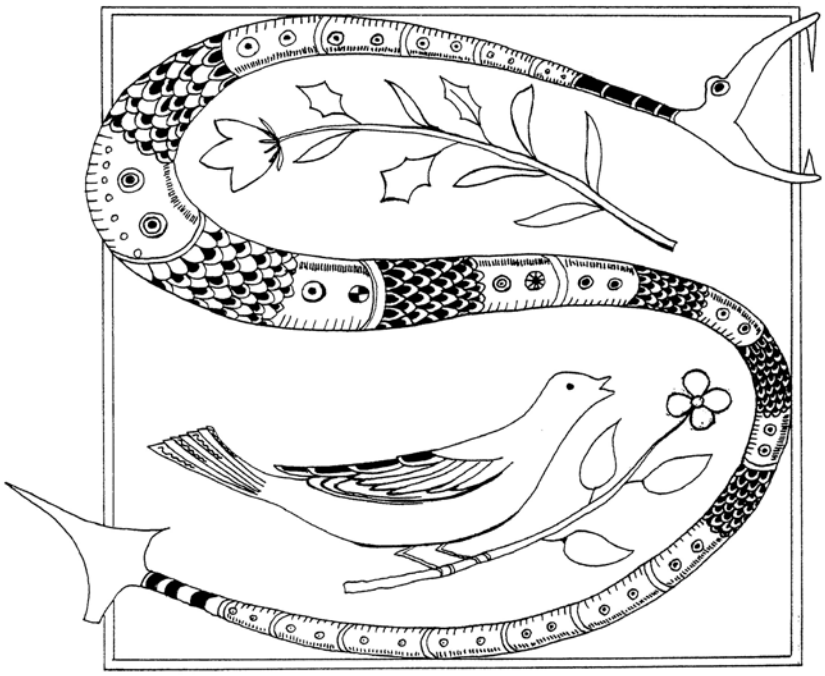
# *SELIM*

Journal of the Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature
Revista de la Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval



Edited by - Dirigida por
Trinidad Guzmán & S. G. Fernández-Corugedo

Nº 14
Oviedo, 2007

Universidad de Oviedo &
*Sociedad Española de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa Medieval*
Oviedo – Murcia 2008

# BOTH HUMAN AND DIVINE: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CONFESSION AND GOSSIP IN *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*


## *Abstract*

The study deals with the *Book of Margery Kempe* both as an instance of confessional practice as well as of gossip. In the consideration of the *Book* as a confession addressed to readers, it might be read according to hagiographic and didactic patterns. However, in such a case, we would perceive contradictions with the didactic aim of this model. The stronghold of doctrinal confessional secrecy would be demolished by this autobiography, as it forces readers to debate the degree of fictionalization of the work and to doubt the author's motives. As gossip, it would be inserted into a wider web of reprisal and counter-reprisal communal activity as it offers more gossip than truth in the revelation of secret knowledge as it would represent a subversive reaction to the misgivings of the Church. Kempe surmounts the very limits of hagiography and challenges those between biography and autobiography. **Keywords**: *Book of Margery Kempe*, hagiography, biography, autobiography, didactic patterns.

## *Resumen*

Este estudio trata del *Libro de Margery Kempe* tanto como ejemplo de práctica de confesión como de cotilleo. Si se considera como confesión dirigida a sus lectores, puede leerse siguiendo rasgos hagiográficos y didácticos.Sin embargo en ese caso percibiríamos contradicciones con la intención didáctica de ese modelo. La fortaleza doctrinal del secreto de confesión quedaría destruida por este autobiografía, ya que fuerza a los lectores a debatir el grado de ficcionalización de la obra y a dudas de los motivos de su autora. Como cotilleo, se insertaría en un panorama más amplio de apreciación y contra-apreciación de la actividad comunitaria ya que ofrece más cotilleo que verdades en la revelación del conocimiento secreto ya que representaría una reacción subversiva ante los desmanes de la Iglesia. Kempe trasciende los límites de la hagiografía y lanza un reto a los de la biografía y la autobiografía. **Palabras clave**: *Libro de Margery Kempe*, hagiografía, biografía, autobiografía, rasgos didácticos.


## 1 Introduction: Auto/biographic paths and diversions

Autobiographic discourse has been conceived of as a reliable literary label since the last decades of the 19th century.[1] Characterized by its many-fold nature, it was first separated

[1] Although, according to Nussbaum (1989: 1) the term was first used at the end of the 18th century by William Taylor, in 1801 Robert Southey refers with it to Francisco Vieira's poetry. Therefore, it was first for poets and writers to realise the particularities of the genre, which would be later accounted for and conveniently dissected by historical studies. Anderson (2001: 8) states that "by the 19th century there was a definite hierarchy of values in relation to self-representation with memoirs occupying a lower order since they involved a lesser degree of 'seriousness' than autobiography". It would be in the early 20th century when Georg Misch's

from its biographical matrix and dissected by critics according to its diverse manifestations: letters, journals, reminiscences, diaries..., which would render autobiography as a form involved in a process of self-creation (Eakin 1985). This contemporary fascination with autobiography is linked to a general interest or even obsession (Hamilton 1994: 10) with memory among Western societies (Huyssen 1995: 5). Such interest in memory has been associated to the divergent temporal categories in modernity and postmodernity: while modernity is linked with a future-oriented temporality bound to the idea of progress, "postmodernity is connected, rather, with a temporality that folds the future back onto the past" (Radstone 2000: 201). Autobiographic discourse has also been regarded from a historical perspective which has analyzed the response to a historically determined understanding of the self. Thus, Spengeman (1980: 6–7) has claimed for the study of the conditions in which autobiographers have produced their depiction of themselves in order to understand the different style in the rendering of their self-portraits. It is from this stance that the study of some historical circumstances accounting for the production of *The Book of Margery Kempe* is approached.[2] Together with Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love,* this early fifteenth century work has been hailed as representing the English participation in the female mystical

*History of Autobiography in Antiquity* (1907) highlighted the concept of individuality that pervaded the self-presentations of Egyptian inscriptions, Greek love lyrics and early-Christian confessions. Broughton (2000: 242) states that Liz Stanley was the first critic to make "[...] the idea that a narrative produced by a self writing about itself, and one produced by a self writing about another being, were formally distinguishable from each other" widely acknowledged. As for the idea of a female autobiographic tradition, see Jelinek (1986).

[2] This is an updated version of a paper read at the XIX Selim Conference held at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (Almagro 2007). I deeply appreciate the comments made at the time as well as the detailed and tactful corrections of SELIM referees.

movement which rose on the continent in the late Middle Ages and furthered the consolidation of a female authorial voice.[3] Although its protagonist's peculiarities have often been misread as responding primarily to psychological drives, in this article I try to present some specific practices, namely confession and gossip, as more general contributory causes of Kempe's characteristic style.

