MARGERY KEMPE

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INTRODUCTION
Margery Kempe was a late medieval English visionary and is, arguably, the author of the first autobiography known to have been written in the English language. Kempe was born in Norfolk in c. 1373, the daughter of a relatively prosperous and distinguished East Anglian merchant who had served as mayor and member of Parliament for the borough of Bishop’s Lynn, now King’s Lynn. The Book of Margery Kempe, which was dictated at least in part by Kempe, who was illiterate, gives a detailed account of Kempe’s lived experiences from the time of her first pregnancy when she was around twenty years old, until she was in her mid-sixties. It describes in lively detail Kempe’s spiritual revelations, affective meditations, and conversations with the divine; her pilgrimages in England, Europe, and the Holy Lands; her controversial expressions of piety; and her tribulations and trials, including her examinations for heresy. The Book is not a sophisticated theological text but a work of lay piety that reflects some of the popular religious enthusiasms of the later Middle Ages. At the same time, it offers a relatively rare insight into the domestic experiences of a late medieval secular woman, albeit an atypical one. Since the discovery of the one surviving manuscript of The Book in 1934, and the subsequent publication of numerous editions and translations, the writing and life of Margery Kempe have become foci of interest for scholars of medieval English history, religion, and literature. The impact of modern feminism on literary studies and the growth of interest in women’s writing since the late 20th century have resulted in Margery Kempe gaining canonical status as she is widely, if debatably, considered to be one of the earliest women writers in the English language addressed by scholars include the questions of authorship and authority in The Book; the relationship of Margery Kempe’s revelatory experiences to those of the Continental religious women; the relationship of her piety to contemporary Lollardy in England and the broader political context of The Book; and the representation of Margery Kempe’s sexual, domestic, and social relationships within The Book. Tension exists between those critics who choose to emphasize the fictional and rhetorical aspects of the The Book of Margery Kempe and those scholars who see The Book as a historical document.

REFERENCE WORKS
Entries on Margery Kempe can be found in many online and printed literary encyclopedias and surveys, such as **Luminarium**. There exist a variety of websites devoted medieval women, which also include material on Margery Kempe. One of the most noteworthy is **Monastic Matrix**. Of the websites devoted to Margery Kempe specifically the most useful is **Mapping Margery Kempe**.

*Luminarium: Anthology of English Literature[http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/margery.htm]*. Luminarium Encyclopedia is online project devoted to medieval and early modern English. Its entry on Kempe includes a biography, extracts of The Book, links to other online editions, books and resources, and a bibliography of essays and articles. There are links to entries on related writers (e.g., Julian of Norwich and the Paston family) and topics (e.g., lyrics and drama).
*Monastic Matrix: A Scholarly Resource for the Study of Women’s Religious Communities from 400–1600 CE[http://monasticmatrix.org]*. This project provides profiles of medieval women’s religious communities and information about documentary sources as well as secondary texts, biographies, digital images, a database of citations, and a glossary of terms. It is a useful bibliographical resource for The Book of Margery Kempe.

Raguin, Virginia, and Sarah Stanbury. *Mapping Margery Kempe: A Guide to Late Medieval Material and Spiritual Life*[http://www.holycross.edu/departments/visarts/projects/kempe/index.html]*. This website provides a wide range of resources related to Margery Kempe’s life and to the society and culture in which she lived. In addition to reproducing extracts of The Book of Margery Kempe, it provides a glossary and bibliography and a range of documents, related texts, maps, and images. There are pages devoted to parish and town life, and to pilgrimage.

**TEXTS**

There is a proliferation of modern versions of The Book of Margery Kempe, in printed and online format. These include the scholarly edition, textbooks that provide annotations and some additional supporting material (including, in some cases, interpretative essays or reprinted critical articles), modernized texts, and translations for scholarly and nonacademic readers. In selecting texts, anthologies which only include short extracts were excluded, as were the most popular translations. For the purposes of academic research for publication, reference is usually made to the scholarly edition of the text. However, in the classroom preference is more often given to the textbooks or translations, which are less expensive and more accessible, and a number of excellent examples are cited here, all produced by reliable and highly informed editors and translators.

