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James Ryan Gregory
Western Michigan University

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**“OPENE ÞERFORE ÞE IZE OF ÞIN INTELLECTE”: HOLY TEARS IN
*THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE AND
THE ORCHERD OF SYON***

by

James Ryan Gregory

**A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
The Medieval Institute**

**Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
July 2006**

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James Ryan Gregory

“OPENE ÞERFORE ÞE I3E OF ÞIN INTELLECTE”: HOLY TEARS IN
THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE AND
THE ORCHERD OF SYON

James Ryan Gregory, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2006

St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) discusses in her greatest work, *Il Dialogo*, the various stages by which the human soul can ascend the spiritual path to God and salvation. She specifically treats the matter of “holy tears” and outlines a complete taxonomy of holy weeping, a six-tiered scale through which the soul can ascend in pursuit of union with the divine. The activities of Catherine’s insular near-contemporary, Margery Kempe, a woman famed for her persistent wailing in remembrance of all things holy, are recorded in a text whose construction of its eponymous heroine parallels in many ways the hierarchy of tears delineated by Catherine. *Il Dialogo* had been translated into English for the nuns of Syon Abbey under the title *The Orchard of Syon* in the early fifteenth century, well before Margery’s book was penned. Margery’s text itself records a visit to Syon Abbey, which raises the possibility that Margery came into direct contact with Catherine’s work. This study explores Margery’s incessant weeping in relation to Catherine’s system of holy tears. By closely reconsidering the texts themselves, the manuscript marginalia, and even the printed extracts of each treatise, this study highlights Margery’s spiritual progression, reevaluates her status as an author, and aims to achieve a better understanding of the influence of Catherine’s work in late medieval England.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A soule is euere movinge, and perfore if it goop not forþ by vertues, it moste needis go
 backward in vicis. Stande stille may it not.
 –*The Orcherd of Syon*, part III, chapter II¹

Perhaps the work of no other medieval English woman has sparked so much scholarly attention as has *The Book of Margery Kempe*. This “schort tretys,” preserved in a single manuscript dating from the first half of the fifteenth century, is a multi-layered text that addresses, against the backdrop of the religious and social institutions of the late Middle Ages, the challenges of reconciling extreme manifestations of faith with the demands and responsibilities of domestic, urban life.² The book tests the boundaries of orthodoxy and heresy through one woman’s assertion of what scholars today call affective piety or affective spirituality.³ Margery’s fervent devotion combines a desire to speak authoritatively in a society that continually seeks to silence the public female voice, with an urgent personal need to demonstrate the salvific power of Christ’s love for one’s fellow human beings. Anyone familiar with Margery’s story will know that her vigorous

¹ *The Orcherd of Syon*, ed. Phyllis Hodgson and Gabriel M. Liegey, EETS no. 258, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 118, lines 26-8. All quotations from and references to the *Orcherd of Syon* are drawn from this edition (hereafter referred to as *Orcherd* in the footnotes). Quotations will be made with reference to page and line numbers. The surviving manuscripts of the *Orcherd* are discussed by Hodgson and Liegey in their introduction, i-xi. I consider them on 19-22 following.

² The only complete version of Margery’s book survives in British Library MS. Additional 61823. For a full description of the manuscript, see Sanford B. Meech’s introduction to Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford B. Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS o.s. 212 (1940; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1961), xxxii-xlvi. For a discussion of the likely date of its composition see esp. xxxii-xxxiv. I discuss the manuscript of Margery’s book and its marginalia in chap. 5. All quotations from *The Book of Margery Kempe* (hereafter denoted as *BMK* in the footnotes) are taken from this edition and will make reference to chapter, page, and line numbers as necessary. Meech uses italics to indicate expanded abbreviations, a feature which I preserve in all quotations from the text.

³ See for instance, Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 95-8; Karma Lochrie, “The Body as Text and the Semiotics of Suffering,” in *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 13-55; and Brad Herzog, “The Augustinian Subject, Franciscan Piety, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*: An Affective Appropriation and Subversion of Authority,” *Philological Review* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 67-88.

religious expression was manifested in the act of holy weeping. She was famed and oftentimes reviled for her uncontrollable and divinely-inspired impulse to cry unremittingly, both publicly and at full volume, whenever the memory of God's eternal love or of Christ's Passion came upon her. Through this signature activity, undoubtedly one of the most salient features of Margery's character and, for those around her, perhaps the most irritating of all the manifestations of spirituality exhibited by "þis creatur," Margery asserts her own voice against that of a predominantly unsympathetic, and of course male, clergy. At the same time, Margery's tears set her off as an exemplar of selfless faith in God and love for neighbor. Although Margery is not physically enclosed, her weeping continually places her apart from her fellow Christians at the same time that it demonstrates her spiritual growth in the faith that they all share. Inspired by God's love, Margery intends her behavior to encourage those around her to adopt a similar practice of utterly selfless charity for their fellow Christians, although not necessarily the life of tearful travail that Margery herself follows.⁴ While the motif of holy weeping, also found in other contemporary works of mystical devotion, is therefore not unique to Margery's text, its extended deployment within and its effect upon her community and upon the readers of her book mark it out as exceptional. Through her tearful expressions of religious conviction, Margery privileges spiritual concerns over worldly issues and rejects the accepted standards of behavior that define both the secular and spiritual communities of her contemporaries. While she retreats from social and communal life

⁴ For an example of this sentiment, see chap. 60, wherein Margery is stirred to cry "ful lowde" and to weep "ful sor" upon seeing an image of the pietà, a priest questions her about the outburst. He reminds her that "Ihesu is ded long sithyn," but Margery replies "Sir, hys deth is as fresch to me as he had deyde þis same day, & so me thynkyth it awt to be to 3ow & to alle Cristen pepil. We awt euyr to han mende of hys kendnes & euyr thynkyn of þe dolful deth þat he deyde for vs." A woman standing nearby and watching the exchange then announces to the priest, "Ser, it is a good exampyl to me, & to oþer men also, þe grace þat God werkyth in hir sowle" (*BMK*, 148, lines 3-19).

over the course of her narrative, Margery draws nearer to God, and abandons her concerns for acquiring wealth or prestige during her earthly existence. Instead, she focuses increasingly on the ways in which she might achieve salvation both for herself and for her neighbors. Nonetheless, Margery's style of devotion and particularly her style of emotive expression arouse shock and disapproval to such a degree that some people threaten her with violence or express a desire that she be locked up in a cell so as to preclude her from doing any further "harm."⁵ Yet for all the difficulties that her vocal outbursts create, Margery's crying simultaneously privileges that voice and establishes her authority as a divinely inspired messenger in the eyes and hearts of those who have the patience to discern her message—loving and serving God by loving and serving every living being.

As a mode of religious expression weeping is more common than one might imagine, found in, among other works, the fourteenth-century *Vita* of St. Birgitta, the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and in Jacques de Vitry's *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, all texts with which Margery herself was familiar.⁶ For all of these women, the act of weeping was an act of prayer, a means of relinquishing self concern and embracing the will of God. Beyond these few treatises, however, holy weeping is also treated extensively in

⁵ For the specific episode at Canterbury in which Margery is accused of Lollardy by a group of monks, one of whom expresses his wish that she were enclosed in "an hows of ston," see *BMK*, chap. 13, 27-9.

⁶ The second scribe of Margery's book, having restored his faith in the sanctity of Margery's tearful fits after having been driven to skepticism through the preaching of a certain friar, cites the lives of Marie D'Oignies and of Elizabeth of Hungary in chap. 62 as proof of the spiritual validity of holy weeping, 152-4. Margery explicitly mentions her own familiarity with Birgitta's writing in chap. 17, 39, lines 16-28. For a comparison of Margery's own experiences to those of Birgitta, as well as a discussion of the influence that Birgitta of Sweden's writings had on Margery's own text, see Gunnel Cleve, "Margery Kempe: A Scandinavian Influence in Medieval England?," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium V; Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1992*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, 163-78 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992). Cleve argues that Margery found in Bridget not only a spiritual but also a literary role model. On Birgitta's influence in medieval England, see Roger Ellis, "'Flores ad fabricandam . . . coronam': An Investigation into the Uses of the Revelations of St. Bridget of Sweden in Fifteenth-Century England," *Medium Ævum* 51, no. 2 (1982): 163-86.

another work, a mystical text nearly contemporary to Margery's narrative, composed by an author whose life has sometimes been compared with Margery's own.⁷ This author is St. Catherine of Siena and the text in question is *Il Dialogo*, which she composed in the few years immediately preceding her death in 1380.⁸ Within the first decades of the fifteenth century a Middle English translation of Catherine's treatise, aptly entitled the *Orcherd of Syon*, had been prepared for the nuns of the Bridgettine house for which it is named, a few miles west of central London. Catherine's work deals at length with one particular aspect of affective piety: holy weeping. Referred to in the *Orcherd* as "þe staat of holy teeris,"⁹ there is, in fact, no less than an entire section allotted solely to the explication of this intriguing and challenging feature of religious expression. In this section, Catherine creates and elucidates what is, in effect, a complete system of classification for spiritual tears. By closely comparing *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the Middle English translation of *Il Dialogo*, this study will reveal a compelling affinity of Margery's spiritual progression to Catherine's taxonomy of weeping. The strong similarities of focus and order shared by both texts lend weight to the possibility that *The Book of Margery Kempe* draws tacitly on the concepts in, as well as the arrangement and authority of, Catherine's work to give form and structure to the life narrative of its

⁷ See David Wallace, "Mystics and Followers in Siena and East Anglia: A Study in Taxonomy, Class and Cultural Mediation," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium III; Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1984*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, 169-91 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1984). Wallace deals with the similarities in the early lives of both Catherine of Siena and Margery Kempe and examines how their social and religious environments led each woman to express herself with the written word.

⁸ Introduction to Caterina di Benicasa, *The Dialogue*, trans. Susan Noffke, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 6-7. The standard Italian edition of Catherine's text has been edited by Giuliana Cavallini. *Il Dialogo della Divina Provvidenza ovvero Libro della Divina Dottrina*, Testi Cateriniani I (Rome: Edizioni Cateriniane, 1968). Noffke's translation of *The Dialogue* is based on Cavallini's edition. I discuss Catherine's life, as well as the composition and translation of *Il Dialogo*, on 12-7 following. Catherine was not canonized until 29 June, 1461, the pontiff was Pius II. Michael B. Hackett, "Catherine of Siena and William of England: A Curious Partnership," *Proceedings of the Patristic, Medieval, and Renaissance Conference* 6 (1981): 40.

⁹ *Orcherd*, part 4, chap. 5, 192, line 4.

eccentrically pious heroine. For discernable within Margery's character is a pattern of spiritual development that continually mirrors, almost without exception, Catherine's outline of holy weeping. One might argue, of course, that any similarities visible between Margery's book and Catherine's treatise are a result of common themes in contemporary spirituality, but the fact that Margery herself spent three days at Syon Abbey immediately after her second pilgrimage to the continent argues in favor of the possibility that toward the end of her life, she encountered the English translation of Catherine's work that resided in Syon's library.¹⁰ While Margery waited to receive the Lammastide indulgence granted to pilgrims at Syon, a pious "3ong man," intrigued specifically by her tears, spoke at length with her about the "cawse of hir wepyng" and the "excellent charite of hir Redemptowr."¹¹ Is it not possible that this anonymous youth could have introduced Margery to the *Orcherd of Syon* and its scale of tears during her visit to the abbey? Might he not have read to her selections that were pertinent to her condition of soul? Could Margery then, upon her return to Lynn some two years before the reworking of her book at the hands of her second scribe, have expressed an interest in this text that was taken up by the scribe himself? Is it not possible, if the scribe were able to locate a copy of the *Orcherd*, that he used Catherine's schema in his subsequent narrative presentation of Margery? Or if the scribe did not have a copy of the *Orcherd* at hand, could Margery's recollection of the scale and its influence upon her own understanding of her visionary experiences have been instrumental in constructing the account of her life?¹² There are certainly those who will argue against such a scenario,

¹⁰ See *BMK*, book 2, chap. 10, 245-7.

¹¹ *BMK*, 246, lines 19 and 24.

¹² According to the proem, the first book of the *BMK* was begun in 1436. See 6, lines 21-4. In a thread of logic not unlike my own, Lochrie has suggested that Margery's visit to Syon Abbey may have been the

claiming it to be too tenuous, too unlikely, or too strained. Perhaps, some may claim, the connection between the texts at hand is a mere coincidence, a function of current trends in contemporary religious thought. I can, in response, only point to the striking similarities in Margery's spiritual progression that will be demonstrated in the following chapters and that compellingly argue for a strong relation to the scale of tears itself. Based on Margery's visit to Syon Abbey and the distinct possibility that she encountered an English translation of Catherine's *Dialogo* there, I will propose in this study that Margery, an author conscious of her role in the composition of her text, allowed the scale of tears to influence the narrative presentation of her life-long spiritual experiences.