Recent approaches stressing the role of language in the constitution of the self have paid attention to the historically determined processes through which certain discourses would end up creating a particular fiction of the self and of subjectivity. Such is the case with confession, perceived of as a set of historically oriented and conditioned discourse practices that bring about a specific sense of the self. Although Misch had established the origin of autobiography in ancient Egypt, Frecero (1986: 17) reminds that most studies agree on the crucial contribution to the genre of St Augustine's *Confessions*, which has come to be regarded as

> the paradigm for all representations of the self in a retrospective literary structure. [...] every narrative of the self is the story of a conversion or, to put the matter the other way around, a conversion is only a conversion when it is expressed in a narrative form that establishes a separation between the self as character and the self as author. When he told his life story in terms of a conversion

[3] The only manuscript (BL, MS Additional 61823), written in 1436, belonged and was annotated by members of the Carthusian monastery of Mount Grace (Yorkshire); some of the fragments were also inserted in a seven-page pamphlet printed by Wynkyn de Worde and reprinted by Henry Pepwell in 1521. Margery Kempe must have been born in 1373, being the daughter of the five times mayor of the town of Lynn, John Brunham. The experiences explained in her book are those that took place once Margery got married to John Kempe. Although she refers to giving birth as crucial to her spiritual awakening, only exceptionally are her children described. Her book details her stubborn inner and outer struggle to affirm her saintly identity by imitating some of the attitudes of continental 13th and 14th century female mystic women, most of whom had confided their spiritual experiences to confessors.

> from paganism to Christianity, Augustine was at the same time establishing a literary genre, the confession, or narrative of the self.

Howarth (1974) has already advanced the idea of self-transformation or "becomingness" as the key to autobiographic writing, which Radstone (2000: 205) clearly sees as characteristic of confession: "[...] the confession's enactment of a purging of the past is in the service of 'becoming'. Since confession produces self-transformation, each act of confession alters the view of the central protagonist offered to the reader by the confessing narrator". In narratological terms, therefore, autobiographic discourse would be based on the distinction between the self as author and as character, involving the development of a temporal distance between the outer narrating voice and the inner diegetic dimension: the implied author would present him or herself as controlling the flexible temporal limits that might exist between the moment of narration, the present, and that which is being recounted, the past.

Margery Kempe presents her book as the result of a series of confessional moments which define its autobiographic nature as subject to the operations of self-concealment and revelation. Lynn Staley (1992: 3) clearly distinguished in the book an author, whom she calls Kempe, different from the unstable creature presented throughout the narration, whom she calls Margery.[4] According to this, the diegetic extremes are clearly stated and no possible delusions of fusion of both persons allowed. Margery the character does not

[4] "Just as we commonly distinguish between Will, the layabout, and Langland, the author, or between the pilgrim Geoffrey and the poet Chaucer, so in this study I draw a distinction between Margery, the subject, and Kempe her author. [...] Since Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe are two of the major prose writers of England's late medieval period, it seems grudging to define their achievements in terms of the stereotypes of gender: placidity, on the one hand, and hysteria, on the other".

have to coincide with Kempe the author, and the autobiographic chimera of a progressive and coherent evolution of personality from the former to the latter is never fulfilled. In this sense, the book, often referred to as the first autobiography in English (Petroff 1994: 152), would differ greatly from previous Latin male autobiographies, namely, from St Augustine's, Guilbert de Nogent's or Peter Abelard's, in which critics have detected the production of becomingness in linear progression as akin to Christianity's model of History. Brodski (1988: 1) refers to the male capacity to represent the individual evolutionary drives of History in contrast to the lack of that mirroring attitude in women:

> The (masculine) tradition of literature beginning with Augustine had taken as its first premise the mirroring capacity of the autobiographer: *his* universality, *his* representativeness, *his* role as spokesman for the community. But only a critical ideology that reifies a unified, transcendent self can expect to see in the mirror of autobiography a self whose depths can be plumbed, whose heart can be discovered, and whose essence can be definitively known. No mirror of *her* era, the female autobiographer takes as a given that selfhood is mediated; her invisibility results from her lack of a tradition, her marginality in male dominated culture, her fragmentation—social and political as well as psychic.

Gender conditions have actually been found to shape the traditional regard on Margery Kempe more as a literary character than as a literary author. Notwithstanding this, in trying to discern Kempe's authorial self-consciousness, many of the recent works revolve around this issue: Is *The Book of Margery Kempe* devised as autobiographic or is it rather another instance of hagiography in which author and character are clearly distanced? If autobiographic, why does not Kempe follow the medieval male pattern known to her? Feminist critics (Stanton 1984: 15; Mason 1988: 21; Schenck 1988: 291) implicitly give an answer to this last question, as they detect in female autobiographies no evolutionary drives leading

the characters to a full and definitive development of the self: more often than not, the boundary between past and present is, consequently, weakened. Therefore, if on the one hand, *The Book of Margery Kempe* could be regarded as exemplary of the "vague, confused, fragmentary" style of female autobiography, on the other hand, many critics still prefer to adjust its limits to the model of a specific kind of biography—hagiography.[5] Formally, the main difference between them rests on the presence or absence of correlation between character and narrator, since otherwise both modes coincide in being individual life accounts written for the public consumption. In this article I argue that this mixed nature of *The Book of Margery Kempe* may be due to the fact that it not only rests on literacy but on specific forms of orality as well: those of gossip and confession. Whereas confession has been the concern of literary critics for quite a long time, gossip has just been considered as a secondary linguistic practice, just recently receiving attention from pragmatic approaches and hardly any from literary standpoints. In order to understand the links between them, the importance of secrecy should be highlighted as well, since this concept pervades both realms (Bok 1989) and makes them especially pertinent among medieval discourse practices. In her substantial examination of gossip, Spacks (1985: 22) detects its resemblance to fiction:

[5] Aers and Staley (1996: 3) refer to the powers of sanctity: "The symbols of Christian sanctity held immense power in the culture we study even as they were themselves bound up with all the sources of social power: gender, class, status, military, legal, literary—the political in its broadest sense. They were essential components of the paradigms through which human beings formed their specific identities and lived out their specific lives". See Lochrie's depiction of Margery's religious background and the symbolic motives which might have inspired her into sainthood (1991, chp. 1: "The body as text and the semiotics of suffering"). Another possibility is that of Margery performing the type of "the fool of God" (R. Maisonneuve 1982: 1), although no indication is given of how she may have received this eastern Christian model.

> What, in the economics of gossip, is offered, what received? Point of view, information; also reassurance. Participants assure one another of what they share: one of gossip's important purposes. Gossip may involve a torrent of talk, yet its most vital claims remain silent. Seldom does anyone articulate the bonding that it generates or intensifies. The sensibility that gossip helps to create is dual: a mode of feeling and of apprehending which rises, as it were, in the space between the talkers, enveloping both. The comparable experience associated with reading fiction helps to account for cases of youthful (or mature) addiction. [...] More than other sorts of literary activity, reading novels establishes a tie resembling that of gossip, since what reader and narrator share is a set of responses to the private doings of richly imagined individuals.