**Scholarly Editions**

The standard edition is Meech and Allen 1940. This is a diplomatic edition of London, British Library MS Additional 61823, which also includes later scribal annotations. As the text only exists in this one manuscript, this authoritative edition has not yet been superseded. The edition was originally conceived of as the first of two volumes, the second of which would include substantial extracts of related works of Continental mysticism. As it stands, the first volume includes appendices on the Dominican female mystics in Germany and on Blessed Dorothea of Prussia. The second volume was never published.


This edition has an introduction by Meech discussing the language of the text, the manuscript, and the early modern printed extracts from The Book of Margery Kempe; it also has a chronological table. It is fully annotated has an excellent glossary and index. Also reproduced are the texts of the early modern printed extracts and other related documents.

**Textbooks and Translations**

The Book of Margery Kempe has been edited and published in a variety of forms since the late 20th century that make it more accessible and reader friendly. Windeatt 1985 is a modernized English version of the entire text aimed at the general reader but
the standard of modernization is such that it is often used in the classroom, especially at undergraduate level. Staley 2001 and McAvoy 2003 provide translated texts with contextual scholarly essays, primarily for a student audience. Staley 1996 and Windeatt 2000 are also aimed at an undergraduate readership, but provide the Middle English text and supporting glossaries. Staley 1996 is also available online McAvoy, Liz Herbert, trans. The Book of Margery Kempe: An Abridged Translation. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2003. [ISBN: 9780859917919]
A good selection of translated extracts with a useful introduction and interpretative essay. The selection of extracts is organized around the themes of motherhood, sexuality, and female orality.

A student edition of The Book published by the Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages (TEAMS), with an informative introduction, good bibliography, textual notes and glossary. This edition includes the entire text of The Book. Available *online*[http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/TEAMS/kempint.htm]*.

This excellent translation closely follows the Middle English text. The edition includes a selection of contextual material, such as extracts from medieval visionary texts by women, and it also reprints of some of the most influential critical essays on Kempe in the later 20th century.

This student edition includes on-page glossing and glossary of key words. It has a good introduction, on-page annotation, and notes.

This accessible and widely used translation includes a good introduction aimed at the nonspecialist. This is a highly readable text.

ANTHOLOGIES
Since the early 1990s, The Book of Margery Kempe has appeared on the syllabi of undergraduate courses in English, history, and religious studies, and this is reflected in the publication of three anthologies of essays on Kempe. McEntire 1992 focuses on Kempe’s spirituality. The collection is situated her in reaction to the sort of negative readings of Kempe’s piety (in which Kempe was dismissed as eccentric, hysterical, neurotic, and even psychopathic), which dominated the responses to the rediscovery of The Book from the 1930s through to the 1970s. The 1980s saw a marked change in approach, and critics began to take Kempe seriously. In an anthology compiled almost a decade after McEntire, Staley 2001 approaches The Book of Margery Kempe primarily from a feminist literary perspective. Arnold and Lewis 2004, in contrast, takes a more historical approach, arguing that The Book can provide greater understanding of the culture of late medieval England.

This collection of essays makes the case that Margery Kempe has to be understood primarily as a historical figure, focusing primarily on interpreting her social and religious experiences. The essays within this collection address a range of topics
such as the female life cycle, medieval patriarchy, mysticism, saint making, Lollardy, book culture, early print, drama, prophecy, penance, and works of mercy.

This anthology includes a range of perspectives on Margery Kempe’s life, piety, and Book under the broad headings of “The Woman,” “Her Work,” and “Her World.” A significant emphasis in the important last section is on exploring the influence of Continental mystics on Kempe’s religious expression.

This translation is accompanied by reprinted extracts of some of the most influential essays on Kempe, mainly but not solely by literary scholars, published in the previous decades. It provides a useful overview to some of the most important later 20th-century criticism about Margery Kempe.

MARGERY KEMPE’S LIFE
Almost everything that is known about Margery Kempe’s life comes from The Book of Margery Kempe itself. As a consequence, biographical approaches to Kempe inevitably rely heavily on The Book as the primary source. Historicist approaches to The Book of Margery Kempe dominate late-20th- and early-21st-century scholarship, but Atkinson 1983 and Goodman 2002 stand out as biographical studies that attempt to fully contextualize Kempe life in terms of contemporary historical developments in England and Europe.