While modern scholarship has carefully examined the influences of Margery's piety in relation to the writings of other contemporary mystical authors, it has failed to produce a direct and closely-considered examination of the imagery and function of weeping as found in Kempe's treatise and in the work of this Dominican tertiary from northern Italy. Yet the motif of holy tears is arguably the most striking similarity between these two texts; not only do both women employ or discuss the matter at length, but both approach affective piety as a means of advancing the soul toward union with God and toward an understanding of the mysteries of faith—all the while drawing the

occasion for her to encounter Mechtild of Hackeborn's *Booke of Gostlye Grace*, even though that work—just like the *Orcherd*—is not mentioned in the *BMK*. See *Translations*, 78. Hodgson posits a connection between Catherine's confessor and biographer, Raymond of Capua, and the religious of Lynn that might allow us to entertain the notion that a translation of *Il Dialogo* was available in Margery's hometown well before Margery made her trip to Syon and that her scribes could have known of it. See Hodgson, "The *Orcherd of Syon* and the English Mystical Tradition," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 50 (1965): 231, and 18-9 following. Sister Mary Denise proposes that Bridgettines traveling between London and Rome during the years 1415-20 may have brought copies of Catherine's text to England. See Denise, "The *Orchard of Syon*: An Introduction," *Traditio* 14 (1958): 291. Grisé asserts that the *BMK* "is one of the few records we have of the reading audience for such works [i.e., Middle English translations of the *vitae* and treatises of Continental holy women], . . . Margery Kempe is not alone in her interest in and emulation of female visionaries from the continent" (156). See Grisé, "Catherine of Siena in Middle English Manuscripts: Transmission, Translation, and Transformation," in *The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden, 149-59 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).

penitent believer nearer to his or her fellow human beings in charity. *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the extraordinary sensory experiences recorded therein situate its author within the tradition of later medieval mystical writers, both male and female. One may, of course, expect that within any given literary tradition certain similarities of theme and technique, of structure, tone, or mood will be discernable to the careful reader. Kempe's treatise is no exception, for within it may be found not only the influence of previous writers, but also direct references to the writings of prominent fourteenth-century mystical authors. Explicit mention is made of Birgitta of Sweden, Richard Rolle, and Walter Hilton, as well as of the *vitae* of earlier saints, by the scribes who are believed to have helped Margery record her incredible story or else by Margery herself. In the seventeenth chapter, for example, while relating the nature of her visions to the Vicar of St. Stephen's in Norwich, Margery claims that no description of God's love in "Hyltons boke, ne [B]rdis boke, ne Stimulus Amoris, ne Incendium Amoris, ne non oper þat euyr sche herd redyn" compares to her own experiences.¹³ Note well that Margery specifically admits to having heard these texts, along with others left unnamed, read to her. As a laywoman, we would expect Margery to have encountered these authors most likely through the medium of the clergy, who could have read and extemporaneously translated

¹³ *BMK*, 39, lines 23-5. Jacqueline Jenkins implies that Margery's list of authors and works, given twice in the course of the book, is a standardized list that is far from comprehensive and that cites only some of the material with which Margery may have been familiar. "More precisely . . . it is very possible this list also functioned as a convenient means of signalling a devout identity to her audience, a kind of shorthand that we perhaps no longer fully comprehend, but can attempt to reconstruct" (122-3). Perhaps Catherine's text is never mentioned by Margery or her scribes precisely because her work and the work of others that Margery possibly knew was subsumed into or insinuated in this "shorthand" list. See Jenkins, "Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *A Companion to "The Book of Margery Kempe"*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis, 113-28 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004). For a discussion of the influence of Rolle and Hilton on Margery's book, see Lochrie, *Translations*, 114-8

such works for her out of Latin.¹⁴ As a result of this assumption, Margery is generally labeled by modern scholars as illiterate. But such an assumption would only make her illiterate in the sense that she could not have expressed herself spontaneously in Latin, nor could she likely have read it with great ease or understood it to any large extent when spoken. And still, as her interrogation in the Chapter House of York Minster proves, Margery was clearly familiar with the meanings of various biblical passages directly quoted in the language of the Vulgate.¹⁵ Her inability, however, to converse freely in the language of the Church is demonstrated in the forty-seventh chapter of her tale, in which she is confronted and addressed in Latin by the Steward of Leicester, a man intent on proving her mystical experiences both unorthodox and heretical. He first attempts to discover if she is able to understand the official tongue of the Church, and thereby to determine if she is open to the influence of non-mediated readings of Scripture (and perhaps even of heretical texts). Margery expresses her frustration with the man when she responds “Spekyth Englysch, yf 3ow lyketh, for I vndyrstonde not what 3e sey ” (113, lines 2-4). Thus, she not only defends herself from the accusation of speaking of God in the vernacular, but she also denies the claim to authority made by her inquisitor through his use of that language.

The fact has been noted by Karma Lochrie and also by Lynn Staley that Margery explicates scriptural passages quoted for her in Latin, as at York Minster, in order to defend her own activities and experiences in the face of suspicious Church authorities—

¹⁴ Margery herself informs the reader on more than one occasion that priests read mystical texts to her. See for instance, chap. 58, 142-4. The likelihood that priests relied on impromptu translations from Latin while engaging in reading to Margery is supported by the fact that no known English translation of Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris* existed before 1434-5, long after Margery would have first become familiar with it (see Lochrie, *Translations*, 114 and esp. 131n48). Meech and Allen suggest the possible existence of now-lost Middle English translations of this and other works with which Margery was familiar, 276-7, (39/23-25, 39/24).

¹⁵ The interrogation at York Minster occurs in chap. 51, 121-3.

not to mention that she once even quotes the Psalms herself, again in Latin, to defend successfully her tearful self expression from the reproach of fellow pilgrims.¹⁶ Although it may be possible to ascribe Margery's humble, brief, and yet deft scriptural exegesis to long years of listening attentively to the reading of her parish priest either in private or during regular attendance at Mass, these passages in Margery's book raise the difficult question of the extent of (if not the very truth of) her purported illiteracy.¹⁷ Scholars have addressed this matter, and it is a point of debate that affects any consideration of the various ways in which Margery could have come to know Catherine's work.¹⁸ Is it possible that Margery was not as inept with the written word as we might at first be led to believe? Any consideration of the possible connections between Kempe's "tretys" and Catherine's "libro" must deal with the matter of Margery's literacy, her ability to record and to read her own words, to create narrative fiction, since an evaluation of possible written influences must recognize that sources are filtered through the person or persons physically responsible for recording the text.

By identifying an individual within the text, an approachable everyman or everywoman, authors give texture and purpose to narrative experience, to the act of reading, as well as a guide to understanding the events related in the plot. In molding events in the life of the main character, whether that character is a complete invention or

¹⁶ For these events in Margery's text, see respectively chap. 51, 121, lines 1-12, and book 2, chap. 6, 235, lines 35-8. For discussions of these episodes in relation to contemporary suspicions that Margery maintained Lollard sympathies, see Lochrie, *Translations*, 108-9, and Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*, 5-6.

¹⁷ Margery has most likely also internalized the Psalms and probably a number of prayers in Latin, problematizing any description of her as "illiterate." For the common medieval definitions of literacy before and after 1300, see Lochrie, *Translations*, 101.

¹⁸ See Staley, "Authorship and Authority," in *Dissenting Fictions*, 1-38, and John C. Hirsch, "Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Medium Ævum* 44, no. 2 (1975): 145-50. Further studies of Margery's literacy are in Josephine K. Tarvers, "The Alleged Illiteracy of Margery Kempe: A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Medieval Perspectives* 11 (1996): 113-24, and also Jenkins, "Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*," 113-28.

a living human being, an author is able to create a model with whom readers can commiserate and empathize, and whose actions they might even choose to emulate. Scholars have approached the record of Margery's life with this exact understanding in mind. They have seen her story as a mirror for clerics that demonstrates how doubtful ecclesiastics might approach and understand her emotive displays, the sanctity, sincerity, and sources of which were constant points of difficulty.¹⁹ The book seeks to vindicate Margery's boisterous expression of spiritual fervor by depicting the generally favorable responses to her "maner of leuyng" that are articulated by powerfully positioned ecclesiastical officials while leaving the greatest criticisms of her activities to secular men, parish priests, and roaming friars.²⁰ The penitent soul who ascends Catherine's scale of tears abandons the worries of everyday secular life and becomes an exemplar of pious living for fellow Christians; Margery herself adopts this role as she draws nearer to God over the course of her life. Catherine's scale is then a metaphor for interaction with one's neighbors. An individual might act kindly toward the world through fear of God's punishment (without literally weeping for fear) just as one might direct all of one's actions via worldly interests alone. Margery's text repeatedly appears as a literal rendition of this figurative schema.²¹ This fact, along with many other evident correlations between the structure of Catherine's tear scale and the progress of Margery's

¹⁹ For the suggestion that Margery's text was intended to be a didactic tool for clerics, see Sarah Rees Jones, "'A peler of Holy Cherch': Margery Kempe and the Bishops," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain; Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 376-91 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). Lochrie sees the composition of the book as "the last singular act of grace" in Margery's life. "Just as she defied social and ecclesiastical restrictions on her life to become a mirror among men, she defies the limitations of her literary authority to establish herself as a mirror among men for all time" (54). See Lochrie, "*The Book of Margery Kempe: The Marginal Woman's Quest for Literary Authority*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 33-55.

²⁰ *BMK*, 36, line 30.

²¹ The first level of weeping on Catherine's scale is that of the "tears of fear." See chap. 2 for an explanation of each level of the system.

spiritual development, again raises the possibility that Catherine's schema directly influenced the flow of Margery's narrative. Before exploring this issue more directly, however, the origin and transmission of Catherine's *Dialogo*, her connections with the English mystical tradition, and the possible ways in which Kempe could have encountered Catherine's text must be considered at greater length. After dealing with these matters presently, the history of the Bridgettine order in England, the monastic group most likely responsible for translating and preserving Catherine's text on English soil, will also be reevaluated briefly before the end of this chapter with the goal of elucidating further possible links between Kempe's book and the translation of Catherine's revelations that was prepared for Birgitta's first generation of English nuns. After examining the historical circumstances that could have facilitated Margery's knowledge of the *Orcherd of Syon*, the case for including Catherine's work among Margery's direct spiritual inspirations can and will be made by evaluating the goal of both texts—the delineation of a soul's progression toward union with God. But if we are to accept that Margery's text reflects the influence of Catherine's scale of weeping, we must acknowledge a high degree of control on Margery's part over the composition of her book. I do not think that Margery's scribes are complete fictions, as Staley has proposed.²² Yet during the course of this study I will operate under the assumption that

²² See Staley, "The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe," *Speculum* 66 (1991): 820-38, and "Authorship and Authority" in *Dissenting Fictions*, 1-38. Staley argues that the scribes were mere inventions on the part of Kempe, the author of the text, intended only to shield Margery, the fictionalized heroine, from the danger of being an outspoken, literate woman criticizing the Church and, indeed, the entire androcentric society around her. There is no doubt that Margery criticizes the political, social, and ecclesiastical structures of her world, but the distinction between Kempe as author and Margery as subject seems to me too sharp a division, one that renders Kempe an omniscient and distant entity who not only creates a completely fictitious narrative in which Margery is an unwitting and equally fictional pawn, but also who does not have faith in the veracity of spiritual experiences like Margery's own. I do, however, think that Staley's distinction is a good way for

Margery is a carefully discriminating author who artfully crafted, through her own presence in the narrative, a model of exemplary spirituality based on a lifetime of exposure to and deliberate consideration of a variety of religious works—not the least of which is the *Orcherd of Syon*.

CATHERINE OF SIENA'S LIFE AND THE COMPOSITION OF *IL DIALOGO*

Catherina Benincasa was born in the Fontebranda quarter of Siena to parents of moderate means, Giacomo and Lapa, on the fifth of March in the year 1347.²³ She was the twenty-fourth of twenty-five children. According to Raymond of Capua, Catherine's confessor, friend, and biographer, after her twin sister, Giovanna, died during infancy their mother was so distraught that she became intensely fond and protective of Catherine, much later vehemently opposing her desires to live a chaste and holy life. But as a bright child who delighted everyone with her precocious wit Catherine had, from an early age, dedicated herself to pursuing a virtuous existence. In fact, according to Raymond, Catherine had been chosen by God practically from birth to be His mystic bride. By about the age of five, she had memorized and often repeated the Hail Mary,

scholars to start thinking about authorship in the *BMK*, but that the distinction should not be taken too literally.

²³ The most complete report of Catherine's life is Raymond of Capua's *Legenda Maior* completed in 1395, some fifteen years after her death. I rely primarily on the first eight chapters of Raymond's account in outlining Catherine's early life and mystical experiences but one should bear in mind that Raymond drafted Catherine's *vita* at the behest of his Dominican brothers and that the text was used as evidence for Catherine's canonization—it therefore presents a carefully idealized image of its heroine. See Raymond of Capua, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, trans. George Lamb (London: Harvill Press, 1960). The Latin text is *S. Catharinae Senensis Vita* in the *Acta Sanctorum*, April III, 853-959. There are other, far shorter discussions of Catherine's birth, upbringing, and spirituality in the introduction to Noffke's translation of *Il Dialogo*, 1-14, as well as in, for example, the introduction to *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin Catherine of Siena*, trans. Algar Thorold (1907; repr., Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1974), 1-25; Hackett, "Catherine of Siena and William of England," 29-39 *passim*; Wallace, "Mystics and Followers," 171; and Jane Chance, "St. Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain: Feminizing Literary Reception through Gender and Class," *Annali d'Italianistica: Italian Women Mystics* 13 (1995): 165. Wallace specifically notes the similarities between the early lives and experiences of both Catherine and Margery. On this matter, see also Allyson Foster, "A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon: The Book of Margery Kempe in its Early Print Contexts," in *A Companion to "The Book of Margery Kempe"*, 105.

doing so as she climbed up and down the staircase in her home, kneeling at each step to offer prayer to the Holy Virgin. Raymond reports that, as the young Catherine had pleased those around her with her remarkable wisdom, “she now began to proffer devout words pleasing to God, endeavouring thereby to rise from the things that are seen to the things that are unseen.” Later, Raymond relates, after Catherine had begun to experience mystical visions, it was not uncommon for her to be lifted into the air and drawn up or down the staircase by the grace of God, a sight most distressing for her poor mother (Capua, 22-7). Seemingly, the importance of hierarchical stages in Catherine’s later work, the imagery of souls ascending in deliberate steps toward God, is foreshadowed by such miracles and by the practices that precipitated them.