## 2 Memory habits

Memory being the stuff autobiography is made of, the truth is that when analyzing female authors' approaches to their past, feminist critics have found the "self" or "auto" elements ambiguous. Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield (2000: 5) coincide with Spence (1986) and Kuhn (1995) in regarding these memory texts as not showing a definite individual source: "Memory [too, then] is intersubjective and dialogical, a function of personal identifications and social commitments. While it may be uniquely ours it is also objectified, a matter of public convention and shared rituals". Therefore, most feminist critics strive to understand the interaction through which the different selves are formed within social frames. Such interaction between the social and the individual —or intersubjectivity— seems especially applicable to the medieval perception of the self, in which the subject is clearly enmeshed in the dynamics of communal progress. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) has dealt with the concept of *habitus* as the capacity of the members of a society to unconsciously internalize all those beliefs and aspects of culture that are socially determined and through which the group articulates its social practices and representations. Claire Sponsler (2004: 135) states

that "[...] most people absorb the 'socialized subjectivity' that is the *habitus* and live it out quietly, without much awareness on their part or on the part of observers that their behavior is pre-shaped by existing social structures". Regarding Kempe's portrait of Margery, we might confirm this is also the case: externalization of the *habitus* rarely happens. Lynn Staley (1992: 40) further emphasizes the way the author Kempe molds her character Margery by exposing her to the limits of expression of those internalized communal habits:

> When Kempe's portrait of the community is compared with what we are coming to understand of the period, it becomes clear that she provides a highly selective vision of a social reality that is designed to reinforce Margery's centrality in the community. In so doing, she dramatizes that conflict between internally perceived and externally imposed codes that lies at the heart of the late medieval literature of social and religious dissent.

Precisely, the practices of confession and gossip in *The Book of Margery Kempe* may be regarded as examples of the protagonist's internalised public habits;[6] they will lead us to further examination of the generic effects the addition of this exercise of memory had on the particular autobiographic nature of the book. Both confession and gossip coexist as forms both of social cohesion and of individual differentiation. Close in its linguistic nature, both respond to the individual need for secrecy in order to resist social pressure as well

[6] We cannot forget that Margery also presents herself as someone well integrated in the social dynamics of the fifteenth-century. Stubborn as she seems in her persistence in ruling herself according to God's wishes and not the community's or the Church's, she is not a marginal woman: "By dwelling on her supposed marginalization and her eccentricity, a certain modern preference for reading teaching narratives about heroic underdogs may risk implicitly accepting some of her medieval detractors' strategies for regarding her as marginal. [...] Her specific criticisms of unbecoming conduct in episcopal households (16,45) only serve to underline Kempe's unspoken larger conservatism—despite all her noisy disruptiveness—in social and political terms" (Windeatt, 2004: 6).

as to enjoy being in possession of knowledge about the others.[7] This handling of secrecy has been regarded by Michel de Certeau (1992: 97) as a web of tactics that is constantly being woven with regard to the self in its connection to the other:

> Secrecy is not only the state of a thing that escapes from or reveals itself to knowledge. It designates a play between actors. It circumscribes a terrain of strategic relations between the one trying to discover the secret and the one keeping it, or between the one who is supposed to know it and the one who is assumed not to know it.

Karma Lochrie's thorough study of the uses of secrecy in the Middle Ages also reminds (1999: 56–57) that this particular set of tactics was clearly associated to gender and cultural differences:

> Gossiping was considered in the Middle Ages to be a vice [...] usually associated with women, particularly their loquaciousness, bodiliness, secrecy, and their susceptibility to deception. Gossip was also associated with a kind of insurrectionary discourse on the part of women as a marginal medieval community, one that existed alongside —but also in resistance to — a variety of institutionalized, written discourses.

This particular practice defined itself as different from written culture and therefore as a kind of challenging female parody of masculine language.[8] As such, it would be felt as threatening and liable to be

[7] As Miller (1988: 207) states: "[...] in a world where the explicit exposure of the subject would manifest how thoroughly he has been inscribed within a socially given totality, secrecy would be the spiritual exercise by which the subject is allowed to conceive of himself as resistance."

[8] Gossip has been contrasted with the Foucaultian depiction of confession (1976) as a form of masculine domination availing of this female need to speak. Both call for an individual who needs to verbalise a secret. Their effect, though, would differ, confession leading to spiritual health, whereas gossip would cause further and divergent harm: since its revelations would involve someone else's secret, not the teller's, it would change the attitude of the listener as well as the moral portrait of the teller.

subjected by male control, increasingly sensitive to the discursive capacities of female groups.[9] Female utterance was thus presented as potentially dangerous and leading to a wrong use of language, embodied by gossip itself. However, the effect of its setting aside as vicious and subversive accentuated the secret nature of this kind of discourse, an attribute that women would internalise and reproduce as part of their character: in order to overcome its liminality and secrecy, the discourse of gossip claimed instead "to speak in the world's voice" (Lochrie 1999: 61),[10] acquiring an undeniable capacity to spread its power.[11]

[9] In reference to the process of female discrimination in late medieval England, Hanawalt (1998: 72) confirms how the Church hierarchy regarded both Beguines and prostitutes as marginal, since they "moved beyond the prescribed space". Religious women who would travel about the city and undertake pilgrimages would be particularly suspicious in their spiritual, social and generic marginality, and the Church advised specifically about their uncontrolled speech. Thus, Jean Gerson complain in 1415 against St Bridget of Sweden's canonisation and warned against these roving women whose liminality gave them the possibility to speak too much. See Morriso (2000: 108).

[10] Meaning the intersection of the social and individual, gossip incorporates both the particularities of relationship as well as the general need for information. One of its effects is creating the participants' apprehension about the limits of the realms of the public and the private. Epistemologically, this intersection raises questions, according to Spacks (1985: 12): "Gossip as a phenomenon raises questions about boundaries, authority, distance, the nature of knowledge; it demands answers quite at odds with what we assume as our culture's dominant values". Gossip can thus be at odds with the dominant values—in a subversive stance that fosters intimacy and conveys a mode of linkage among women—while it can also reinforce some of its tenets.

[11] "Only reluctantly do most people confess pleasure in discussing other people's private affairs. Even lacking consciousness of immediate aggressive impulse, they may partake in infantile fantasies about language's magical power of destruction; to gossip can evoke the terror of the self as agent or as victim of such power. If I talk about them, perhaps they will talk about me; if I expose, may I not be exposed?" (Spacks 1985: 51).