In writing the first book-length study of The Book of Margery Kempe, Atkinson set out to complete the project of historical and religious contextualization originally undertaken by Hope Emily Allen. The book includes accounts of Kempe’s pilgrimages, of her conflicts with the Church, and of the Continental female mystics who inspired her. It also provides a good introduction to affective piety. This study is still a valuable starting point for those interested in understanding Kempe’s religious expression.

Approaching The Book of Margery Kempe from the perspective of a social historian, this study focuses primarily on the everyday life of Kempe, which is seen to provide a window into late bourgeois society in late medieval Bishop’s Lynn, East Anglia, England, and beyond. Rather than using an understanding of Kempe’s context to explain Kempe’s Book, The Book is used to understand the world in which Kempe lived.

RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS
While all studies of The Book of Margery Kempe have to consider the religious context of the work, to a greater or lesser extent, the following sections group together the major themes that have dominated historical studies since the 1980s: mysticism, hagiography, orthodoxy and heresy, English and European contexts, and geographies of belief.
Mysticism

While early- and mid-20th-century approaches to Margery Kempe were preoccupied with the question of whether or not Kempe was a “genuine” mystic and visionary, with dismissing her as a hysteric, or with offering diagnoses of other assumed mental conditions, the issue of her authenticity has largely been laid to one side in contemporary scholarship. Beckwith 1986 offers a useful summary of these previous approaches and provides a much-needed reassessment in terms of Franciscan mysticism, examined from a feminist perspective. Hirsch 1989 stands apart in this respect, examining the evidence from a self-consciously modern perspective. Taking a long view, his concern is to establish that Kempe’s religious practices are paradigmatic of extreme spirituality, rather than idiosyncratic or exceptional, and that they anticipate modern-day manifestations. Renevey 2000, Yoshikawa 2007, and McAvoy 2011 offer more mainstream interpretations of Margery Kempe’s mysticism and devotions, although they too set out to establish that Kempe is part of larger religious traditions. Renevey and McAvoy understand Kempe’s mysticism in terms of the flourishing of anchoritism and female lay piety in late medieval England, while Yoshikawa interprets it through the lens of the Church liturgy.

This extremely influential, theoretically informed study is concerned with ideology and mysticism in relation to women and patriarchy. Kempe, it is suggested, challenges the misogyny of male clerical culture.

This study defines Margery Kempe’s controversial expressions of piety as “paramystical,” that is, located on the boundaries of mysticism and affective devotion. Unusually, it draws comparisons between medieval texts and modern charismatic churches.

In this comprehensive study of late medieval anchoritism, Margery Kempe is cited as an example of a laywoman who remains in the world but who is anchoritically disposed in her spirituality. An analysis of Kempe’s visions illustrates the extent to which Kempe is drawn to enclosure.

This chapter focuses in particular on the connection between Margery Kempe’s devotions and anchoritic piety. It pays particular attention to the bodily performance of Kempe’s piety.

This book-length study contends that The Book of Margery Kempe is not as disorganized as it is often assumed to be, but that it is structured according to the
liturgical calendar. It also reveals the extent to which Kempe’s devotions themselves were inspired by the liturgy.

Hagiography

One key area of debate surrounding Margery Kempe is the extent to which she fashions herself, or is fashioned by others, as a saint. Gibson 1989 and Watt 2007 see Kempe as a would-be saint, and Watt argues that her Book is closely aligned to the genre of hagiography and was prepared with her future beatification in mind. Closely connected to this is the question of the extent to which Kempe modeled herself on legendary and historical saints: a topic explored by Lewis 2000 and Lewis 2004.


The chapter on “Saint Margery” interprets Kempe’s visionary experiences as devotional performances. The study as a whole is groundbreaking insofar as it illustrates the extent to which religious enthusiasm flourished in late medieval East Anglia. Kempe’s Book is seen as the product of what is termed an “incarnational aesthetic,” where religious concepts are understood in material terms.