Her earliest mystical experience, a vision of Christ enthroned in glory, floating above the Church of St. Dominic, occurred when she was approximately six years old. Raymond claims that after this experience the “fire of Divine Love burned within her, enlightening her mind, kindling her will, strengthening her power of thought, and enabling her external acts to conform to the law of God” (26). Catherine then abandoned the carefree pleasures of childhood and began to pray, to fast, and to flagellate herself with a rope, which would be replaced later in her life with an iron chain. These were but the beginnings of the asceticism and self denial in the tradition of the “holy Fathers of Egypt” that Catherine would practice throughout her life (26-7 and 51). At the age of seven, Catherine vowed her virginity to Christ, her longed-for spiritual bridegroom and Savior. And after her older sister Bonaventura died in childbirth a few years later, something for which Catherine felt personally responsible, she revealed the vow of virginity to her family and announced that she would not accept an earthly husband in

place of Christ, voicing a strong intention to join the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic (commonly known as the *Mantellate*), as she had been bidden in a dream (30-47).²⁴ The *Mantellate* was the women's branch of the Dominican Third Order, widows who wore the Dominican habit but remained in their own homes caring for the sick and needy with the guidance and aid of a prioress and friars.²⁵ Although the sisters initially declined Catherine's request to join them since she was not a widow but a maiden, she finally gained approval to receive the habit with the reluctant yet persistent aid of her own mother. Catherine was eighteen years old. For a woman so intent on following the teachings of Christ this seems quite a late point in life to begin an official religious career, yet the intensity of activity that characterized her later years certainly demonstrated her passionate dedication to the Church. Catherine plunged into the political struggles between the papacy and the Italian city states, spending the late 1370s in Rome where she hoped to convene a "Papal Council" that would mend discord in the Church, all the while living on alms with a small group of disciples. But by 1380 Catherine's extreme asceticism, coupled with the nearly constant travel and tireless work on behalf of the Church that had underscored her life, finally wore her down (*The Dialogue*, 6-7). By late February she was confined to her bed and within two months, on

²⁴ Noffke records that once Catherine had become a member of the *Mantellate*, she retreated into an intensely solitary life of contemplation, not exactly the focus or function for which tertiaries were intended. Soon thereafter, however, she realized that such behavior did not benefit her fellow human beings and so she turned to a life of active devotion. Curiously, this is exactly the sort of change experienced by a soul who achieves the first stage of perfection, the fourth level of weeping, on Catherine's tear schema. See Noffke, "The Physical in the Mystical Writings of Catherine of Siena," *Annali d'Italica: Italian Women Mystics* 13 (1995): 111n6. For a diagram and discussion of the tear scale, see chap. 2 following.

²⁵ Noffke, *The Dialogue*, 4 and Hackett, "Catherine of Siena and William of England," 31. For Raymond's account of the history of the *Mantellate*, see 66-8.

April 29, Catherine died. It was a Sunday, about the hour of Terce, and she was thirty-three.²⁶

Catherine was more than just a spokeswoman to and for the papacy; she was, according to Raymond, a visionary who received the gift of the stigmata as well as other divine mystical revelations over the course of her entire life.²⁷ She was a prolific epistolaire of whose letters almost four hundred survive. In addition, there remain over two dozen prayers documented by her secretaries and, of course, her crowning literary achievement, *Il Dialogo*.²⁸ In the autumn of 1377, as she was engaged on a mission of peace in Rocca d'Orcia at the age of thirty, Catherine experienced the heavenly visions that would eventually lead to the composition of this, her greatest work. The text, which Catherine referred to simply as *Il Libro* (the book), was likely composed over the course of about a year, beginning in 1377 while Catherine was still at Rocca d'Orcia.²⁹ In a letter to Raymond that would become the structural framework for *Il Dialogo* itself, Catherine related the basic nature of the mystical experience that was the impetus for her longest work (*The Dialogue*, 12). In this letter

[s]he tells of having offered four petitions to God (for the reform of the Church, for the whole world, for Raymond's spiritual welfare, and for a certain unnamed sinner), to each of which, in her ecstasy, God had responded with specific teachings. (12)

²⁶ Noffke, *The Dialogue*, 7 and Capua, 336.

²⁷ Catherine first experienced the stigmata, available upon her request but visible only to herself, while in Pisa in 1375. See Noffke, *The Dialogue*, 5.

²⁸ Noffke, "Mystical Writings," 110-1.

²⁹ For Catherine's own references to her masterwork, see Denise, "*The Orchard of Syon: An Introduction*," 269n2, and Noffke, *The Dialogue*, xi. The notion, sometimes entertained by scholars, that Catherine dictated the entire text of *Il Dialogo* during the course of a five-day ecstasy is supported neither by references to the composition of the book in Catherine's letters nor by the writings of her contemporaries. The title by which the work is commonly known today, *Il Dialogo*, is taken from descriptions of the work such as those given in Raymond's biography. See *The Dialogue*, 11.

This basic arrangement of four petitions offered to and answered by God establishes the foundation upon which Catherine's entire literary edifice would be built. Raymond reports, in the third section of the *Legenda Maior*, the beginning of the composition of *Il Dialogo* before he translates a couple of rather long passages culled from it into Latin:

Thus, nearly two years before she died such brightness of light was revealed to her from heaven that she felt constrained to spread it abroad by means of writing, begging her secretaries to be on the alert to take down whatever issued from her mouth as soon as they saw that she was going into an ecstasy.

In this way there was composed within a brief space of time a certain book, which consists of a Dialogue between a soul that asks the Lord four questions, and the Lord Himself who replies to the soul and enlignens it with many useful truths. (320)

While the preponderance of Catherine's book was recorded by three secretaries to whom she dictated in her native Tuscan dialect, she herself admits the ability to write and one of her secretaries notes the fact as well.³⁰ But regardless of the degree to which Catherine actually wrote or edited the final product, once the entire text had been initially recorded an official redaction was worked out in which the whole work was separated into one hundred and sixty-seven chapters. Several copies were then made. By the close of the fourteenth century, Catherine's book had been fully translated into Latin twice in order to secure ease of circulation, initially in 1389 by Cristofano Guidini, one of Catherine's disciples who had been present at the original dictation, and secondly by Stefano Maconi,

³⁰ Raymond's account of the dictation is in the third part of the *Legenda Maior*, 303. The three men responsible for recording Catherine's book were Barduccio Canigiani, Stefano Maconi, and Neri di Landoccio de' Pagliaresi, see Noffke, *The Dialogue*, 19n36. MS. 292 of the *Biblioteca Casanatense*, a manuscript of *Il Dialogo* traceable to Canigiani, is the basis for Giuliana Cavallini's 1968 edition which is in turn the basis for Noffke's modern English translation, 15 and 19. Catherine declares to Raymond, in the letter mentioned above, that she had suddenly learned to write while at Rocca d'Orcia (and this in spite of the fact that she had never received a formal education), 9 and 12. Tommaso d'Antonio Nacci da Siena (better known as Caffarini) reports that Stefano Maconi claimed to have witnessed Catherine writing several pages of her book on her own. See 9, 12, and 14. Catherine also knew how to read, perhaps with some difficulty, in Italian. See Noffke, "Mystical Writings," 110 and Hackett, "Catherine of Siena and William of England," 33.

one of Catherine's original scribes. Raymond of Capua had also begun a Latin translation (after both Guidini and Maconi had completed theirs), but he finished no more than the first five chapters and the final two before he died in 1399.³¹

IL DIALOGO IN ENGLAND:
TRANSMISSION OF THE TEXT AND INTRODUCTION TO THE MANUSCRIPTS

There is an explicit lack of scholarly consensus on the question of how *Il Dialogo* originally made its way to England, although there is no doubt that it was in the form of a Latin translation.³² Exactly whose translation it was, however, is a question that remains to be answered definitively.³³ According to Hodgson and Liegey, the *Orcherd of Syon* appears to follow the Latin edition of Cristofano Guidini, a text that they claim closely

³¹ Hodgson, "English Mystical Tradition," 230-1 and *Orcherd*, vii. Denise, in her general (and early) introduction to the manuscript and print traditions of the *Orcherd*, assumes that Raymond completed an entire Latin translation of *Il Dialogo* from which "the whole of *The Orcherd of Syon* seems to have been translated" ("*The Orcherd of Syon*: An Introduction," 277, see also 283). However, Hodgson and Liegey maintain, in the preface to their 1966 EETS edition of the *Orcherd*, that Raymond's translation of *Il Dialogo* was never finished and was, in fact, left quite incomplete. See *Orcherd*, vii. Denise's conflicting assumption stems from the misidentification of the author of a prologue found in Wynkyn de Worde's 1519 printing of Catherine's book. Denise claims that this prologue was penned by Raymond while Hodgson maintains that it was taken from a preface by Marcus Civilis "which occurs in the early printed edition of a Latin text, Brescia, 1496, attributed then [i.e., when de Worde was printing] and until recently to Raymond of Capua" ("English Mystical Tradition," 231). Hodgson concludes that the "frequent attribution of the Latin translation to Raymond is clearly mistaken" (*ibid.*). The printed text to which Hodgson refers is entitled *Dialogus seraphice ac diue Catherine de Senis*, the sole Latin edition in print. See *Orcherd*, Vln7. Chance notes that Oxford Bodleian MS. Canonici Miscellaneus 205, an early fifteenth-century Venetian MS, contains in fols. 122r-127v "the Latin translation of Catherine's 'Liber de Providentia Dei, ex italico,' by Raymond of Capua," but that this consists "only of five chapters of the first book," and that the text is dated 1398. See Chance, "Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain," 183n40. Raymond's *Life* contains short translated selections from the beginning of *Il Dialogo*, 320-9. C. Annette Grisé observes that "Raymond of Capua, Cristofano Guidini, and Stefano Maconi were responsible for producing Latin versions of the *Dialogo*," but she offers neither further details nor a reference to a full-length edition by Raymond. See Grisé, "Catherine of Siena in Middle English Manuscripts," 150. According to Hodgson and Liegey's preface, Guidini's version is truer to the Italian original than is Maconi's. See *Orcherd*, vii. See also Chance, "Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain," 175n32.

³² Denise remarks that the *Orcherd* "is of special interest as a sustained piece of English prose, in many places drawing its structure and style from the original Latin" (270). See Denise, "*The Orcherd of Syon*: An Introduction."

³³ See Chance, "Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain," 175.

follows Catherine's Italian original (*Orcherd*, vii).³⁴ Hodgson has conjectured both Carthusian and Dominican channels through which the text could have been transmitted and, based on Hackett's work exploring Catherine's relationship with the English Augustinian hermit at Lecceto, William Flete, Chance has suggested that *Il Dialogo* may have been transmitted through Flete's motherhouse in England.³⁵ Considering William Flete and her confessors, Catherine no doubt had spiritual links with England both during her life and after her death. Stefano Maconi joined the Carthusian order after Catherine's passing and was elected Prior General in 1398, perhaps facilitating the transference of *Il Dialogo* through either the Carthusian house at Sheen (across the Thames from Syon Abbey) or Mount Grace Priory in Yorkshire (the earliest verifiable location for Margery's text).³⁶ Raymond himself was, between 1393 and his death in 1399, the Master General of the Dominican Order, a fact that hints at another possible route of textual transmission. Interesting is Hodgson's assertion, especially in the context of a study that seeks connections between the narrative life of Margery Kempe and Catherine's text, that Raymond was in close contact with William Bakthorpe, the "Prior of Lynne," during his

³⁴ Note that Noffke refers to the *Orcherd* as "quite faithful to Catherine's thought but in many senses more a paraphrase than a translation" (*The Dialogue*, 20). Both Hodgson and Noffke acknowledge, however, that the *Orcherd* makes no significant omissions from Catherine's text. See Hodgson, "English Mystical Tradition," 230 and *The Dialogue*, 20. For geographic placement of the Middle English orthographic forms within the *Orcherd*, see *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, ed. Angus McIntosh, et al., 4 vols. (New York: Aberdeen University Press, 1986). The item maps are located in vol. 2.

³⁵ Hodgson, "English Mystical Tradition," 231-2 and Chance, "Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain," 175n32. Chance has also identified a manuscript by Guidini, now at the University of Edinburgh, (MS. 87, the *Liber Divine Doctrine S. Catherine Senensis*) from which she believes *Il Dialogo* to have been translated into Middle English. See Chance, "Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain," 175. Hackett himself does not explore the possibility that Flete sent copies of Catherine's work to England, although he does note that Flete did on rare occasions send correspondence. See Hackett, "Catherine of Siena and William of England," 37. Vincent Gillespie observes that a text held in the Syon Abbey library, thought by the brethren to be the work of Walter Hilton, is actually one of "Flete's remedies against temptations" (264). See Gillespie, "Dial M for Mystic: Mystical Texts in the Library of Syon Abbey and the Spirituality of the Syon Brethren," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition: England, Ireland, and Wales; Exeter Symposium VI*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, 241-68 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999). Perhaps it is not impossible that Flete could have been a link in the chain that brought *Il Dialogo* to England.

³⁶ See Hodgson, "English Mystical Tradition," 231 and Chance, "Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain," 175.

time as Master General. Did Raymond send Catherine's revelations directly to Margery's hometown? The notion is tantalizing, but without further evidence as to the nature of their relationship, it is probably not very likely.

Regardless of how the text originally made its way to the British Isles, the fact remains that by the end of the fifteenth century at least three English translations had been produced and within two decades, in the year 1519, Wynkyn de Worde had printed an English edition from a manuscript that was most likely based on Guidini's Latin text.³⁷ Of the three extant manuscript versions, British Library Harley MS. 3432 and Cambridge, St. John's College MS. 75 both date from the early decades of the fifteenth century while New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS. 163 dates to the latter half of that century (*Orcherd*, v-vi). Each of these manuscripts is a "large, finely written, [and] elaborate" rendition of *Il Dialogo*, and all three manuscripts have been "corrected" in a hand different than that of the original scribe; Pierpont the most frequently and Cambridge the least (viii).³⁸ Both Harley and Cambridge are written with decorative ornaments in double columns on vellum. The Harley manuscript—the one used directly in my study—also features highly decorative colored foliage (often with gold leaf) at the beginning of each new major section within the text. The preponderance of the text in

³⁷ In the colophon, de Worde's readers only learn that the manuscript on which the print edition was based had been discovered at Syon Abbey "in a corner by itselfe" by Sir Richard Sutton, steward of the abbey from 1513, who ultimately brought the text to de Worde for printing at his own expense. See *Orcherd*, v and Hodgson, "English Mystical Tradition," 231. Hodgson and Liegey have suggested that the Harley manuscript, because of its unique explicit ("Here eendeth þe Orcherd of Syon"), is the source for de Worde's printed edition; the first edition officially to use the allegorical title. See *Orcherd*, vi and ix. For the explicit, see *Orcherd*, 421. Further support for the notion that the Harley MS was de Worde's exemplar is to be found in the fact that of the three extant MSS, only Harley 3432 contains the translator's envoy that also appears in de Worde's version. See Denise, "*The Orcherd of Syon*: An Introduction," 292.