As for confession, in the late Middle Ages it had become a craft, a skill or technique of self-production and self-representation. In his *History of Auricular Confession*, Lea noted that in Augustine's times the penitent dealt directly with God with no need of an intermediary (1896 I: 181). Augustine had acknowledged three ways to remit sins: baptism, prayer, and penance. Watkins (1920 II: 442) underlined that for Augustine the last category was to be applied to crimes such as adultery, homicide or sacrilege, being these of such serious nature that they called for public humiliation devised in the most dramatic and impressive of manners, so that its didactic goal be fulfilled.[12] By the early 15th century, when Kempe was issuing her book, this first model of public penance coexisted with a modern conception of confession, that of "the power of the keys", based on the supremacy of the priest's imposition of penitence and on the spread of auricular, private and secret confession. According to Root (1997: 68): "The spoken confession gradually begins to subsume the functions of the other aspects of the sacrament of penance. Tears of contrition and works of satisfaction can be easily translated into words".

By turning confession compulsory at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the Church reinforced both its surveillance and didactic aims when making the private conversation between priest and sinner not only a way to examine and purify the conscience but also to stress its doctrinal program: confession not only meant cleansing the soul but also receiving further knowledge, an extra spiritual training conveyed secretly to the penitent, and thus liable to be sensed as alluring to the public eye. The paradoxical closeness between confession and gossip is best illustrated by the physical

[12] Also Chenu (1969: 23) refers to how satisfaction was more important than contrition, which expressed the subjective individual repentance, taken into account especially from Abelard onwards.

space where confession took place, "in the church before the altar with witnesses not far off" (Lea I: 394). That is, sinners would speak privately to the confessor but they would stand in full sight quite near the rest of the congregation in church. Consequently, although privacy was intended in this new model, also the public exposition of the penitent when kneeling down to utter the sins called for future deviation into gossip.

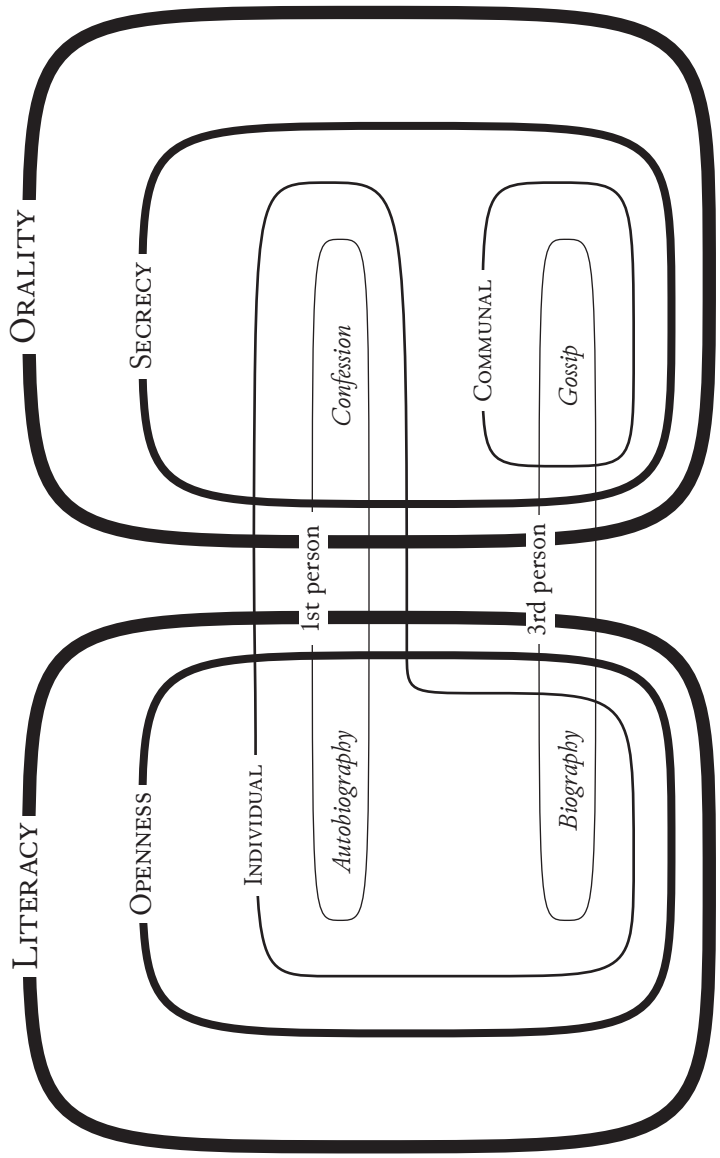
The intersection of orality and literacy throughout *The Book of Margery Kempe* stands as one of the main reasons for the fascination[13] this work arouses (Jenkins 2004: 116). The interlace of both systems of transmission in the book allows for its partaking of the two generic modes: autobiography and biography, set as a written parallel response to the oral enactment of confession and gossip. In the setting of this binary reality, the axis conformed by gossip and confession—deriving from their commerce with secrecy—would respectively stand as parallel (within orality) to that of biography and autobiography (within literacy). Within orality, confession would be closer to the literacy realm than gossip due to its exclusively individual nature, which is shared by both written modes, as seen on Table 1.

Such interlace is particularly relevant throughout the book, becoming a strategic narrative and ideological resort Kempe may have used when facing the possibility of being censured by the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[14] The scheme of the alternative set of

[13] "There is a fascinating blend of voices—written and spoken—in the Book. Margery is referred to throughout the text in the third person singular; she is 'þis creature'; but the text includes at least two remarks in the first person, as well as the possessive adjective 'owyr' throughout, and at times it is impossible to untangle the referent" (Carolyn Dinshaw 2003: 230–31).

[14] Despite that, as Sarah Rees Jones (2000: 381) explains, Kempe's book belongs to a didactic tradition of literary pieces intended to instruct religious addressees, mainly confessors, Janette Dillon (1998: 134) reminds that, despite such edifying

Table 1. *Orality and literacy in* The Book of Margery Kempe



dictations to the scribes who will take down those recollections of her adult life is interspersed with the pervasiveness of Margery's confession to a diversity of priests and members of the Church. Therefore, the presence of confession as an agent of individuation of this woman cannot be denied and becomes —from the diegetic dimension— a feasible cause and precedent of the dictation carried out as she recounts her experiences to the scribes.[15] Accordingly, either as part of her memories or as an actual and current performative utterance, the notions of confession and gossip pose a surface and a structural connection through which the woman establishes her particular bond with readers and with herself: as a member of a lay or a religious community, any reader, in fact, might have access to the spiritual narration echoing Margery's common practice of conveying her secrets to priests. The ecclesiastical authority held so far by the members of the Church might be translated to the reader, also embedded and aware of the dynamics of confession and gossip.[16] Sincerity and revelation remain as persistent and charismatic motives that shape her behavior both in the religious and in the lay spheres, as one may see when rapidly surveying the chapters that reiterate these topics:

aim, "[...] The Book of Margery Kempe embraces disobedience more frequently and openly than any other female revelations."

[15] Janet M. Mueller (1984: 59) observes the importance of the ethics of sincerity for Margery's diegetic authority: "One major aspect in which female spirituality, selfhood, and authorship come together is in the formation of blocks or sequences of narrative that address the question of giving credence to Margery, to what she says and does: the authorial imperative she faces at the outset of her Book—in rhetorical terms, the necessity to use ethos effectively in self-presentation—is exactly the challenge Margery presents herself as having to face in life."