This extensive study of the cult of one of the most popular legendary female saints in late medieval England includes a fascinating analysis of St. Katherine’s influence on Margery Kempe. Kempe herself seems to have identified St. Katherine as a model to emulate.

Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy

The Book of Margery Kempe vividly describes Kempe’s frequent conflicts with the Church and its representatives. Historians and critics debate the extent to which the established church tolerated, or even encouraged, criticism and reform. Watt 1997 places Kempe in a tradition of prophetic women who felt themselves empowered by God to speak out against the corruption and exploitation of the Church. Warren 2001 places Kempe within a similar tradition but emphasizes the extent to which holy women were used by men to legitimize their own authority, if with varying degrees of success. Voaden 1999 sees Margery Kempe as less successful than St. Bridget in
establishing the validity and legitimacy of her own visions. Rees Jones 2000 adopts a controversial stance in arguing that Margery Kempe was not a historical figure largely responsible for her own self-representation but that she was created by churchmen in support of ecclesiastical authority. Margery Kempe’s life coincides with the spread of Lollardy and the first heresy trials in England. The Book of Margery Kempe itself includes vivid accounts of Kempe’s own examinations for heresy, in which Kempe is depicted as outwitting her interrogators and as proving the orthodoxy of her beliefs. Watt 1997 also examines the centrality of these examination narratives to The Book. Arnold 2004 challenges the prevailing critical assumption, represented here by Shklar 1995, that Margery Kempe was radical in her religious beliefs.


This essay offers a balanced reassessment of the extent to which Margery Kempe’s piety might be seen as dissenting, and suggests that Kempe was socially rather than religiously dissenting. It also explores the reasons why Kempe was arrested and questioned so often about her orthodoxy.


This innovative, provocative essay argues that the real subject of The Book of Margery Kempe is the church itself. Going further, the essay contends that the text was produced by the clergy for the clergy.


This essay, while acknowledging the complexity of medieval religious beliefs, argues that Kempe was a champion of religious dissent.


This detailed examination of the discreetio spirituum, whereby visions were tested by the church to ensure that they were of divine and not diabolic origin, contrasts the case of St. Bridget of Sweden, who presented her visions as orthodox, with that of Margery Kempe, who, it suggests, was more inconsistent.


This study of the interaction of medieval politics and religion examines the Lancasterian context of The Book of Margery Kempe.


The study locates Margery Kempe within a longstanding tradition of female prophecy, which continued after the Reformation. While not involving herself in larger political issues, Kempe was critical of figures in positions of secular and religious power, and she also represented herself as an inspired teacher.
English and European Contexts

The relationship between Kempe’s devotional practices and those of English and European pious women, visionaries, and mystics is widely recognized, and one of the first phases in criticism that set out to rescue Kempe from accusations of hysteria and eccentricity was concerned to establish her connections with English and European spirituality and practices. Dickman 1980 and Dickman 1984 look separately at English and Continental traditions. Cleve 1992 and Holloway 1992 focus on Northern Europe and St. Bridget of Sweden, while Stargardt 1985 considers the Low Countries. Barratt 1992 looks at the influence of Elizabeth of Hungary. Dillon 1996 is concerned with models for Kempe’s relationships with her confessors. See also *Margery Kempe’s Life*; *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy*; and *Geographies of Belief*.


This informed account identifies and examines the influence of an important model of sanctity for Kempe. It makes the case that Kempe herself knew the Revelations of Elizabeth of Toess, and may have drawn her scribe’s attention to them.


A study of Kempe’s relationship with her predecessor, St. Bridget of Sweden, to whom she was devoted.


This essay provides a good contextual overview of insular piety in the later Middle Ages. Kempe’s forms of religious expression are understood in terms of popular religion.


This essay provides a useful introduction to religious women in Europe whose expressions of piety might be compared with those of Kempe.


Looking at a range of relationships between Continental holy women and their confessors, this essay addresses the question of Margery Kempe’s disobedience. It is Kempe’s repeated refusal to follow her confessors’ instructions that distinguishes The Book of Margery Kempe from other books of revelations by holy women.