³⁸ None of the extant manuscript editions of the *Orcherd* is complete. See *Orcherd*, viii. For my discussion of the pertinent marginalia in Harley 3432, see chap 5. following.

Harley is written in black while all of the Latin and all of the smaller section headings are, of course, in red.³⁹

Based on the existence of these manuscripts and de Worde's printed version, there can be little doubt that Catherine's material was growing in popularity during Margery's lifetime and thereafter. And noting the assorted and numerous vernacular extracts taken both from Raymond's account of Catherine's life and from *Il Dialogo*, Gris  argues for a stronger Catherinian influence in late medieval England than has been previously suggested.⁴⁰ She asserts that Middle English translations of Catherine's work transform her from a mystic visionary into a didactic model for living a good Christian life (152). Gris  suggests that Catherine's works were best known in England in vernacular translations and that the Latin or Italian exemplars did not circulate widely (156-157). This insinuates a preponderance of lay readers, male and female, who could not have accessed the text in its original continental dialect or in the language of the Church. Translations were carried out in and by monastic centers that sought to provide this increasingly literate laity with orthodox reading material as a counter to heretical Lollard works circulating at the time, and there was an undeniable and growing interest in the mystical treatises of continental holy women. The Bridgettine house of Syon served as one of these centers of textual production and transmission; in fact, the library at Syon

³⁹ See Denise, "The Orchard of Syon: An Introduction," 270-2 for a general, physical discussion of all the manuscripts.

⁴⁰ Gris , "Catherine of Siena in Middle English Manuscripts," 157. In considering two specific extracts taken directly from the *Orchard*, Gris  maintains that such texts "suggest that the influence of the *Orchard* was a little more far-reaching than we might otherwise assume, since an interest in the Middle English account of Catherine's revelations results in the use of extracts from that text in other manuscript contexts," (152).

boasted a vernacular copy not only of *Il Dialogo* but of Catherine's *vita* as well, the only confirmed location for both of these texts in all of medieval England (153n15).⁴¹

THE USE OF BL HARLEY MS. 3432 IN THE PRESENT STUDY

Although there are three manuscript copies of the *Orcherd* surviving today, the decision to use that of the British Library's Harley collection in a study comparing *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the *Orcherd of Syon* was the most logical. Both the Harley and Cambridge manuscripts have been dated to the first half of the fifteenth century, the period in which Margery is said to have visited Syon Abbey. Furthermore, Hodgson and Liegey base their critical edition of the *Orcherd* primarily on the Harley manuscript (with, of course, reference to the others and to Wynkyn de Worde's printed edition). This choice is somewhat arbitrary, but they defend their decision by the fact that the other manuscripts lack the translator's envoy and because the Harley text appears to be extremely similar to the conjectured exemplars for both the Pierpont manuscript and de Worde's edition (*Orcherd*, viii-ix). While there do not appear to have been direct or extended linguistic studies made of the Harley manuscript that would lend support for placing it at Syon at the time of Margery's visit, the Cambridge manuscript (a contemporary of Harley) has been placed in Middlesex, the location of the abbey, by the editors of *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*.⁴² And, of course, with

⁴¹ See also Gillespie, "Dial M for Mystic," 265-6.

⁴² The editors note that the language of the Cambridge MS. is that of the London/Middlesex border. See, 1:64, and 2:378. Orthographic features listed in the atlas for both manuscripts, as well as those for a contemporary copy of the *Prick of Conscience* (BL. Additional MS. 11305) in the hand of Stephen Doddesham, a monk at Syon's sisterhouse, Sheen, might allow us to infer the origin of Harley with more certainty. Initial comparisons of the linguistic profiles for the Cambridge manuscript and Doddesham's text reveal orthographic qualities similar to Harley, strongly indicating that Harley originated in Middlesex contemporaneously with Cambridge. See, 3:301-2. I am indebted to Prof. Paul Johnston's expertise in this matter for the placement of the Harley manuscript. See *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, ed. Angus McIntosh, M.L. Samuels, Michael Benskin, et al., 4 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986).

pragmatics being not the least important of considerations, the reality that both Margery's manuscript and the Harley *Orcherd* reside in the British Library was also a deciding factor in selecting the Harley manuscript for this study.

SYON ABBEY: TEXTS, TRANSLATIONS, AND PLENARY PARDONS

The Bridgettine house of Syon was originally intended to be one of three religious communities founded by Henry IV in expiation for the execution of Archbishop Scrope of York.⁴³ Along with the Carthusian house of Jesus of Bethlehem at Sheen (now known as Richmond), Syon was one of the last two monasteries to be founded in medieval England. While the Carthusian monastery was up and running relatively quickly, such was not the case with the Bridgettine establishment. Henry IV did not live to see this latter institution built, but his son, Henry V, pursued the foundation with zeal and personally laid at Twickenham Park the first stone of the monastery of the Holy Savior, St. Mary the Virgin, and St. Birgitta on 22 February, 1415. There was, however, no official foundation charter in place until the following month and even this did not solidify the organization of the house and its members. Although the charter named William Alnwick (a recluse from Westminster) as confessor general and Matilda Newton (a nun from Barking) as abbess, both supposedly professed Bridgettines confirmed in their supervisory roles, this was not in fact the case. There were no Bridgettines in England except two brothers who had come from the motherhouse at Vadstena seven years before to inspect a prospective site for the abbey and the king therefore summoned more religious, both male and female, from Sweden. They set out in May and, upon their

⁴³ The second house was the Carthusian monastery at Sheen and the third house, intended to be Celestine, was never completed. For my account of the founding of Syon Abbey, I rely on David Knowles's account in *The Religious Orders in England, Volume II: The End of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 175-82. Meech and Allen also include a brief account of the founding of Syon in their notes, 348-9 (245/31-32, 245/31).

arrival, took control of the small community of volunteers that had gathered at Twickenham.

Difficulties followed regarding the hierarchy of power within the monastery. By the end of 1417 there were still no professed superiors within the house and by early 1418, Henry V sent a petition to Vadstena—to be completed and then directed to the pope for final confirmation and approval—seeking permission for the English volunteers at Twickenham to be transferred officially into the Bridgettine Order. The bull of approval was secured and the first professions occurred on 1 April, 1420. By this time, William Alnwick had returned to his anchoritic existence at Westminster and had been replaced by Thomas Fishbourne in the position of confessor general. Matilda Newton had gone back to her convent at Barking and Joan North, a nun from Markyate near St. Albans, had assumed her role as abbess. The only major event to be noted following the actual professions is the movement of the Bridgettines in 1431 from Twickenham to Isleworth, a short distance down the Thames, due to the dampness and smallness of the original site. The new establishment, set up on the opposite side of the river from the House of Jesus of Bethlehem at Sheen, had been from the outset known as Syon (or alternately as Mount Syon of Sheen).⁴⁴

As scholars have noted, Syon Abbey was a well-known center of textual production and transmission, particularly in the case of mystical and devotional texts.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Today virtually nothing remains of either house. Only a mansion by the name of Syon House (settled within Syon Park) pays any homage to the religious establishment that once stood on the site and of the Carthusian house there is not even a visible trace on the ground to hint at the original location of the building(s). Even the graves of the monks and nuns are unknown. Knowles, *Religious Orders in England*, 181. For a helpful map of the location, as well as a brief account of the founding of Syon, see Michael Aston, *Monasteries* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1993), 141-2.

⁴⁵ See Gris , “Catherine of Siena in Middle English Manuscripts,” 149. Chance also makes this assertion: “Certainly Syon Abbey was a hub of translation and copying activity throughout its life, both in relation to the writings of its founding saint, which furthered her cult in England, but also in relation to the writings of

The library there contained the lives of the Church Fathers, classical works, the writings of various saints (male and female), guidebooks for preaching or pursuing the ascetic life, mystical and contemplative texts, as well as an assortment of miscellanies.⁴⁶ And yet, after assessing the library's holdings through an examination of an early-sixteenth-century catalogue maintained by several brethren but originally begun by Thomas Betson, one of the four deacons at Syon, Vincent Gillespie has concluded that

the contemplative and para-mystical holdings of the Syon brethren do not encourage an impression of them as contemplatives in the Carthusian mould, searching for material with which to calibrate their spiritual gyroscopes. Rather they give the impression of a sober, sane and moderate asceticism.⁴⁷

Books and manuscripts made their way into the Syon library from external benefactors, and they arrived with priests entering the house to become brethren as well. Although mystical works did make up a portion of the library holdings at Syon (mainly in the form of extracts or shorter pieces found in miscellanies), the bulk of texts were apparently not in this category.⁴⁸ In exploring the question of why many of the contemplative and devotional texts present in Syon's library were penned by Carthusians from Sheen,

others, often intended for the Bridgettine sisters" (167). See Chance, "Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain." Foster observes that Syon Abbey quite likely lent books out to the laity, 103. See Foster, "*A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon: The Book of Margery Kempe* in its Early Print Contexts."

⁴⁶ See Gillespie, "Dial M for Mystic," 256-260 and 266.

⁴⁷ "Dial M for Mystic," 267-8.

⁴⁸ While the works of Rolle and Hilton were numbered among the library's holdings, it was primarily a collection of their least mystical texts. See Gillespie, "Dial M for Mystic," 264. Roger Ellis maintains that Margery's second scribe may have encountered the *vita*e of women like Mary D'Oignies in miscellanies like MS Bodleian Canon. Misc. 205, ff. 128r-139r, a work of Dominican provenance that contains Mary's *vita* as well as those of Dominican tertiaries including Catherine of Siena (excerpts from *Il Dialogo* are also present). While he notes that this particular manuscript could not have been read by Margery's scribe as it did not arrive in the United Kingdom until 1817, Ellis also observes that Margery's interest in Mary may have begun during, or at least may have been bolstered by, her trip to Rome, 168-71. See Ellis, "Margery Kempe's Scribe and the Miraculous Books," in *Langland, The Mystics, and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S.S. Hussey*, ed. Helen Phillips, 161-75 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990). Perhaps Margery encountered some of Catherine's work in Rome as well, as evidence in favor of her canonization was being gathered there at that time. See Wallace, "Mystics and Followers in Siena and East Anglia," 171n22. The process of canonization had begun in 1411. See Hackett, "Catherine of Siena and William of England," 32.

Gillespie notes that even many of the books owned and read by Syon nuns originated in their sister foundation across the Thames (242 and 257). The fact is that, since their rule forbade them to preach, the brothers at Sheen focused on the production of religious books. Sometimes the Syon brethren were responsible for the dissemination of texts among the laity, perhaps as a result of or else through the preaching that the Bridgettine rule required.⁴⁹ Gillespie further explains that:

The Carthusians, despite their strict enclosure, had a pastoral programme of book-making that was defined and enshrined in their earliest legislative materials, and a proven track record of interest in spiritual experience and the raw data of mystical and para-mystical encounters. The Bridgettine brethren observed a similarly strict enclosure (though there was provision for them to leave the cloister on business) and . . . could on occasion act as the catalysts for the transmission of texts into the wider lay community. (249-50)

If Gillespie's assessment is accurate, the preaching of Syon monks must not have required access to a vast collection of mystical writings (and, of course, his findings in the library catalogue seem to disperse any considerations of such a holding ever being present there). Indeed, he notes that the Syon brothers were probably not known for their mystical knowledge (257). If the Syon monks had a reputation for anything, "especially in the later years of the house, it was for secular academic brilliance rather than mystical or spiritual excellence" (258). From the outset, Syon was a house that attracted

some of the best-educated and most civilized men and women of the country, including many Oxford and Cambridge alumni. Contemplatives already in religious life as hermits and anchoresses found themselves drawn to Syon. The solitary life of mystical contemplation, flourishing in later medieval English spirituality as an individual quest, opened itself to the new foundation at London, where the anchoritic life was refashioned into a community pattern under a Rule and obedience to an elected abbess.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ See Gillespie, "Dial M for Mystic," esp. 255-6.

⁵⁰ E. Catherine Dunn, "*The Myroure of Oure Ladye*: Syon Abbey's Role in the Continuity of English Prose," in *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer*, ed. Thomas Halton and Joseph P. Williman (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 114.

If we cannot assume a strong interest in mystical writings on the part of the male population at Syon, the nuns are a different matter. E. Catherine Dunn remarks that “[t]here are . . . explicit indications of a lively interest in the literature of mysticism and the devout life among the Syon nuns” (115).⁵¹ She remarks further that the vernacular translations at Syon Abbey—undoubtedly intended for the nuns—focus on the revelations of Saints Birgitta and Catherine, something which Dunn feels is “entirely appropriate” given their feminine perspective. Most, if not all, of these translations (including the *Orcherd*) are anonymous and there is, in fact, “no certainty that they were actually written at Syon itself” (115).⁵² While the *Orcherd of Syon* was undoubtedly prepared for the abbess and the sisters under her control, the identity of its translator and the location of its composition are, as with other Syon translations, mysterious.⁵³ In noting the language of the prologue, specifically the reference to the “Religious modir &

⁵¹ Dunn references the case of Dame Joan Sewell, who received a printed, glossed copy of Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection* and quite possibly a copy of Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris* from Brother Greenehalgh of Sheen. See also Denise, “*The Orcherd of Syon: An Introduction*,” 292n101.

⁵² Gillespie observes that “[n]o text that has been assigned a Sheen/Syon provenance by modern scholarship has Syon authorship claimed for it in the catalogue of the brethren’s library” (242). See Gillespie, “Dial M for Mystic.”