[16] Isabel Davis (2004: 41) reflects on the importance of the reader in defining Margery's final profile: "Indeed, the reader is incorporated into a community with Christ, a community which knows better than Margery herself what is most advantageous for her."

The fist fragments are decisive in shaping her confessional nature as well as in portraying her as enmeshed in the communal web of gossip. In the prologue, her complaint against the influence of backbiters' remarks on the second scribe can be heard, and in the ensuing account this tandem of confession and gossip will define her relationship with the community, with God and with readers:

> Sche was so usyd to be slawndred and repreved, to be cheden and rebuked of the world for grace and vertu wyth whech sche was indued thorw the strength of the Holy Gost, [...] for evyr the mor slawnder and repref that sche sufferyd, the mor sche incresyd in grace and in devocyon of holy medytacyon, of hy contemplacyon, and of wonderful spechys and dalyawns whech owr Lord spak and dalyid to hyr sowle, techyng hyr how sche schuld be despysed for hys lofe, how sche schuld han pacyens, settyng all hyr trost, alle hyr lofe, and alle hyr affeccyon in hym only. [...] Than was ther so evel espekyng of this creatur and of hir wepyng, that the prest durst not for cowardyse speke wyth her but seldom, ne not wold wryten as he had behestyd unto the forseyd creatur. And so he voyded and deferyd the wrytyng of this boke wel onto a iiii yer or ellys mor, notwythstandyng the creatur cryed often on hym therfor. At the last he seyd onto hir that he cowd not redyn it, wherfor he wold not do it. He wold not, he seyd, put hym in perel therof. (*TBMK* I, Prol.: ls. 45–55 & 105–112)

From the beginning, Margery's account highlights confession and gossip: she is harassed by the devil (¶1) that tells her she does not need a human confessor, since she has God.[17] She presents the whole community talking about her after her failure in the brewing and milling businesses (¶2), and later on, when her attitude to shrift

[17] After giving birth and in fear of dying, she searches for one, but this confessor rebukes her for being too slow in her narration, so she decides to cease the confession; she goes mad and stays like that for over half a year till Christ brings her back to her senses.

radically changes (¶3) her exacerbated religiosity makes people leave her aside:[18]

> Anoon as it was noysed abowt the town of N. that ther wold neythyr man ne best don servyse to the seyd creatur; than summe seyden sche was acursyd; sum seyden God toke opyn veniawns upon hir; sum seyd on [thyng]; and sum seyd another. And sum wyse men, whos mend was mor growndyd in the lofe of owyr Lord, seyd it was the hey mercy of our Lord Jhesu Cryst clepyd and kallyd hir from the pride and vanyte of the wretthyd world. [...] Sche yaf hir to gret fastyng and to gret wakyng; sche roos at ii or iii of the clok and went to cherch, and was ther in hir prayers onto tym of noon and also al the aftyrnoon. And than was sche slawnderyd and reprevyd of mech pepul for sche kept so streyt a levyng. (*TBMK* I, 2 & 3: ls. 311–317 & 371–375)

This general rejection is explicitly shown in other several instances: when she (¶12) has to convince a monk of her sincerity; later on, when, having to face a congregation at Canterbury who accused her of not being frank (¶13), she tells the parable of the sinner whose confessor had imposed as a penitence to have people paid in order to discredit him.[19] Beyond the motive of sincerity, the rivalry among important women for a proper confessor is another cause of dispute (¶16): the anchorite of Preaching Friars reveals that important ladies have tried to persuade him to abandon Margery:

> And he seyd to hir: 'I have herd mych evyl langwage of yow styth ye went owt, and I have ben sor cownseld to leve yow and no mor

[18] Later on (¶18), through a friendly talk with the Virgin and Christ, again confession becomes a key concern: the Virgin tells them she must have a good confessor, Master R., from Norwich. Honesty in the form of a sudden confession defines her when her husband asks her if she would prefer seeing him dead to having sex with him: Margery is not afraid to give an affirmative answer.

[19] This episode poses a crucial question to readers: is Margery alerting of the possibility that she might be playing her mystical role as part of some penitence, just as the protagonist in the parable is? Is the reader, consequently, to believe in that crazy stance of hers, being this her innermost indirect confession?

> to medyl wyth yow, and ther is behyt[e] me gret frenschepys wyth condycyon yf I leve yow. And I answeryd for yow thus: Yyf ye wer in the same plyte that ye wer whan we partyd asundyr, I durst wel say ye wer a good woman, a lovere of God, and hyly inspyred wyth the holy Gost. "And I wyl not forsake hyr for no lady in this reme, for to speke wyth the lady and levyn hir, for rathar I schuld leve the lady and speke wyth hir, yyf I myght not fon bothen, than I schuld don the contrarye.'" (*TBMK* I, 16: ls. 1197–1206)

She loses the acquaintance she enjoyed with a woman in her community on account of confession (¶18): a widow seeks advice from her as to what to do with her confessor: Margery thinks the widow is in love with him and advises her to have him replaced by the hermit at Lynn. Another instance in which gossip and confession coalesce is that of God sending her to talk to a respectable lady that will only converse with her in her confessor's presence (¶19), Margery confiding that this lady's husband is in Purgatory. Another example of the spread of rumours against her is reported: when coming back to England from her Italian journey (¶43) she visits not only master Richard Caister of St. Stephen, but also another hermit who abruptly inquires after the baby which she had conceived and given birth to during the journey. The passage reveals the power of hearsay:

> And therfor sche went to hym in purpose to mekyn hyrselfe and drawyn hym to charite yyf sche myth. Whan sche was come to hym, he wolcomyd hir hom schortly and askyd wher sche had don hir chylde, the whech was begotyn and born whil sche was owte, as he had herd seyde. And sche seyd: 'Ser, the same childe that God hath sent me I have browt hom, for God knowyth I dede nevyr sithyn I went owte wherthorw I shylde have a childe.' (*TBMK* I, 43: ls. 3393–3401)

As also shown by this fragment, a constant source of anxiety throughout the book is Margery's search for ecclesiastical representatives and for the proper confessor. This motive will be underscored in her pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Italy, where

a local English priest takes the side of suspicious fellow pilgrims against her.[20] In contrast to the kind attitude of some important members of the English Church, the Leicester steward interrogates her in Latin (¶47) and (¶52), at the Archbishop's home many call her a lollard and a heretic; she explicitly accuses them of slander, and again the link between gossip and confession is revealed when she is accused in front of the Archbishop of York by an enemy preaching friar of having been intimate of Lady Greystoke and having suggested her to leave her husband (¶54).[21] Back to her sacred conversations (¶58), among her many concerns when crying, she asks God for a new confessor who can also read the Scriptures to her. The newcomer gets ill (¶60), so she must go to other men's and women's homes to listen to the readings. Though she seems to be on good terms with these attendants to the reading sessions (¶69), gossip re-emerges against her friendship with one of the white friars who had helped her in her swoons, which makes her confessor suggest

[20] The figure of a good priest from England links this part of the book devoted to pilgrimage to the English local echoes of the first part: despite the disdain of other fellow travelers, this priest will believe her (¶40). Other instances of ecclesiastical acceptance may be found: Chapter Fifteen presents her husband escorting her when talking to the Bishop of Lincoln, who listens to her confidences joyfully and says that her visions should be written. In a friendly relationship with another member of the hierarchy, Archbishop Arundel (¶16), she asks him to let her choose a confessor and take the Eucharist every Sunday. Much later, about to take ship for Santiago from Bristol (¶45), the Bishop of Worcester calls for her on account of her being John Brunham's daughter. She stays and he listens to her in confession before departure.