Uncontroversially, this essay also explores Margery Kempe’s historical connections to Bridget of Sweden. Controversially, it contends that Chaucer was a Wycliffite who set out to undermine the institution of pilgrimage, and in so doing, in the figure of the Wife of Bath, satirized a specifically Brigittine model of pilgrimage.


Geographies of Belief
That late medieval East Anglia was a center of religious fervor, both orthodox and heterodox, is widely recognized in accounts of The Book of Margery Kempe. Wilson 1997 explores what she sees as the marginal status of Margery Kempe in the context of contemporary religious frictions in the locality. Parker 2004 provides a detailed historical description of Kempe’s hometown of Lynn during her lifetime. In contrast Watt 2006 focuses on Kempe’s accounts of her religious travels in Europe and the Holy Lands. Weissman 1982 also looks at Kempe’s devotional expression in the Holy Lands. McIntyre 2008 looks more broadly at Kempe’s pilgrimages and piety. Wallace 2011 plays particular attention to Kempe’s travels in Northern Prussia.

This essay considers The Book of Margery Kempe as a pilgrimage narrative. It looks at the construction of textual sacred spaces within it. Available online[http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00138380802252974]* by subscription.

Parker, Kate. “Lynn and the Making of a Mystic.” In A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe. Edited by John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis, 55–73. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2004. [ISBN: 9781843840305] This essay explores the geography, economy, society, and politics of Kempe’s Lynn. Kempe as a mystic, it is argued, is the product of the ruling urban elite into which she was born. Of particular interest is the account of the political “fall” of Margery Kempe’s father, John Brunham, and his fellow mayors in the early 15th century.


ways in which the environment is depicted as impacting on Kempe’s piety and religious certainty.


This essay offers a valuable contextual reconsideration of Kempe’s visionary experiences in the Holy Lands.


This essay sees Margery Kempe’s marginal status and the controversy surrounding her religious fervor as the product of tensions between the lay and religious communities of late medieval East Anglia. Wilson argues that Kempe actually provoked religious dissent within her local community, and may have deepened existent tensions.

AUTHORITY AND AUTHORSHIP

Recurrent topics in literary scholarship on The Book of Margery Kempe in particular have been authority and authorship. Scholars have been divided over the extent to which Margery Kempe can be thought of as the author of her own Book and thus as an early woman writer. The Book itself indicates that Kempe was unable to either read or write, and it includes a description of its own genesis, as the product of two main scribes. Kempe apparently dictated her story, which was then revised with her approval. This question of authorship cannot be divorced from that of authority, as according to medieval theorization, the only true authority is divine, and women were excluded from authority on the basis of their gender. The question of authorship is also linked to that of whether or not it is possible to discern the voice of Margery Kempe within her Book.

Authority

Margery Kempe’s difficult relationship with patriarchal authority is explored by Mueller 1984, Lochrie 1986, and Beckwith 1992. Kempe’s problematic relationships with agency and authority are linked directly to the challenge in defining the genre of her Book, and specifically to the question of whether or not it can be described as an autobiography. Mueller 1984 and Krug 2009 offer opposing viewpoints.


This essay provides an excellent theoretically informed consideration of Kempe’s power and status as revealed in her Book. Available *online [http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/exm/1992/00000004/00000001/art00008]* by subscription.


This essay considers how Kempe negotiates and exploits her liminal position as a laywoman in medieval society. It also examines how Kempe’s illiteracy functioned within the narrative of The Book,
The question of how to define The Book of Margery Kempe in terms of genre is one that has dogged literary scholarship. This essay offers a balanced reassessment of how useful it is to think of The Book as autobiography, and of the extent to which this reflects modern rather than medieval preconceptions.

Taking the view that The Book of Margery Kempe should be understood as an early spiritual autobiography, this article explores the ways in which Kempe’s individuality is constructed within the text.

Authorship
At one extreme of the spectrum of scholarly opinion about the authorship of The Book of Margery Kempe is that of Hirsch 1975, who made the case for scribal authorship. At the other extreme, Johnson 1991 and Staley 1994 drew a distinction between Kempe as author and Margery as her fictional creation, and made the seductive and compelling case that the scribe functioned as a literary trope within The Book, imbuing it with an authority that a female-authored text would otherwise lack. Erskine 1989 and Ellis 1990 are positioned within this spectrum. Watson 2005 and Evans 2007 offer valuable balanced reassessments, with Evans 2007 arguing that the authorship of The Book should be seen to be collaborative. Ross 1992 offers a different angle of authorship, from the perspective of an historian rather than a literary scholar.