⁵³ In his printed edition, Wynkyn de Worde mistakenly identifies one “Dane James” as the translator and consequently as the author of the envoy that concludes the text (Denise, “*The Orcherd of Syon: An Introduction*,” 291-92). A close reading of the envoy, however, reveals that the individual in question was no more than an aid to the translator himself. The translator exhorts the reader who has completed her walk through the “orcherd” to “strecchiþ forþ zoure charite and partep forþ zoure holy desiris to helpe and cumfort of þat synful creature which bigan þis werk; & in zoure deuoute prairis haueþ myn helper recomendid, zoure broþir, Dan Iamys, which for þe mooste partye hap laborid it to þe eende of þis goostly orcherd” (*Orcherd*, 421, lines 12-6). Denise remarks that if, in fact, the translator himself is the “synful creature” and “Dan Iamys” a mere collaborator, there is no reason immediately to assume that the translator was a Bridgettine brother (although she does not discount the possibility). In both the prologue and the envoy, the translator addresses the “sustren” of Syon Abbey and in reference to Dan Iamys he uses the designation “zoure broþir,” not “our broþir” (Denise, 292). This may signal the *de facto* textual community between Syon and the Carthusian house at Sheen proposed by Gillespie. See “Dial M for Mystic,” 242. As Denise notes, “[t]he Carthusians, who were across the river from Syon at Sheen, were known to use the appellation ‘Dan’ and were likewise known to have prepared books for the nuns who were their neighbors. Or possibly an English Dominican friar undertook the task for the Syon nuns and was ‘lent’ a brother to assist him, probably as a scribe. It remains possible, of course, that the translator was himself a Syon brother” (292). See Denise, “*The Orcherd of Syon: An Introduction*.”

deuoute sustren clepid & chosen bisily to laboure at the hous of Syon,”⁵⁴ Hodgson

considers that “clepid & chosen” is

a collocation familiar enough in the body of a text, with its scriptural associations, and as a translation of Latin *electi*, but here its unusually emphatic position in the actual address is arresting. Might it not possibly imply here ‘titular’, ‘designate’, but not yet actually professed? That is, before 1420. The dating of the manuscripts does not preclude the guess that the abbess could have been Matilda Newton of Barking, the abbey which had a leading position among English nunneries for its books, and prefigured Syon itself in the encouragement of learning.⁵⁵

Hodgson goes on further to suggest that similarities between the closing lines of the translator’s envoy and the endings of two books associated with Barking abbey that are near contemporaries with the *Orcherd* might point to a connection in authorship (235). Her suggestion is tantalizing but, at best, circumstantial. Finally, she offers that the translator may have been none other than the proposed first confessor general for Syon Abbey, William Alnwick, a weak and aged man who may have humbly described himself and asked for spiritual charity in the following manner:

Grete laborer was I neuer, bodily ne gostli. I had neuer grete strengþe myztli to laboure wiþ spade ne wiþ schouel. Perfore now, deuoute sustern, helpeþ me wiþ preiers, for me lackiþ kunnyng, azens my grete febelnes. (*Orcherd*, 16, lines 17-20)

There is little else in either the prologue or the envoy to aid scholars in the identification of the translator. And while William Alnwick seems a very likely candidate (if we do not assume that the translator came from Sheen), one would think that a man who once lived as an anchoritic monk in Westminster could hardly claim to never have been a “grete gostli laborer”; humility is, however, the translator’s intent. Interestingly, there is a

⁵⁴ *Orcherd*, 1, lines 1-2.

⁵⁵ Hodgson, “English Mystical Tradition,” 235. See also *Orcherd*, vii.

William Alnwick, bishop of Norwich from 1426-1436 and of Lincoln from 1436-1449, who appears in the twenty-fifth chapter of Margery's book. Could this suggest another channel by which Margery became familiar with Catherine's work? There is no doubt that Margery interacted with a previous bishop of Lincoln, Philip Repingdon, who served from 1405-1419.⁵⁶ Could she not also have had contact with Alnwick, albeit contact unmentioned in her book? While this is a tantalizing consideration, Gillespie does not deem it likely that the William Alnwick originally intended as confessor general at Syon was the same man who later served as bishop of Norwich and then of Lincoln.

Despite the claims of the [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography], the William Alnwick who was bishop of Lincoln (and previously of Norwich) is unlikely to have been the William Alnwick described in the foundation documents as the first confessor-general [of Syon]. His primacy was brief, and no mention of him is found in the *Martiloge*: he may have retired to a hermitage in Westminster after his stint at Syon. It has been plausibly suggested that the Syon Alnwick was first a Benedictine of St. Albans, a house intimately connected with the early years of Syon.⁵⁷

Oddly enough, however, the Alnwick who served as bishop of Norwich and Lincoln was confessor to Henry VI while the Alnwick who served briefly at Syon had been confessor to Henry V. As Henry VI ascended the throne in 1422, soon after the professions at Syon, could it be that he took as his confessor the same man as did his predecessor? This, of course, would then argue in favor of identifying the Alnwick mentioned in Margery's book with the Alnwick at Syon.⁵⁸ As this sort of speculation cannot be further

⁵⁶ See *BMK*, chaps. 15 and 49 for Margery's contact with Repingdon.

⁵⁷ Vincent Gillespie and A.I. Doyle, eds., *Syon Abbey with the Libraries of the Carthusians*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 9 (London: British Library Board and British Academy, 2001), 488. Gillespie references the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 63 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For Bishop Alnwick's entry, see 1:889-91. Margery Kempe is listed in 31:188-9. Gillespie's assertion that the William Alnwick at Syon was originally from St. Albans comes from Margaret Deanesly, ed., *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole* (Manchester 1915), 116-26.

⁵⁸ For information regarding the confessors of Henry V and Henry VI, see respectively Knowles, *Religious Orders in England*, 179n6 and *The Award of William Alnwick, Bishop of Lincoln, A.D. 1439*, ed. and trans.

supported by definitive evidence the question of Bishop Alnwick's possible role in the translation of *Il Dialogo* must be set aside. For the present, the most important and indisputable fact is that the translation was prepared for the early generations of sisters at Syon and that it was kept at the abbey until its dissolution on November 25, 1539.⁵⁹ Until that point, Syon was a popular spot for pilgrims. They came to hear the monks preach; they came to pray; they came to receive a special grace exercised at the abbey with the blessings of the pope known as the "Pardon of Syon."⁶⁰

Beside þe chene soply seuen myle fro Lundun,—
 Our gracious kyng Herre þe V. wes founder of þat place,—
 Haile! he let preuelege þat hole place & callid hit Bregit Sion.
 Þe pope conferme þerto his bul þroz his special grace
 In þe worship of S. Bregit,
 To al here pilgremys on Lammesday,
 & also Mydlentyn Sunday;
 Þis perdon to last fore zeuer & ay.
 God graunt vs a pert of hit!⁶¹

So John Audelay, the deaf and blind chaplain in the monastery of Haghmond, wrote of the "Pardon of Syon" in his poem *Salutacio Sancte Brigitte*, composed just after 1426.⁶² And so it was for just this sort of plenary remission that Margery Kempe came to visit Syon Abbey late in the summer of 1434, arriving three days before the Feast of St. Peter

Reginald Maxwell Woolley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 24. While the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* certainly maintains that both of the Henry's in question confessed to the same man, it does not explicitly mention any connection between Bishop William Alnwick and Syon Abbey. See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 1:889-91.

⁵⁹ This is born out by marginalia in both the Harley and Cambridge manuscripts, something which Hodgson points out. See "English Mystical Tradition," 233.

⁶⁰ See Chance, "Catherine of Siena in Late Medieval Britain," 167.

⁶¹ John Audelay, *Salutacio Sancte Brigitte*, printed in *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, ed. William Patterson Cumming, EETS, o.s. 178 (1929; repr., New York: Kraus, 1971), xxxi-xxxvii. For the stanza quoted above, see xxxv, lines 136-43. Cumming includes a brief account of the founding of Syon in his introduction and notes that, when it was dissolved, Syon "ranked eighth in wealth in England" (xxix).

⁶² The monastery of Haghmond "lay four miles north-east of Shrewsbury, in Shropshire" (Patterson, xxxi).

in Chains or Lammas Day, “þe principal day of pardon” (*BMK*, 246, lines 32-3).⁶³ At this time, the new monastery would not have been complete, the decision to move the Bridgettines a little farther down the Thames having been made only three years previously.⁶⁴ But Margery spent her time at the site in her usual manner of disport: weeping and crying in memory of Christ’s Passion and for her sins against God. She was so intense in her devotions that she attracted the attention of others, including that of a young man, a prospective member of the Bridgettine Order. He approached Margery, “meuyd thorw þe Holy Gost . . . wyth feruent desir to haue vndirstondyng what myth be þe cawse of hir wepyng” (246, lines 4-6) and inquired about her condition:

Modir, yf it lyke 3ow, I pray 3ow to schewyn me þe occasyon of 3owr wepyng, for I haue not seyn a persone so plenteuows in teerys as 3e ben, & specially I haue not herd be-forn any persone so boistows in sobbyng as 3e ben. &, modir, þow I be 3ong, my desir is to plesyn my Lord Ihesu Crist & so to folwyn hym as I kan & may. & I purpose me be þe grace of God to takyn þe abite of þis holy religyon, & þerfor I prey 3ow beth not strawnge vn-to-me. Schewith modirly & goodly 3owr conceit vn-to me as I trust vn-to 3ow. (lines 7-16)

She commended him in his religious intentions, taking the lead that he granted in calling her “modir,” and revealed “in parcel” the source of her tears—her sins and the mercy of Christ’s Passion. She spent a good deal of time with the young man, eating and drinking with him, and all the while she related “many good wordys of gostly comfort, thorw þe whech he was steryd to gret vertu” (lines 29-30). Margery is here guiding a man, a member of the Church—albeit a novice—just as she is guided throughout her journey by men of the cloth. So her role as exemplar is now, at the end of her book, seen to influence the future of the Church, in which future we might expect both social and

⁶³ The episode at Syon occupies the last chapter of the second book, 245-7. Allen’s chronology posits 29 July, 1434 for Margery’s arrival at Syon with fair certainty, li and 348-9 (245/31-32).

⁶⁴ *BMK*, 348 (245/31-32) and Staley, trans. and ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 179n9.

ecclesiastical authority to have more acceptance for a woman like Margery. For not only was the acolyte “steryd to gret vertu,” but he expressly was “ful glad to ben in hir company” (lines 31-2).⁶⁵ Upon entering the church on Lammas Day itself, the first day of August, Margery spies Reynald, the man who, earlier in the book, had led both Margery and her daughter-in-law from Lynn to Ipswich. He is hardly thrilled to see her, given that she had set sail with her daughter-in-law unexpectedly and without permission bound for Germany, something for which he was blamed (247, lines 10-15). In the end, however, Margery prevails upon him (with a little help from her pocketbook) to lead her back to Lynn, and they set off together, presumably after the Lammas Day services have concluded. And although Margery undoubtedly spent a good deal of time in prayer and sorrow during her visit to Syon, before she left with Reynald she enjoyed the company of that young, prospective member of the Church “in þe tyme þat sche was þer” (246, line 31). Given Margery’s appetite for hearing works of spiritual edification read aloud, is it not possible that this unnamed neophyte—who through the urging of the Holy Spirit had kindled a desire to look within and understand the nature of Margery’s tears (unlike so many other people she encounters)—could have introduced Margery to Catherine’s scale of weeping in the *Orcherd of Syon*? Based on the correlation between Margery’s spiritual development and Catherine’s tear schema, I argue in favor of such a scenario.

MARGERY READING CATHERINE: A QUESTION OF LITERACY

Careful consideration of the possibility that Margery encountered Catherine’s treatise at Syon Abbey brings us back to the question of composition; who really wrote *The Book of Margery Kempe*? Indeed, how factual can we assume Margery’s book itself

⁶⁵ In approaching Margery, the young man seems to be following the injunction of Birgitta’s rule that male members of her communities must preach and interact with the public. See 24 above, esp. n47.

to be? John Erskine views it as a compromise between the autobiographical novel envisioned by its titular heroine and the saint's life he feels the second scribe was attempting to fashion. In this way, Margery's book is perhaps not very different from the *vita* Raymond penned for Catherine. While he locates two voices within the text, Erskine maintains that Margery's authorial voice, frequently operating in a "fictional or creative mode," is the strongest:

The vital question for the literary critic is not the literal truth, but the artistic status of the *Book*. If the *Book* is in part rendered fictional by the operation of its author's implied voice, then it is certainly of no less merit as literature; on the contrary its interest is rather increased. . . . Margery Kempe used a narrative structure, and a semi-fictional mode of writing; she did not adopt the native literary model available to her in the *genre* of personal mysticism.⁶⁶

Erskine's conclusion is that Margery's book represents an attempt, the scribe's, to transform the story of an eccentrically pious life into a holy exemplum, to fit Margery's account of her own experiences into a recognized literary form (a saint's *vita*). In a similar line of thought, John Hirsch argues that "the second scribe, no less than Margery, should be regarded as the author of *The Book of Margery Kempe*."⁶⁷ He maintains that the structure of Margery's various trials proves her "wise in God's ways, not man's, . . . her *Book* contains a lesson not less than a biography," and continuing he notes that

[t]hese distinctions are broad ones, but do suggest that the choice of material was selective, and that the second scribe, with Margery's help . . . took part in forming the basic structure of the *Book* if only by putting Margery's random thoughts into a larger context, and by giving them direction. Because of him, the reader is not overwhelmed by detail, and is shown the *spiritual growth* of a temperamentally static human being. (148-9; emphasis added)

⁶⁶ Erskine, "Margery Kempe and Her Models: The Role of the Authorial Voice," *Mystics Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (June 1989): 82-3.

⁶⁷ Hirsch, "Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Medium Ævum* 44, no. 2 (1975): 150.

The structure that Hirsch posits as the scribe's contribution could easily have come from or at least been influenced by his own experience with mystical or devotional works like the *Orcherd*.⁶⁸ And the proposition becomes more likely when we consider the fact that a definite pattern of striving for spiritual perfection that closely resembles the tear scale of the *Orcherd* is immanent in the presentation of a woman, Margery, whose exterior activity (weeping) remains relatively unchanged in contrast with her internal growth.

Anthony Goodman's thoughts on the authorship of *The Book of Margery Kempe* harmonize with both my own and with Hirsch's: that the text carefully incorporates and allows external material to influence and lend structure to Margery's experience.

The *Book* cannot be viewed as the unalloyed composition of Margery Kempe, nor solely as an expression of secular piety. It is a distillation of her matured devotional experiences, made by her in conjunction with a cleric who mulled over them for a number of years. . . . More generally, it is a manifesto in favour of one sort of clerical reaction to current manifestations of feminine piety which were provoking alarm and controversy.

