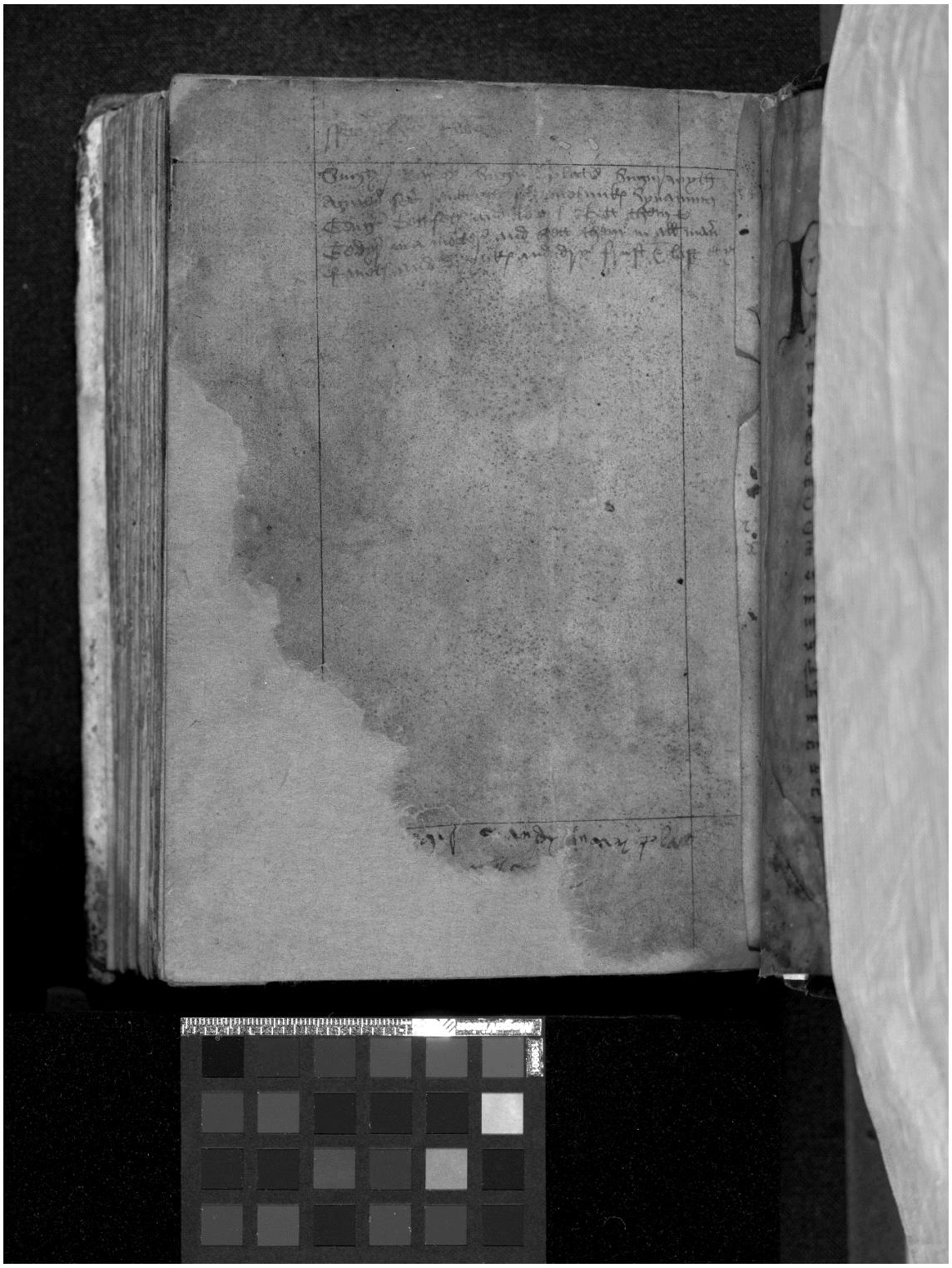

Figure 14: An example of a full-page multispectral image of folio 124v. from Add. MS 61823, as before.

Figure 15: Rotated, enlarged detail of high definition image of f. 124v. of Add. MS 61823, as before.

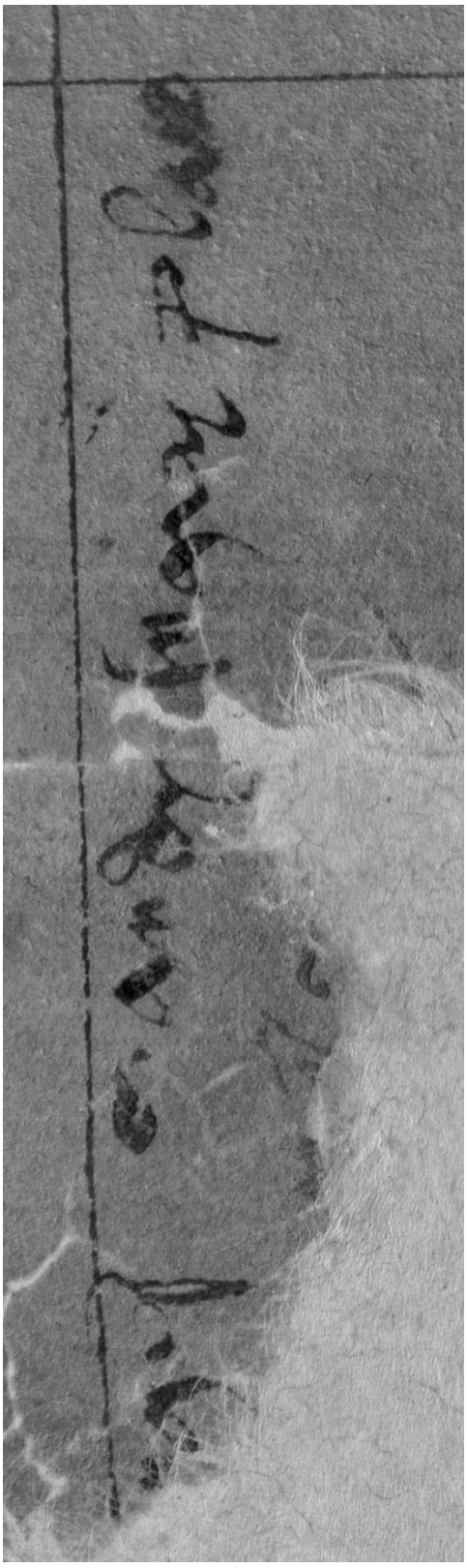

Figure 16: Rotated, enlarged detail of bottom of f.124v of Add. MS 61823, as before.

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