This essay offers a thoughtful analysis of Kempe’s main scribe and of his textual influences.

This article offers a useful reassessment of Kempe’s status as author.

This challenging study proposes a new materialist approach to The Book and to Margery Kempe’s subjectivity, which accepts that writing is collaborative and authorship constructed historically. Particularly interesting is the insistence that the reader should pay attention to Kempe’s self-appellation as ‘this creature’.

This provocative essay argues for the importance of the scribe in the composition of The Book of Margery Kempe. This view necessarily plays down the importance of Kempe as author.

This hugely influential essay contends that the scribe is a literary trope functioning to provide authority in The Book of Margery Kempe. Similarly, it contends that readers should distinguish between Margery the subject of The Book and Kempe the author (as readers distinguish between Geoffrey the pilgrim and Chaucer the author of The Canterbury Tales). Available *online* by subscription.


Staley, Lynn. Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994. [ISBN: 9780271010304] This extremely important book-length study contends that The Book of Margery Kempe should be seen as a fictional work rather than as an unmediated historical document. However, it also argues that as a fictional work, The Book has to be firmly located within its historical and political context.


Voice

Uhlman 1994 examines the question of voice in The Book of Margery Kempe by considering the interaction of oral and literate cultures. Both Spearing 2004 and Riddy 2005 have attacked the assumption that the voice of Margery Kempe can be detected in her Book. Riddy takes issue with the views of Watson 2005 (see *Authorship*) and Riddy and Watson 2005 is a joint further response. Spearing 2004 follows a similar line of argument.


This brief introduction to The Book of Margery Kempe includes a controversial (and not widely accepted) argument for Robert Spryngolde’s authorship. However it also makes a strong case for the clerical textuality of The Book, and makes valid criticisms of the assumption that it communicates almost unmediated the authentic voice of Margery Kempe.


ISSUES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY
The vast majority of literary and historical scholarly essays on The Book of Margery Kempe published since the 1980s focus on issues of gender. Listed here are a selection of important essays that concentrate centrally on key feminist topics such as traffic in women, patriarchy, maternity, family relations, the body, sexuality, and relations between women. More recent criticism has also been influenced heavily by queer theory, with emphasis on sexual and gender transgression. The Book of Margery Kempe lends itself particularly well to such approaches precisely because it does focus so centrally on the lived experience of a medieval woman who was not confined by the cloister but who remained in the world, exercising her own distinctive brand of affective piety.

Feminist Approaches
Bosse 1979 and Partner 1991 offer valuable overviews and reassessments of Kempe criticism in the 20th century, from feminist perspectives. Kempe’s sometimes painful relationships, with a God whom she perceived in masculine terms, and with her own husband, as well as with male religious authorities, have been explored by a number of critics, most notably in Delany 1994. A rather different angle, focusing on women’s distinctive relationship to time, is taken by Dinshaw 2003. Jenkins 2004 is influenced by work on the emergence of female textual communities in the later Middle Ages and suggests that Kempe’s illiteracy is a trope rather than a reflection of reality.


Taking chapter 60 of The Book of Margery Kempe as its starting point, this essay draws out key themes in the text, including Kempe’s relationship to the written work, her relationships with others, and her troublesome spirituality. It goes on to look at time and history in relation to The Book of Margery Kempe, arguing that Kempe was both of her time and outside of it.

This essay offers an intelligent and balanced analysis of Margery Kempe’s engagement with literary and literate culture. It points out that a woman of Kempe’s social class would quite probably have been able to read some vernacular texts, and suggests that Kempe deliberately developed a “trope of illiteracy” in the context of the Lollard panic of the early 15th century.

This article serves as an excellent introduction to The Book of Margery Kempe and to its problematic critical reception.

Queer Readings

Queer approaches to The Book of Margery Kempe have addressed her homoerotic relationships with women, as in Lavezzo 1996, and the subversive potential of her religious expression, as in Dinshaw 1999. See also *Fictionalization*.