Therefore, despite the *Book's* plausible naïvetés of expression, the autobiographical material in it has been shaped in a sophisticated and highly selective way.⁶⁹

A major assumption under the influence of which all these considerations operate, is the totality of Margery's purported illiteracy. Josephine K. Tarvers has effectively and convincingly argued in favor of Margery's ability to read and write in her native tongue, a notion that alters any approach to an understanding of the composition and origin of Margery's text.⁷⁰ According to Tarvers, it was quite common for English women of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries to have received enough education that they

⁶⁸ "In articulating what Margery must have seen [i.e., atop Calvary], the second scribe fell back naturally enough on his own devotional reading in order make the significance of the event clear to the reader" (149). See Hirsch, "Author and Scribe."

⁶⁹ Goodman, "The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter of Lynn," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 349.

⁷⁰ Tarvers, "The Alleged Illiteracy of Margery Kempe: A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Medieval Perspectives* 11 (1996): 113-24. See also Jenkins, "Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*," 113-28.

were able “to read aloud pious works to each other in domestic or social gatherings” (113).⁷¹ Beyond this, they were able “to read basic correspondence, to keep business records, and probably to compose their own correspondence,” even if they employed male scribes to copy the work of their own hands (113-114). The assumption that Margery is illiterate (something which she never completely admits in her book)⁷² is based upon a misunderstanding of the degrees of literacy prevalent in the later Middle Ages and their discontinuity with modern definitions of literacy:

What this kind of literacy [i.e., that garnered through basic vernacular education] did *not* afford women, however, was the ability to read Latin—and here the confusion in translation of technical terms has led us to make some very misleading deductions. If a person was described in Middle English as being *lewed* or *unlettryd*, those terms are usually translated in Modern English as “illiterate”—and based on our modern assumptions that illiteracy means “unable to read and write,” we assume that these *lewed* and *unlettryd* people could not decipher or compose texts of any kind. But as the work of Malcolm Parkes and others has shown, these terms in late fourteenth and early fifteenth century Middle English refer most frequently to the inability to read and write Latin texts, the province of the *lernyd* and *lettryd*. They rarely mean illiteracy in the modern sense, the inability to create and decode written language. . . . Thus, when a Middle English author describes him- or herself as being *lewed*, the reference is most often to exclusion from the world of Latin *textuality*, the province of *lernyd* clerks, rather than to an inability to read or write in any language. (114)

Tarvers concludes that a woman of Margery’s social and political standing in late medieval East Anglia would probably be “literate in the vernacular” and she insinuates

⁷¹ Even before Margery’s time women of the lower classes could understand legal documents. I am indebted to Prof. Eve Salisbury for this observation. The fact that Margery operates not one but two separate businesses further suggests literacy. Jenkins maintains that “the omission of Margery’s early education in the *Book*’s description of her preparation for the visionary experiences of her adult life almost certainly has more to do with the generic demands of the text than with the facts of actual childhood experiences. While the depictions of failed businesses, which coincidentally imply her literate abilities, are motivated by the narrative of the text (as demonstrating her initial, sinful, resistance to God’s call to her as a visionary), descriptions of her childhood, any education or training she might have received as a girl, are less essential to the narrative of her life as a mystic” (119). See Jenkins, “Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*.” One should also note that in chap. 2 of book 2, we are told explicitly that Margery writes letters to her son in Germany. There is no mention of anyone helping her. See *BMK*, 224, lines 29-31.

⁷² See Tarvers, “Alleged Illiteracy,” 123.

that Margery waited until late in her life to compose her text out of fear of persecution for Lollardy (115, 121).⁷³ This is no naïve anxiety; Margery faced more than one ecclesiastical trial that sought to test the orthodoxy of her beliefs.⁷⁴ Considering the role of the scribes in Margery's narrative, she further asserts that "Margery's use of male scribes is strongly supported by generic and rhetorical convention; it alone does not constitute evidence that she was illiterate [except, of course, in the medieval sense of the term]" (122). Tarvers even suggests that Margery's scribes were employed by her not only to lend authority to her text, but to proof, polish, and copy a draft of the narrative written by Margery's own hand—something which Tarvers maintains would have been considered standard practice for women who wanted to compose a text for more general consumption (122).

Whether the scribes are a complete fiction or a reality required by contemporary religious and political sentiment, whether they introduced Margery to Catherine's thought or silently allowed it to influence their depiction of her spiritual journey, and regardless of whether Margery directly had read or had heard the *Orcherd* read to her, the final narrative purpose of the scribes remains unchanged. They are there to convince whoever reads the book that Margery is a legitimate channel for God's grace, that she truly undergoes a profound spiritual development over the course of her story, often confounding clergy and secular men of power along the way. The scribes are, in effect, Margery's first audience, whether they actually lived or were a part of Margery's literary creation, they model responses to her activities, words, and behavior that readers can

⁷³ Gillespie suggests that Margery's delay in composition was the result of her knowledge of contemporary heresy trials in Norwich or of fear of being reduced by the established clergy "to some manageable stereotypical form" (247). See Gillespie, "Dial M for Mystic."

⁷⁴ There are, for instance, her experiences with the Archbishop of York, Henry Bowet. See chaps. 51, 52, and 54.

vicariously experience. In the end, as the scribes themselves have come to believe in and support Margery, so too will those of us who read her book. Of any of the manifold scenarios that could have introduced the scale of tears into Margery's tale or allowed Catherine's work to be an influence on it, the most important consideration is the fact that Margery actually works her way up the scale over the course of her narrative, and that the scale can be perceived within the text. By the end, when Margery has achieved the perfect sixth level of fiery tears on Catherine's scale, she proves the success of her ascent by the very act of composing the book.⁷⁵ The respite from incessant, violent sobbing afforded by an internal, spiritual weeping allows Margery to craft an extraordinary narrative that explicitly demonstrates God's salvific grace at work in the world.

While I recognize that unless the one responsible for documenting Margery's life was in some way familiar with Catherine's work the connection between these treatises could be dismissed as a curious yet simple coincidence, I will demonstrate that such a familiarity is not simply possible but plausible, even likely. After having completed a close comparison of both texts in chapters three and four, chapter five will conclude this study with a careful evaluation of the copious marginalia in both the sole extant manuscript of Kempe's work and in the *Orcherd of Syon*.⁷⁶ This evaluation will highlight the parallel themes and images, spiritual concerns, and religious goals of each text, as they are noted by contemporary readers, further supporting the notion that Catherine's thought influenced the structure of Margery's narrative. Discussing both the printed extracts of Margery's book produced by Wynkyn de Worde at the turn of the sixteenth century as well as the marginal notations that fill the manuscript of Kempe's

⁷⁵ Catherine, like Margery, composed near the end of her life, when she could reflect on years of spiritual growth and development.

⁷⁶ Chap. 2 consists of my careful reading and outline of Catherine's scale of weeping.

treatise, Lochrie claims that such early attention to the text provides evidence for a contemporary reading of and a readership for Margery's book. And although modern scholarship cannot be accused of ignoring the work or of devoting too little attention to it, Lochrie criticizes the manner in which Margery's text is often approached:

[S]tudies of Kempe tend to view her work in isolation from its readership and the culture which read it in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Her book is mined for the influences on it, the historical context which accounts for it, and its indices to historical figures and life of the late Middle Ages. In the mystical canon, her treatise is generally regarded as the culmination of late medieval spiritual trends, rather than as a work which generated trends of its own.⁷⁷

Lochrie advocates a new approach to Margery Kempe, one in which she should be looked on not as the naïve end product of a long medieval tradition of sensual spirituality but as a self-conscious author in her own right, with a voice that in its turn could have exercised influence over readers and perhaps even over later writers.⁷⁸ Margery Kempe, as well as her contemporary Julian of Norwich, "sought to create texts that are not simply annals of spiritual experience but narratives intended to give a particular form or meaning to experience."⁷⁹ If the influence of Catherine's work on Margery Kempe is acknowledged, it may be argued that her book gives Catherine's taxonomy of weeping vivid and immediate life, and that the abstract concept of Catherine's tear scale is presented as an understandable, almost tangible model in the person of Margery herself, a

⁷⁷ Lochrie, *Translations*, 204.

⁷⁸ Considering Margery an independent author capable of wielding influence over others, Martin Thornton argues that she should be understood not so much as a mystic, but a "first-class parishioner" who intended to better her fellows by providing them with an example of the most devout prayer to and humility before God. He even deems her tears as "minor and incidental," little more than an over-emphasized feature of her character, devoid of any long-term worth and of little weight in the ultimate value of her work. See Martin Thornton, *Margery Kempe: An Example in the English Pastoral Tradition* (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), esp. 2-5.

⁷⁹ Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*, 22.

model that can be both cited and emulated.⁸⁰ In other words, we might approach Kempe as an author who was not so much passively influenced by Catherine's writings and those of other current mystical authors, but as an author who actively sought to present her readers with a model of piety that lucidly demonstrated the themes and sentiments of contemporary spirituality.

When considering Kempe's adept treatment and evaluation of the issues and institutions of early fifteenth-century English society and what this treatment has to say about her status as an author, Staley notes that Kempe "was not only aware of the social and religious tensions and needs of her age but had also considered the ways in which she might present these as informing a fiction that, in turn, constitutes the age in fictional terms" (*Dissenting Fictions*, 10-11). She refers to Kempe's "awareness that truth-telling demands some form of authorial fashioning" as a "strategy of dissent" (11). The term "strategy" generally presupposes a well-considered if not rational approach to any given situation, and Kempe's text is, of course, just that—a critique, a critical *speculum*, of the social and religious environments of her day. Margery perceptively internalized the mystical texts of her age, the society in which they circulated, and the reactions that this society had toward the texts and toward the people who read them. So to consider Margery Kempe as an entirely passive and non-influential figure, whether as an actual person, a complete fiction, or some combination of the two, would be to ignore willfully the evidence in the text of her keen social critiques. To approach Margery Kempe as

⁸⁰ Helen Clare Taylor maintains that Margery Kempe is merely a character, a fictional construct whose tears are based on contemporary literary and ecclesiastical traditions. She identifies three specific sources for Margery's tears in the *vitae* of other holy women, in devotional treatises such as Aelred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, and in the definition of tears found in the liturgy and the Psalter. For Taylor, Margery's weeping is a purely narrative feature that serves to demonstrate her holiness. "Kempe's tears will obviously seem excessive if we treat them as autobiographical details instead of elements of characterization" (365-6). See "'Mulier, Quid Ploras?' Holy Tears in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Mediaevalia* 19 (1996): 363-84.

someone who deliberately and judiciously constructed a critical social narrative using elements found in contemporary authors of note is to allow for Kempe's place as an accomplished author. To accept the existence of Margery's own internal spiritual progression, quite possibly modeled on the work of Catherina Benincasa, is to accept her as a figure of exemplary piety for her neighbors. Catherina was also a spiritual role model for her own community. Humble in their origins, both women came to understand that the only way to bring others closer to God was to find the path for themselves, within themselves. By abandoning the lures of secular married life both women pledged themselves to Christ, and strove to demonstrate for their fellow Christians the true path to salvation, hoping that all who were able to follow would, in fact, do so. But such an ambitious project on the part of either woman, obviously limited by the span of their lives, would require them to garner enough experience and will to see their examples recorded for posterity. Reflecting on a lifetime of religious development and drawing on the spiritual traditions available to them, both women were able to do just that. //

Dialogo set the stage for future generations by outlining the scale of tears through which souls come to union with God. *The Book of Margery Kempe* may very well demonstrate that scale in action.

CHAPTER II

A RIVER OF SIN AND TEARS THAT BURN: A STROLL THROUGH THE *ORCHERD*

When Catherine of Siena died on 29 April 1380, at the age of thirty-three, her book likely consisted of a single piece of continuous prose. In all probability her secretaries divided the text into the sections and chapters—loosely following the flow of Catherine’s thought—which later translators and copyists retained and modern editions of *Il Dialogo* still employ.¹ Yet regardless of who was responsible for this “ordering” of Catherine’s book, the process was complete by the sixteenth century, and the work survives today in multiple manuscript copies. Each of these copies is parsed into ten sections or treatises, each of which deals with one of a series of broad individual topics that together make up the entirety of Catherine’s colloquy with God, every section growing out of the developments and spiritual understandings established in the one preceding it.² Within these greater topical divisions, the text is broken into brief chapters, often in what seems to be a random or arbitrary manner.³ These section and chapter divisions were slightly reordered when the book was rendered into English at the beginning of the fifteenth century, allowing for the text’s allegorical English title. Referring to the book as a “fruytful orcherd” in his prologue, the anonymous translator explicitly states his intention to divide the entire text, by God’s grace, “into seuene parties, and ech party into fyue chapitres” so as to create a metaphorical “orcherd” within which the sisters of Syon Abbey—for whom the translation was undertaken—“wolen be confortd” and where they “mowe walke and se bope fruyt and herbis” (*Orcherd*, 1, lines

¹ Noffke observes, in the introduction to her translation of *Il Dialogo*, that none of these later divisions “correspond exactly with the natural structure of the work, and [that] their perpetuation through the centuries has only further obscured Catherine’s already complex logic” (15).

² Ibid.

³ See Hodgson, “English Mystical Tradition,” 236.

14-7).⁴ Even though those responsible for recording and translating *Il Dialogo* were so enamored with ordering and numbering Catherine's vast work, in reading the text itself—in any of its renditions—one quickly becomes aware of Catherine's own tendency to enumerate all aspects of her religious thought. For in *Il Dialogo* are discourses on the four stages of the soul, the four torments of hell, and the three stairs on the sacred bridge to heaven that Christ symbolically erected for humankind at the Crucifixion.⁵ Then there are the three glorious virtues of patience, strength, and perseverance that support the soul through the highest levels of spiritual attainment.⁶ And, of course, there are six varieties of tears that serve as the primary external signs by which the spiritual growth of the soul can be witnessed.⁷ The matter of spiritual weeping or "holy teeris" is given a place unto itself in both the original continental versions of *Il Dialogo* and in the anonymous English translation that came to be known as the *Orcherd of Syon*.⁸ This is the portion of Catherine's text in which she turns her attention to sacred tears and the soul's progression toward God. This is the portion of Catherine's text with which the present study is most interested.