[21] To this, she answers that she never advised such thing, but had instead told the lady a story which she now repeats and the audience finds a good one. Kempe, however, decides not to include it for readers.

she should stop seeing those doctors in Theology and specialists in Canon Law:[22]

> And than sum envyows personys compleynyd to the Provincyal of the White Frerys that the sayd doctowr was to conversawnt wyth the sayd creatur, for-as-mech as he supportyd hir in hir wepyng and in hir crying, and also enformyd hir in qwestyons of scriptur, whan sche wolde any askyn hym. Than was he monischyd, be vertu of obediens, that he schulde no mor spekyn wyth hir, ne enformyn hir in no textys of scriptur, and that was to hym ful peynful, for, as he seyd to sum personys, he had levar a lost an hundryd pownd, yyf he had an had it, than hir communicacyon, it was so gostly and fruteful. Whan hir confessowr perceyvyd how the worthy doctowr was chargyd be obediens that he schulde not spekyn ne comownyn wyth hir, that he, for to excludyn al occasyon, warnyd hir also, be verty of obediens, that sche schulde no mor gon to the freys, ne spekyn wyth the sayd doctowr, ne askyn hym no qwestyons as sche had don beforn. (*TBMK* I, 69: ls. 5641–5656)

The constant harassment Margery is exposed to not only reflects the communal view about these independent women, but as well the internalization of these social demands and religious models, since even Margery may have been carried away by gossip:[23] the

[22] So when Margery and one of these doctors—master Aleyn—meet in the street they don't dare to talk openly. In fact, she complains to God that all friends have been taken away from her: in compensation, God sends the priest of the Our Lady Chapel at Lynn, who becomes her confessor. She predicts the future of various priests in the community (¶71) and spends her days dictating the book, so she has less time to pray and go out, and states that God likes her present confessor, master Robert (¶88). One of the last references to her confessor is in the second chapter of Book II, when, in leading her daughter-in-law to the port, she tells God she would like to accompany her (with her confessor) through the journey to Germany, but is divinely warned not to say a word to him about this voyage.

[23] In detecting the social concern about Margery's whereabouts as a dissenter, John Arnold (2004: 83) refers to these habits: "[...] in arresting Kempe it was not just 'heresy' but other possible transgressions that sprang to mind: perhaps that

book displays a variety of responses, both from the priestly and the lay groups, with regard to the quality Margery has attained, namely, her capacity to share God's secrets, which enables her to guess the hidden wishes of her fellow women, or the whereabouts of the souls of the dead. However, though sometimes she confides part of those sacred conversations, on other occasions the transcendental dialogues are eluded and remain secret, even to readers.[24] The result is a book in which memory has been selectively guided by a vested interest in a particular image of herself: her portrait alternates the depiction of her zeal for the divine with the recollection of human grievances.

## 3 The burden of confessional patterns

When trying to account for the protagonist's stance regarding secrecy, a feasible possibility is that of a Kempe depicting a deranged incongruous Margery in order to show the discrepancies in the confessional model. At the outset of the book, the greatest question is expressed in the devilish temptations Margery suffers: if she already had God to talk to, what is it that a priest might give her; what the use of confession?

> For sche was evyr lettyd be hyr enmy, the devel, evyrmor seying to hyr whyl sche was in good heele hir nedyd no confessyon, but don penawns be hirself aloone, and all schuld be foryovyn, for God is mercyful inow. And therfor this creatur oftyntymes dede greet penawns in fastyng bred and watyr, and other dedys of almes wyth devowt preyers, saf sche wold not schewyn it in confessyon. And, whan sche was any tym seke or dysesyd, the devyl seyd in her

she [...] had abandoned her husband; or possibly that she was a runaway nun; or simply that she was a woman 'out of place'. It is simply not clear what brought Margery to the mayor's attention [...]"

[24] Thus (¶21), she says that what the Virgin has shown her is of such high nature that she is ashamed to utter a word of it to anyone except the hermit.

> mende that sche schuld be dampnyd, for sche was not schrevyn of that defawt. Wherfor, aftyr that hir chyld was born, sche, not trostyng hir lyfe, sent for hir gostly fadyr, as iseyd beforn, in ful wyl to be schrevyn of all hir lyfetym, as ner as sche cowde. And whan sche cam to the poynt for to seyn that hing whech sche had so long conselyd, hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye and gan scharply to undyrnemyn hir, er than sche had fully seyd hir entent, and so che wold no mor seyn for nowt he myght do. (*TBMK* I, 1: ls.183–197)

This passage shows the individual effect the dichotomy of the confessional model entailed for Christians: the ancient doctrine, based on penitence, and that of the power of the keys, clash in the book. The former, resting on the preeminence of inner contrition and public penance, still weighted on personal consciousness and so, Margery is tempted by the suggestion that her sins are God's business, not the Church's, and challenges the ecclesiastical authority when postponing confession. This grows to be the origin of her madness and of subsequent spiritual renewal: the confession crisis evolves into the discovery of her divine private dimension: she is reborn spiritually through confession, and the writing of the book simply becomes the last step in the reshaping of a saintly identity,[25] once Christ himself guides her as to who the adequate confessor in the future might be.

Another reminder of the old penitential system is the emphasis placed on a mysterious awful first sin which hovers but is never solved. The confession of this particular secret marks a dividing line

[25] In the first chapters she still persists in the old habits, and interprets all the mishaps taking place as signs of God's will: her failure in starting the milling business, as well as in the love affair with an old acquaintance of her. It is, in fact, God who speaks directly through his actions, not through the voices of the priests. Although confession soon becomes the means to remain in contact with the divine sphere and with herself as a renewed soul, God's actions never cease to be interpreted as judgement on her behaviour.

in her narrative reconstruction: her first twenty years of life simply disappear from the account, deemed insignificant by her when compared to this particular secret. The conflict between concealment and revelation is in fact the drive of the whole process the book rests on, and the one that animates her spiritual transformation: later on, although Margery will bring us into her spiritual landscape, we shall not be revealed all her secret conversations with Christ; nor shall we ever hear what this particular first awful sin consisted in. The exacerbation of her religious attitudes, which might be read as a response to her sense of guilt, require proportional penitence: all the screaming, crying, exaggerated fasting, constant failures in worldly matters, pilgrimage and lack of belief from ecclesiastical representatives become instances of God's imposed penitence on her. All this taken into account, the character's traits would echo the ancient confession system, whereby suffering and endurance would be the proper penance for a huge sin that is confessed only once in a lifetime. The fact that she cannot perform her first confession correctly (after giving birth and in danger of death, the moment would be the proper one) would indicate the shifting point and reversal towards the second model.