This includes a chapter on Margery Kempe that adopts a highly innovative and compelling queer approach to history, literature, and theory. It includes readings of Margery Kempe’s white clothes (seen as a form of cross-dressing) and of her “queer” spiritual family.

This essay focuses on Margery Kempe’s gendered self-representation as emotional and intensely compassionate. It argues that her piety, and in particular her affective identification with the Virgin Mary, is homoerotic.

The Body

Kempe’s extremely physical form of affective piety has been the focus of studies that explore medieval conceptions of gender and representations of the female body, most notably Lochrie 1991, Harding 1993, and McAvoy 2004. Motherhood is a key theme, but Salih 2001 focuses on virginity as a spiritual as well as (or instead of) a physical state in the Middle Ages.

This study focuses on the representation of Margery Kempe’s maternal body.
This crucially important feminist reading of The Book of Margery Kempe focuses of the implications of the medieval theological division between the body and the flesh. This book explores the extent to which Kempe challenged taboos and prohibitions that silenced women in the Middle Ages.

This extended close comparison of the writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe focuses on medieval ideas of femininity, maternity, virginity, and sexuality.

This examination of the construction of virginity in the Middle Ages includes a chapter on Margery Kempe, who, despite having had children, defined herself as a reclaimed virgin.

REPUTATION AND AFTERLIFE
While The Book of Margery Kempe itself indicates that, during her lifetime, Kempe’s reputation (positive and negative) spread well beyond her own locality of East Anglia into other parts of England, and indeed into Europe, there is little if any supporting surviving historical evidence. The extant manuscript of The Book of Margery Kempe is directly descended from the original version, and it cannot be assumed that other copies were made and circulated. The extant manuscript itself was once part of the library at Mountgrace Priory in North Yorkshire. Lochrie 1991 offers an analysis of the scribal annotations on the manuscript and what they reveal about its reception among the Carthusian contemplative monks. There is then little to suggest that The Book was read by laypeople. Nevertheless, a short series of extracts of The Book of Margery Kempe did make it into printed form in the early modern period, published first by Wynkyn de Worde in 1501, and subsequently in a short anthology of mystical works, by Henry Pepwell in 1521. The early modern abridgments are analyzed in Holbrook 1987, Keiser 1987, Foster 2004, and Summit 2000. Mitchell 2005 looks at The Book’s reception in the 20th century.

This essay offers a timely reassessment of the early modern printed extracts of The Book by de Worde as a quarto pamphlet in 1501. It argues that de Worde’s publications responded to a growing lay demand for Bridgettine and Carthusian mysticism and that the publication of the Kempe extracts has to be understood in terms of this market.

This essay looks at the first printed edition of extracts of The Book of Margery Kempe, and contends that it may have been composed by Kempe’s main confessor, Robert Springold.

This essay offers an excellent account of the contexts in which the early printed extracts of The Book of Margery Kempe were produced.
This study includes biographical accounts of the late medieval monks who annotated the surviving manuscript of The Book of Margery Kempe.
Taking a cultural materialist approach, this innovative research examines the scholarship that emerged around The Book of Margery Kempe, and the reception of the published editions in the Second World War and thereafter. Particular attention is given to Hope Emily Allen, and other female scholars of the period.
This important study of women’s literary history in the medieval and early modern periods includes a chapter that discusses of Pepwell’s edition of extracts of The Book of Margery Kempe and the text’s early-16th-century reception.

FICTIONALIZATION
While The Book of Margery Kempe has inspired widespread popular interest, Glück 1994 stands out as the most innovative rewriting of Kempe’s life. Howard 1989 dramatizes Kempe’s performance as a mystic. Glück 1994 is discussed by Dinshaw 1999.
This study, which suggests that it is possible to connect with the medieval past through a queer touch, includes a reading of Glück 1994 alongside a reading of The Book of Margery Kempe.
In this queer novel, Kempe’s already eroticized relationship with Jesus is explicitly sexualized, and her narrative is interwoven with that of the narrator and his relationship with a beautiful man called Bob.
A dramatization of Margery Kempe’s life.