⁴ While there is no definite proof as to the identity of the translator, scholars consistently assume that this person was male. See chap. 1 above.

⁵ The translator of the *Orcherd* often refers to what Noffke renders as the "stages of the soul" as the three "degrees" or "statis" (and often simply as the "grees"). For examples, see the *Orcherd*, 130, lines 4-12; 139, lines 9-19; 162-3, lines 35-7 and 1-8; and 193, lines 12-4. According to Cavallini's Italian edition the phrase is "stati dell'anima" (200). For the four torments of hell, see the *Orcherd*, 89. Perhaps Catherine's own inclination toward enumeration can partly explain why her secretaries felt it necessary to divide and organize her treatise into distinct parts, if they did so not simply to facilitate easy reference. For the three stairs on the bridge, see the *Orcherd*, 68-9. There are also four principal vices that lead to the downfall of humankind (see the 80 and 88), as well as three reproofs or reminders given by God to all humanity so that no one person might have any excuse not to follow the teachings of Christ. The translator of the *Orcherd* renders these three "reproofs" (a term borrowed from Noffke's translation) as the three "vndirnymynges." See 85-6.

⁶ See the *Orcherd*, 169, line 14.

⁷ See 193-4.

⁸ For Noffke's condensed outline of Catherine's text, which is based on one produced by Giuliana Cavallini, see *The Dialogue*, 16-7. Cavallini's complete outline of Catherine's treatise can be found, in Italian, on xv-xx of the introduction to her edition of *Il Dialogo*. The *Orcherd* itself begins with a prologue by the translator, which is followed by a "kalendar" adumbrating the structure of the text wherein the section on tears is relegated to the fifth chapter of the fourth part. See the *Orcherd*, 9-10.

Catherine's discourse with God on the matter of holy weeping begins—as do the majority of the sections in the text—with a specific petition for enlightenment, in this case, that she might receive from Him knowledge of “þe staat of holy teeris” as well as of the spiritual fruits associated with this state. She further implores God to delineate the various kinds of tears and asks that He explain the differences among them, revealing to her “fro whennys þei come” (*Orcherd*, 192, lines 25-6). God hears her request and responds by commanding Catherine to “opene þerfore þe iʒe of þin intellecte,” so that she might perceive all that He is about to reveal (193, line 12).⁹ This is one of God's favorite phrases, for throughout the entire book He repeatedly reminds Catherine (and by extension, her readers) to examine His mysterious and miraculous revelations with the “iʒe of þin intellecte” in order to understand their true meaning. This motif of the intellectual or spiritual “eye” is the most explicit manifestation of the intense and repeated focus on looking beyond external appearances and ignoring the superficial concerns of the world. Such concerns reverberate throughout the entirety of Catherine's book.¹⁰

To achieve the eventual aim of union with God, the penitent soul must first look at all aspects of the world only through the “eye of the intellect.” In so doing, the sensual will of the soul will, in time, be replaced with the divine will of God, thereby allowing the penitent to travel farther along the heavenly bridge toward salvation free from concern over the scorn and reproof of the world. The soul, able to replace her own

⁹ Noffke translates the Italian “l'occhio dell'intelletto” as the “mind's eye.” See Cavallini, 200 and *The Dialogue*, 161.

¹⁰ The concept behind the image of the “eye of the intellect” is that the inner meanings of things on earth are not immediately apparent through casual inspection and that no one can begin to comprehend God's influence and will in the world without first stripping herself of the ephemeral, physical, and external distractions of human society. Augustine himself employs the image of the “mind's eye” when discussing his attempt to understand the place of free will in a universe ruled by an infinitely good Divine Being. See *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 113-4.

resolve with that of God, enjoys a spiritual security while on earth, secure in the knowledge that she has found for herself the path to salvation. Faith is, of course, the key to success in subordinating the will of the individual to that of God; and as God Himself explains through Catherine in the *Tercia Pars* of the *Orcherd*, the soul that abandons her own will then achieves spiritual security

in þe sizt of my goodnes in hym [i.e., the soul], and in þe knowleching & knowynge of my soopfastnes, which knowyng þe brizt and cleer intellecte haþ in me, which intellecte is the ize of þe soule. This ize haþ a lytil blak in þe ize [i.e., a pupil] which zeueþ sizt of verry holy feiþ, which lizt of þe feiþ makeþ a soule discusse and to knowe and to folowe þe wey and þe doctryne of my soopfastnes, þat is, of my sone incarnate. Wiþoute þis cleer sizt of feiþ þat wey and doctryne is not seye, but as a man seep þat haþ oonly þe foorme of an ize and no sizt. A cloop keuereþ þat litil blak which zeueþ lizt to þe ize. For þat litil blak of þe intellectual ize which zeueþ cleer sizt is þe holy feiþ; which blak, whanne a cloop of vntroupe or of mysbileeue is cast þerevpon, it seep rizt nouzt. Which cloop of mysbileeue comeþ of a mannys owne propre loue. And soop it is it seep not, for it haþ a liknesse and foorme of an ize, but it haþ no lizt, for þoru his owne propre loue he haþ take fro hymself his owne propre lizt. (106, lines 12-27)¹¹

As faith is the key to perceiving and following God's will, so too a lack of faith makes one blind to God's work in the world. In loving their creator, souls are freed from their own will and "þanne þei take," as God further explains:

my wille, which desireþ not but zoure sanctificacioun. Siche þat forsaken her owne wil, þei . . . bigynnen to ascende up by þe brigge and goon upon þe þornes [i.e., the persecutions of the world]. And for her feet, þat is to seye, her affeccions, ben acoordynge wiþ my wille, þerfore þe þornes harmen hem not. Therefore . . . þei suffriden payne bodily, but no payne to her soule, for her sencible wille is deed, which bringeþ and causeþ þe payne and turmentþ a creaturis soule. (106-7, lines 31-8 and 1)

¹¹ Within the *Orcherd* both Catherine and God generally refer to the human soul as feminine (*anima*). This particular passage is one of the relatively few that discusses the soul in masculine terms. In keeping with the most common usage found in the *Orcherd* I will always refer to the soul as feminine.

Thus the goal of the penitent on earth is attained through perception of and careful attention to God's work in the world: the divine will is wholly accepted as the human will is cast aside and the soul continues along the scale of tears toward union with God free from the fear of worldly criticism or persecution.

There are then five distinct varieties ("maneris") of holy tears on this scale that God outlines in the *Orcherd*, beginning with the "teeris of dampnacioun" and proceeding to the perfect tears of sweetness, "þe which is a virtuous wepyng" (193, lines 15-29). Beyond this He mentions the existence of a sixth level that falls outside the "normal" scale, that of the "brennyngteeris wipoute wepyng of þe i3e," a variety reserved for those who wish to weep for God's love but who, for some reason, may not do so (193, lines 30-2).¹² For the purposes of clarity and simplicity, the different levels of tears will be enumerated and referred to in this study as they appear initially in the text of the *Orcherd*. From lowest to highest then, they are as follows:¹³

1. "Teeris of dampnacioun"—The weeping of those who are consumed with worldly concerns.
2. "Teeris of dreede"—The tears of those who weep in fear of the inevitable punishment for sin, this variety of crying belongs to a category that Catherine calls the "imperfect tears of life."
3. "Teeris of hem þat aftir tyme þei ben risen fro synne . . . bigynne to serue [God]"—These are also imperfect tears of life.

¹² In the actual discussion of the system within the *Orcherd*, God starts with the second level (the "teeris of dreede") and proceeds through the end (the "brennyngteeris wipoute wepyng of þe i3e") before turning His attention to the first and lowest set of tears, the "teeris of dampnacioun." The matter becomes somewhat confused when God then begins to refer to the lowest level as the fifth level of tears when it is chronologically the first (see 203, line 34). God begins His more detailed outline of the different sorts of tears on 194.

¹³ The name given for every level on the scale of tears is listed in the *Orcherd*, 193, lines 15-32.

4. The tears “of hem þat ben come to perfeccioun in charite of her neizboris, louynge [God] wiþout ony maner biholdynge of hemsilf”—The first level of the perfect tears of life.
5. “Teeris of swetnesse”—The second level of the perfect tears of life.
6. “[B]rennynge teeris wiþoute wepinge of þe ize”¹⁴—Tears shed within the soul and accompanied by no physical, external weeping.

A close if not exhaustive look at this taxonomy, as well as at the other complementary and related portions of Catherine’s thought on tears within the *Orcherd*, must now precede any attempt to explicate Margery Kempe’s weeping using this schema. As mentioned above, Catherine’s work employs a variety of metaphorical images (in addition to the tears themselves) to outline the upward progress of the penitent soul toward God. While an evaluation of these component images may at first seem to indicate that Catherine’s scale is complicated, the system is, in fact, a matter of a simple ascent illustrated by means of a series of interconnected symbols. Because any thorough discussion of this scale has the potential to become rather confusing given the variety of parallel concepts and metaphors involved, a table is provided here as an aid to following the flow and structure of Catherine’s schema. The table summarizes the individual levels of the soul’s progression and allows a quick comparison of each element within the system, thereby demonstrating the interlocking nature of the scale’s separate parts. Such a table will make later reference to the individual levels much easier.

¹⁴ Noffke, in her translation of *Il Dialogo*, renders this as “the tears of fire” and in the interest of simplicity I shall follow her translation and will henceforth refer to this, the sixth level, as either the “tears of fire” or the “brennynge teeris.”

	Level of Tears	Stage of the Soul	Step on the Bridge	Power of the Soul	Component of the Crucifixion	Soul's Behavior
6	Tears of Fire	Outside the scale of Perfection	Connected to the previous step through perseverance.	Connected to the previous step through desire.	Connected to the previous step through strength.	The soul exhibits extreme patience in suffering and in praying for the salvation of others.
5	Tears of Sweetness (Perfect)	Perfect Fourth Stage of the Soul, joined to the third.				
4	Tears of those who have lost all self interest (Perfect)	Perfect Third Stage of the Soul	Third Step on the Bridge	Will	Christ's Mouth	Will is now dead. Soul desires to suffer for God and neighbor.
3	Tears of those who begin to serve God (Imperfect)	More perfect Second Stage of the Soul	Second Step on the Bridge	Understanding	Christ's Side / His Heart	Desire for consolations. Soul must suffer to proceed.
2	Tears of Fear (Imperfect)	Imperfect First Stage of the Soul	First Step on the Bridge	Memory	Christ's Nailed Feet	Individual will is not yet abandoned. Soul desires forgiveness for her own sins.
1	Tears of Damnation	Outside the scale of Perfection	The River beneath the Bridge	No thought given to spiritual matters	No contact with Christ	Concern for worldly profits.

Table 1: The Levels of the Soul's Progression According to *The Orchard of Syon*.

Catherine's system of ascending spiritual development is based primarily on the image of the celestial bridge to God. The tears serve as a measure of one's progress along the bridge, and the source of all tears, according to God, is the heart: "for þere is no membre in a mannys body þat wil so myche schewe and satisfye þe entent of þe herte as

wole þe iʒe” (*Orcherd*, 194, lines 8-10). The value of tears (something that Catherine calls their “level of perfection”) is based on whether or not the love of the heart precipitating them is well ordered. One essential question is then: “is love for God and neighbors placed above all else?”¹⁵ As God explains in the *Orcherd*, since all tears come from the same vessel, the heart, “þerfore alle teeris mown wel be clepid hertly teeris. Napelees al þe difference stondiþ bitwene ordynat and vnordynat loue, and bitwene parfizt and vnparfizt loue” (200, lines 28-31).

There are two primary divisions of tears according to the *Orcherd* that concern the matter of perfection. The first of these are the tears of sinners who have not yet come to a complete understanding of themselves, their actions, or their Lord. Beyond this is the level of perfection in which tears are shed in love for neighbors and God, totally bereft of self interest. Each of these primary categories—imperfect and perfect—is divided into two sub-levels and below all are the “teeris of dampnacioun”(193, line 16). The four sub-levels belong to an order that the *Orcherd* calls “þo teeris þat bigynnen to zeue liif” (194, line 18) (numbers two through five in the table above) while the cries of the damned are aptly dubbed the “teeris of deeth” (194, line 12) (number one, outside the scale of perfection). Any tears shed for God, be they perfect or otherwise according to the overall schema of weeping, still fall within Catherine’s category of the tears of life since they bring the penitent closer to the supernal. Above and beyond all of these are the “brennynge teeris” or “tears of fire” shed by the Holy Spirit within the soul, devoid of

¹⁵ This “ordering of love” elucidates the importance of interiority throughout the *Orcherd*—for the inner, invisible working of the soul is of more value than any immediate and exterior result. This also ties into the concept of the “eye of the intellect” as it plays out in Margery’s narrative, in that the interiority of spiritual experience and of spiritual intent are crucial matters that Margery’s critics fail to consider: they cannot or willfully do not look beyond the external drama of her weeping performance to attempt an understanding of its true cause and meaning. For further discussion of the penitent’s heart as a vessel of grace and love and the place of this analogy within a study of the scale of tears and Margery’s book, see 81-4 following.

any external weeping. God bestows this last form of sacred crying upon those who wish to weep outwardly for His goodness but for some reason cannot do so.¹⁶ More specifically, this level is reserved for those whom God wishes to direct toward greater works of neighborly care, ministry, and devotion, that is, works that would be hampered by boisterous and incessant weeping.¹⁷

Although the scale of tears is given an entire section in Catherine's text, it is not independent of her overall theological framework. Indeed, each element within her work is intimately connected to all others. A thorough reading reveals that every important concept, strengthened and expanded upon by later developments in the course of the work, continually resurfaces and reasserts its relevance to and intimacy with each new addition to the whole of Catherine's system of thought. The imagery of tears is most closely connected to Catherine's notion of the three-tiered bridge to heaven—a metaphor for the crucified Christ Himself and a symbol of His sacrifice for the sins of humankind—and with the three powers of the soul: memory, understanding, and will.¹⁸ The bridge is described as having three stairs equivalent to the three stages of the soul (not to be confused with the three powers of the soul), and of which “tweyne weren maad in þe tre of þe holy cros,” the third being fashioned, also during the Crucifixion, when

¹⁶ One might be prevented from weeping outwardly by her responsibility for the welfare of others incapable of helping themselves, by seeing to the needs of fellow Christians in general, or by performing some other good work in God's name—including the writing or dictating of an exemplary religious text for the benefit and instruction of one's neighbors. God sends the “tears of fire” to a soul when He deems that the time has come for her to take up some other selfless and spiritually beneficial activity (an activity that would be hindered by constant, uncontrollable weeping). See the *Orcherd*, 200-3.