Kempe portrays a Margery who undergoes a conversion crisis: thenceforth, her sense of sinfulness is such that she will never overcome the fall (the main precedent of this despairing attitude being that of Judas) and will turn to the second model, based on regular cleansing under the confessors' surveillance: unable to forgive herself, she needs to test the resistance of the sacrament: the lenient voice of priests will confirm her future redemption only momentarily, since her sense of guilt supersedes the benign effects the sacrament had been granted.

## 4 The lightness of gossip

Theoretically, the utterance of the hidden sin should bring relief to the penitent and his or her divided self would be whole again, and one with the religious community. In Margery's case, however, once confession becomes a habit it allows no respite to the penitent: her sense of guilt does not disappear and words must somehow be echoed and performed in the fashion of gossip: whether or not there is such a thing as a sin to confess, the revelation process must go on, and even the third person device in the voice of the priestly narrators emphasizes this attitude. Margery must define herself as a sinner; but the bigger the frequency the more redundant the sins and the more meaningless the shape of the penitent.

Secrets represent a locus of resistance of the individual in front of the public (Miller 1988), and in this sense, Margery would be using the excuse of the prime sin to start a new identity through which she, as a confessing pious creature, stands against the multitude of neighbors and pilgrims and suffers their contempt.[26] In this sense, we must bear in mind that public humiliation was a common hagiographic *topos* whereby saints confirmed divine predilection through the rejection of the community or representatives of institutional authority. In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the part that used to be assigned to pagan rulers or enemy Jews in old hagiographic accounts is given to those priests listening to the gossip of the people who consider her a hypocrite and resent the indiscriminate familial

[26] She would be opposing the principles of confession and gossip: in the latter, the dynamics of revelation/concealment mean the feeling of superiority of those who keep the secret from the ignorant ones, as well as the pleasure of disclosing that which had been concealed so far. At both moments (silence and disclosure) the identification between the subject and the secret takes place. In contrast to this, the power relationship displayed in confession is different: the person who ignores the content of the secret, the confessor, is granted the power to forgive, thus feeling superior to he or she who reveals it. St Thomas Aquinas had given priests the power to utter the "ego te absolvo", thus acting as God's mediators.

intimacy she claims to hold with the divine congregation.[27] In her attempt to present herself as a soon-to-be saint, Margery reproduces in her own discourse the third person echo, and points out the capacity of neighbors and priests to fabricate an image of her that contrasts with her will to be sincere. However, the degree of veracity she wants to convey in her autobiography is threatened by the very fact that the stories she tells also derive and articulate gossip or aspects of it: she places herself in other people's mouths, repeats the accusations coming from them, includes her misgiving about other women neighbors and their confessors, frustrates any hope in readers of getting substantial reliable information... Consequently, against the tradition in hagiography, many of the anecdotes Margery confides cannot certainly be presented as an example to be posed to other Christians: they are simply minor idle talk. By forcing the boundaries of confession to those of gossip, by becoming an addict to it, the paradoxes of the sacrament are revealed.

This way, Kempe uses the confessional model in her autobiography as a means to refer to the wider system of gossip, which configures the individual as much as confession does and reveals the inconsistencies of a complete, closed and coherent self-portrait as a saint. Here, what the others think of Margery is not simply integrated as a hagiographic topic, but as the means through which we see her caught in the endless web of fictionalization, a web she reenacts constantly when hinting at the possible existence of a secret, of a common shared piece of information between her and priests, Christ, saints, friends... Hard as she tries to recreate herself

[27] Regarding the book as a "spiritual autobiography" (224), Carolyn Dinshaw (2003: 228) recalls that it is precisely her emphasis on piety, her direct communication with the divine, as well as her correction of clerics that turned her into a suspect to the eyes of the Church.

as a saint,[28] her need to speak betrays her. Although her public saintly mission compels her to cry and shout, to censure important people and reveal the future publicly, she otherwise talks about the divine and confides some of her most intimate thoughts and fantasies as a mere human being, in whispers. Her way to react to the imposition of confession—that inaugurates her new spiritual life and the *Book* as such—is a subversive one, in which incoherence, lack of conviction, constant derision, forgetfulness... hint at the unstable limits between the individual and the communal. The book exposes thus the paradox of secrets: they dissolve when publicly revealed and when losing the possibility of being revealed all.[29] Therefore, they must be guessed, hinted at, advanced through gossip, which represents this middle way chosen by the author.

As said before, Kempe intensifies Margery's sense of guilt by exposing her to the highest of humiliations: only the confrontation with the community's gossip will do to reconcile her divided self with God.[30] In this battle, readers are invited to take Margery and the divine congregation's side, while acknowledging as well the

[28] Although Diane Watt (2004: 158) states that Kempe had rejected St. Bridget's prophetic model and replaced it by St. Katherine of Alexandria's debating stance, Sara Salih (2004: 170) reflects on Kempe's strategy to have Margery play the saint through the device of social rejection: "If Margery is to be properly slandered, then the exchange must appear to be her idiosyncracy, shocking to a public which likes its holy women bodily and suffering and which will thereby unknowingly constitute Margery's sanctity precisely by refusing to recognise it. Margery thus substitutes slander for bodily suffering"

[29] Its nature is a contradictory one: the will not to speak depends on the existence of listeners. Secrecy rests thus on that will for silence and the likelihood that such silence be broken.

[30] The Book as the ultimate shrifting act becomes a metaphor of the encounter of the confessional subject and the gossiping community, and of the failure to present a reunified self. It renders the confession of the constant fall of God's chosen creature into the pit of disbelief in which the community places her:

common suspicion aroused against her. But since Kempe does not recreate the sense of a gradual development of the character and leaves readers in constant dissatisfaction, she implicitly invites them to develop an alert and inquisitive attitude as well. Finally, it is Kempe's capacity to draw even readers to the vortex of doubt and hearsay that enlivens the character as a human being and justifies her autobiography beyond the limits of hagiography.

## 5 Conclusions

In order to retrieve some of the positions held so far, the perspectives of the book as an instance of the confessional practice as well as of the gossip habit may be summed up as follows:

### *5.1 The* Book *as confession*

It could be regarded as the tangible effect of penance —imposed by Christ himself in Margery's "old age"— for her sinful attitude, according to the early medieval penitential system whereby, in old age or at the verge of death, the great penitential act was undertaken by the sinner. Thus the *Book of Margery Kempe* would be the reenactment of the memory of her spiritual life as a confessing subject, now uttered anew at the end of her life as she dictates it to scribes.

As confession addressed to readers, the *Book* might be read according to hagiographic and didactic patterns. However, in such a case, we would perceive contradictions with the didactic aim of this model. The stronghold of doctrinal confessional secrecy would be demolished by this autobiography, as it forces readers to debate the degree of fictionalization of the work and to doubt the author's motives.

Margery won't ever stop confessing since she never stops seeing herself as a sinner.

### *5.2 The* Book *as gossip*

It would be inserted into a wider web of reprisal and counter-reprisal communal activity. As such, the *Book* offers more gossip than truth in the revelation of secret knowledge. In this withstanding attitude to refer to petty trivial knowledge, it would convey the author's retaliation to the imposition of confession. Perceived as part of the dynamics of gossip, the *Book* would represent a subversive reaction to the misgivings of the Church: after all, priests as well as scribes participate both as confessors and as victims of Margery's bad reputation in the neighborhood: they represent both confession strictures and the vice of gossip. The *Book* would also stand as her particular outspoken revenge for the oral spreading out of her reputation as a fake and a hypocrite by neighbors, some priests and pilgrim companions: she claims sincerity all through the *Book*, even at the expense of narrative coherence.

The individual that results from the initial imposition of confession, Margery, tackles with her recent identity as a profound devoted Christian and presents this new self as a most conflictive one to the community, to the Church and to herself as a self-narrator. *The Book of Margery Kempe* claims to imitate a hagiographic account in which orality and literacy represent the unstable grounds whereon the discursive production of an individual woman is enacted: a victim of gossip and confession, one who experiences these two systems as complementary in oppression. In so doing, Kempe surmounts the very limits of hagiography thus challenging those between biography and autobiography.

María Beatriz Hernández Pérez
Universidad de La Laguna

References

Aers, David & Lynn Staley 2001: *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park.

Anderson, Linda 2001: *Autobiography*. Routledge, London & New York.

Arnold, John H. 2004: Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy and Dissent. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 75–93.

Bok, Sisela 1989: *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*. Vintage, New York.

Bourdieu, Pierre 1977: *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Brodski, Bella & Celeste Schenck eds. 1988: *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London.

Broughon, Trev 2000: Auto/Biography and the Actual Course of Things. In Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield eds.: *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods*. Routledge, London & New York, 241–246.

Chenu, M.-D. 1969: *L'Éveil de la Conscience dans la Civilisation Médiévale*. Vrin, Paris.

Cosslett, Tess, Celia Lury & Penny Summerfield eds. 2000: *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods*. Routledge, London & New York.

Davis, Isabel 2004: Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A*

*Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 35–54.

De Certeau, Michel 1992: *The Mystic Fable*, Vol. 1, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Dillon, Janette 1998: Holy Women and their Confessors or Confessors and their Holy Women? Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition. In Rosalyn Voaden ed.: *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*. D.S. Brewer, Woodbridge, 110–148.

Dinshaw, Carolyn 2003: Margery Kempe. In Carolyn Dinshaw & David Wallace eds.: *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 222–239.

Eakin, Paul John 1985: *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Foucault, Michel 1980 (1976): *The History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Vintage, New York.

Frecero, John 1986: Autobiography and Narrative. In Thomas Heller, C. Morton Sosna & David E. Wellbery eds.: *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 16–29.

Hamilton, Paula 1994: The Knife Edge: Debates about Memory and History. In K. Darian-Smith, & P. Hamilton: *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1–19.

Hanawalt, Barbara A. 1998: *'Of Good and Ill Repute'. Gender and Social Control in Medieval England*. Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford.

Howarth, W.L. 1974: Some Principles of Autobiography. *New Literary History*, 5: 363–381.

Huyssen, A. 1995: *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. Routledge, London.

Jelinek, Estelle C. 1986: *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*. Twayne, Boston.

Jenkins, Jacqueline: Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 113–128.

Jones, Sarah Rees 2000: 'A Peler of Holy Cherch': Margery Kempe and the Bishops. In Jocelyn Wogan-Browne *et al.* eds.: *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*. Turnhout, Brepols, pp. 377–391.

Kempe, Margery 2000: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt. Longman Annotated Texts, Edinburgh Gate.

Kuhn, A. 1995: *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. Verso, London & New York.

Lea, Henry Charles 1896: *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*. 3 vols. Lea Brothers, Philadelphia.

Lewis, Katherine J. 2004: Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 195–215.

Lochrie, Karma 1991: *Margery Kempe and the Translations of the Flesh*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

——— 1999: *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

Maisonneuve, Roland 1982: Margery Kempe and the Eastern and Western tradition of the "Perfect Fool". In Marion Glasscoe, ed.: *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*. University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1–17.

Mason, Maty 1988: The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers. In Bella Brodski & Celeste Schenck eds.: *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 19–44.

Miller, D. A. 1988: *The Novel and the Police*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Misch, Georg 1950: *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London (1907).

Morriso, Susan Signe 2000: *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England. Private Piety as Public Performance*. Routledge, London.

Mueller, Janel M. 1984: Autobiography of a New 'Creatur': Female Spirituality, Selfhood, and Authorship in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. In Domna Stanton ed.: *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 57–69.

Nussbaum, Felicity 1989: *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Petroff, Elizabeth Alvilda 1994: "*Body and Soul": Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*. Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford.

Phillips, Kim M. 2004: Margery Kempe and the Ages of Woman. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A Companion*

*to* The Book of Margery Kempe. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 17–34.

Radstone, Susannah 2000: Autobiographical Times. In Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield eds.: *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods*. Routledge, London & New York, 201–219.

Root, Jerry 1997: *"Space to Speke": The Confessional Subject in Medieval Literature*. Peter Lang, New York.

Salih, Sarah 2004: Margery Kempe's Bodies: Piety, Work and Penance. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 161–176.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer 1985: *Gossip*. Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press.

Schenck, Celeste 1988: All of a piece: Women's Poetry and Autobiography. In Bella Brodski & Celeste Schenck eds.: *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 281–305.

Spence, J. 1986: *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography*. Candem Town, London.

Spengeman, W.C. 1980: *The Forms of Autobiography*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

Sponsler, Claire 2004: Drama and Piety: Margery Kempe. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 129–143.

Staley, Lynn 1994: *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park.

Stanley, Liz 1992: *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Stanton, Domna ed. 1984: *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Watkins, Oscar D. 1920: *A History of Penance*. 2 vols. Longman, Green & Co., London.

Watt, Diane 2004: Political Prophecy in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 145–160.

Windeatt, Barry 2004: Reading and Re-reading *The Book of Margery Kempe*. In John Arnold & Katherine J. Lewis eds.: *A Companion to* The Book of Margery Kempe. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1–14.

*Received* 02 Apr 2008; *revision received* 27 May 2008; *accepted* 08 Jun 2008