¹⁷ Although one might not experience a complete respite from external, physical tears at this level, for the most part the soul's weeping will subside in order to facilitate other holy activities. In Margery's case, this other holy activity is the composition of her book.

¹⁸ The translator of the *Orcherd* renders these, the three “myztis” of the soul, as the “mynde,” the “intellecte” (or “vndirstonding”), and the “wille.” See the *Orcherd*, 70, 79, 120, 125, and 130. Noffke notes that Catherine may have drawn on Gregory the Great for the imagery of the bridge, *The Dialogue*, 64n1. Noffke also observes that the image of the bridge found in *Il Dialogo* “very interestingly occurs nowhere else in her writings except in the long letter to Raimondo da Capua which became the initial framework for her book” (117). See Noffke, “Mystical Writings,” and 15 above.

Jesus “felte into ful greet payne of bittirnes whanne bei zauen hym bope galle and aysel to drinke” (68, lines 21-3).¹⁹ The three stages of the soul—imperfect, more perfect, and most perfect²⁰—that correspond to the three stairs of the bridge describe the manner in which an individual progresses on the path, or the bridge, to God. The powers of the soul—memory, understanding, and will—are employed by the individual to move across the bridge toward salvation, instigating motion over the bridge as follows: by the remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice for humankind, the soul begins to know herself (that is, without God the individual cannot be free from sin) and to weep for her own sin. By next contemplating the Crucifixion, she comes to understand that the individual is incapable of accomplishing any good thing without the aid of God; her journey will require that she do more than simply bewail her own trespasses. And finally by yearning for God’s will to replace that of the human soul, she submits herself entirely to the divine will in order to bring charity to her fellow human beings, weeping only out of a concern for their spiritual welfare.²¹ Throughout this process, the levels of tears serve as a sort of gauge by which the soul’s progress can be determined (should her neighbors, witnessing her progress, be

¹⁹ The translator of the *Orcherd* employs the term “laddris” where Noffke’s edition uses “stairs” to render the medieval Italian “scaloni.” For the sake of clarity, the levels of the bridge will be referred to in this study as stairs in accordance with Noffke’s translation of *Il Dialogo*. The *Middle English Dictionary* defines “laddris,” quoting the *Orcherd* for reference, as “the ladder as a symbol of the communication between heaven and earth, God (or Christ) and man, and earth and hell; also, a step or stage in the soul’s ascent to everlasting life.” On a figurative level, the dictionary defines the term as a “means or process by which one attains a certain state or condition.” See the *Middle English Compendium* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=93776995&egdisplay=compact&egs=93793840> (accessed May 29, 2006). For the original Italian version of the passage under consideration see Cavallini, 57.

²⁰ This terminology is again, based on Noffke’s translation (see *The Dialogue*, 111). The three stages of the soul in the *Orcherd* are “vnparfiȝt,” “parfiȝt,” and “moost parfiȝt” (see *Orcherd*, 130). I adopt Noffke’s translation in this study to avoid confusion as it is awkward in a modern English idiom to insinuate that something can be superior (i.e., “moost parfiȝt”) to that which is already perfect. One might compare this sort of scale and the language used to describe it with Langland’s lives of Do-Well, Do-Better, and Do-Best. See Langland, *Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation*, trans. E. Talbot Donaldson, ed. Elizabeth D. Kirk and Judith H. Anderson (New York: Norton, 1990).

²¹ Augustine also maintains that the soul’s ascent to God begins externally but eventually moves inward as the penitent explores his or her own self understanding through the use of the memory. This sentiment is most explicit in the tenth book of the *Confessions*. See, for example, 194-5 and 217-8.

capable of discerning the true nature of her tears). There is then one more element to this bridge, so the reader is told, for the structure is fortified by walls of virtuous stone. This metaphoric stone was formed from the deeds of righteous men and women and erected into a defensive structure at the time of the Crucifixion, intended to ward off the “greet reyn of þe riȝtwiisnes of þe godheed” that torments those who do not walk piously on the bridge but who go beneath it, traveling through life in a tumultuous river of sin (71, lines 13-4).

Although it may seem complex, Catherine’s system is a matter of a simple, linear progression highlighted in an assortment of different ways. Each image in this progression is linked to and draws upon all of the others. For example, the image of a soul crossing over the bridge, step by step, and that of a soul metaphorically climbing up the cross on which Jesus hangs crucified are used synonymously and interchangeably. The *stages* of the soul (imperfect, more perfect, and most perfect) correspond to and are achieved through the exercise of the individual *powers* of the soul (memory, understanding, and will). Both the stages and the powers of the soul are repeatedly linked to, if they are not indeed made synonymous with, the individual steps on the bridge and the three portions of Christ’s crucified body—His feet, His wounded flank, and His mouth.²² Each element of this system illustrates the progress of the soul toward God accomplished only through the development and finally the exercise of what Catherine calls the three glorious virtues, that is, lifelong patience, strength, and perseverance in faith.²³

²² See the *Orchard*, 68-9, lines 19-32 and 1-14. For a brief summary of the penitent’s progress through the various stages of the soul, see 174, lines 4-12. Note that the translator uses the form “grees” at this point.

²³ For mention of the three glorious virtues, see the *Orchard*, 169, lines 12-21.

In the end, all of these elements constitute an internal process, the continual unfolding of which is signaled through the unchanging exterior activity of weeping that, while perhaps homogenous in appearance, is itself arranged in a specific symbolic hierarchy discernable only through a careful examination conducted with the “eye of the intellect,” that is again, with the patient eye of faith. The various typologies of weeping presented in the *Orcherd* are differentiated almost exclusively on the basis of the evolving spirituality of the penitent soul. There are, then, very few visible or external criteria by which one witnessing such an ascent might distinguish one level from another.²⁴ Yet Catherine’s system of tears is deliberate and precise, and constitutes a blueprint for a gradual ascent toward holiness and an ultimate union with God. Her system is a hierarchy of stages through which a soul must pass before coming to perfection in unity with the divine.

A description of each component in this process, of each level of weeping, might proceed from lowest to highest, then, as follows:

1. The “Teeris of dampnacioun” (weeping souls under the bridge).

This level of weeping is symbolized by those impious souls who spend their lives in the chaotic river of sin that thunders beneath the *pons celestis*. They disregard spiritual matters and instead “weep” only for worldly affairs and the gathering and maintenance of fleeting material possessions. Although their tears originate in their hearts—as do *all*

²⁴ The shift from spiritual imperfection to perfection that occurs upon reaching level four is probably the most salient point on the scale insofar as the appearance of visible or external markers is concerned. Those who witness the crying fits of a soul (like Margery Kempe) climbing this scale might note the manifestation of an outward shift in focus at this, the turning point of perfection. That is, while ascending the initial levels of tears the soul expends a good deal of energy seeking pardon primarily for her own sins, and she devotes relatively little attention to the well-being of others. The achievement of perfection at the fourth level, however, ushers in a new desire actively to seek the salvation of fellow Christians through good works. The discussion of Margery’s ascent to level four begins on 119 following.

tears according to the *Orcherd*—the love that induces their weeping is based solely on secular concerns, thereby rendering the tears ineffective for the attainment of eternal rewards. God summarizes the matter in this way:

If þe herte haue sorowe, þe iʒe schewiþ it. And if it be a sencible sorowe, þe iʒen wepen hertly teeris. The whiche teeris in a wickid man ben deedly teris, and teeris of deeth bycause of his vnordynat loue and affeccoun þat he hap, wherfore his wepyng is noþing plesynge to me. Napeles þe greetnesse of þe trespass and weping is lesse or moore aftir þe mesure and quantite of his vnordynat loue. Al sich vnordynat louers and wickide lyuers, þouʒ þei wepe, her teeris ben teeris of deeth. (194, lines 10-7)²⁵

Those who weep in this manner suffer pain and sorrow when deprived of those worldly things in which they have placed their love and affection. Anyone who remains at this level of weeping possesses “a corrupte herte” and, therefore, any tears here shed “moste needis be corrupt and wrecchid” (198, line 24). The outlook of a soul who weeps such tears is essentially selfish and no thought of hers is ever given to the well-being of neighbors.²⁶ This level and those who inhabit it are, then, outside the scale of perfection altogether.

2. The “Teeris of dreede” (the tears of the souls rising up from sin).

The first step on the bridge, equated with Christ’s feet nailed to the cross, is synonymous with the first level of imperfect crying; that is, the tears of those self-centered individuals

²⁵ Not only are the tears of these irreverent souls incapable of bringing them to salvation, but any good deeds that they might perform are rendered equally useless for realizing spiritual benefits (i.e., eternal life). If anything, good deeds performed by an impious individual might incline God to bestow temporal rewards upon the soul while still on earth. The greatest of these temporal rewards is an extension of one’s life, so that more opportunities might be available for the abandonment of irreligious living and for the pursuit of God’s mercy. See 204-5, lines 24-36 and 1-5.

²⁶ God maintains that the “þouʒtis of þe herte of sich a soule ben stynge flouris, þat likiþ me neuere a deel. & also þe þouʒtis of sich a soule is noþing ellis but hate and displesaunce of his neizbore, hauynge þe condicioun of a þeeþ þat robbiþ worschip and honour fro me þat am his maker, and ʒeeldiþ and kepeth it to hymself.” See 205, lines 7-12.

who weep for fear of the eventual punishment they will receive for their sins: "The first laddir is at þe feet, bitokenynge affeccyoun and desier of þe soule; for as þe feet beren vp þe body, so þe desier and affeccoun beren vp þe soule. The feet naylid ben maad laddris to þee" (68, lines 25-8).²⁷ This is the stage of the soul in which the penitent strips herself of sin through a "seruile dreede" of personal pain and suffering that God will inflict in retribution for their spiritual wrongdoing. For "in þe first laddir of affeccoun and of desier whanne sche reiseþ up þe feet fro þe erþe, þanne sche voidiþ hir fro þe derknessis of vicis" (69, lines 8-10). The first power of the soul, the memory, is responsible for bringing the soul to this first imperfect stage/stair wherein the memory recollects God's blessings and goodness to the soul. As God phrases it,

by þe mynde of my beenfetis, a man haþ mynde also of my goodnes in hymself;
and þe intellecte or vndirstondynge biholdeþ oonly and verily in myn
vnspe[k]able and meruelous loue, þe which loue I schewide 3ou by mene and
mediacioun of myn oonly soopfast sone, Ihesu, whom I putte and sette af[ore] þe
ize of 3oure vndirstondyng, þat 3oure vndirstondyng mow se in hym þe greet myȝt
of my moost brennyng charite; and þanne schal þe wille be gaderid to h[e]m,
louynge me and desiryng me, her eende. (125-6, lines 32-7 and 1-3)

The memory recalls Christ's blood, His gift of mercy in which the soul was baptized, allowing for the exercise of its higher powers (the understanding and the will) during the later levels of spiritual growth. However, the penitent has not yet learned, here at the second level of weeping, to suppress her own will and the individual desire to be saved. Rather, she holds her own happiness in the hereafter in higher regard than the salvation of

²⁷ Again, the stairs on the bridge are referred to by the translator of the *Orcherd* as "laddris." See 49n19 above.

her neighbors.²⁸ The later levels of the scale (attained through the higher powers of the soul) are founded on and supported by this initial remembrance of God's benevolence.

3. The "Teeris of hem þat aftir tyme þei ben risen fro synne . . . bigynne to serue [God]."

Upon achieving the next echelon of imperfect weeping, the second power of the soul—the understanding—comes into play. Having initially remembered the gift of Christ's sacrifice through the exercise of the memory, the soul now conceives an intense and overflowing love for God through deep contemplation of His limitless love for all humankind. Utilizing the knowledge of Christ's eternal and boundless love as something of a mirror, the "intellecte" initiates an abandonment of disorderly, worldly, and imperfect love, and reorganizes the soul's desire to focus on the benefit of living among other human beings. That benefit is, of course, the ability to reciprocate to some degree God's ineffable love, something possible only through one's neighbors:

For liik as I haue loued 3ou and loue 3ou wipout any maner biholdynge of meritis, and þerto myn owne increate loue wipout any mene stiride me to make 3ou of nouzt to myn ymage and symylitude, þe which loue 3e mown not 3eelde to me wipout mene: therfore 3e mosten 3elde þat same loue to resonable creaturis, louynge hem withouten any reward of louynge a3ein, & also wipoute any biholdynge of [3oure] owne profizt goostly or bodily, but oonli for to loue hem for þe glorie and preisyng of my name, bycause þei ben loued of me. (197, lines 4-12)

At this point, however, the soul has not yet completely abandoned her own spiritual desire and replaced it with God's will. This third level is marked by the soul's longing for spiritual comforts or consolations, taken not only from God but from those whom the

²⁸ The suppression of the soul's will occurs when she reaches the fourth level of weeping and the third stair of the bridge, Christ's mouth. See the *Orcherd*, 166-8.

anima adores with a spiritual love, that is, her neighbors. The notion is that God placed other human beings on earth so that the soul could love them selflessly, that is, out of love of God alone (indeed to reciprocate His love for the individual soul itself), and not for any selfish reason (that is, not out of a desire for the spiritual consolations that others might give).²⁹ At this third level the soul is still learning the appropriate manner of interaction with her neighbors that God intends her to follow. Specifically, through suffering a loss of spiritual consolation, God will instruct her to abandon selfish concern. As she now begins to hope in God's mercy, "[t]hanne bigynneth þe ize to wepe, þat myche wepinge gooþ out of þe welle of þe herte," and God then further explains that

bycause it is not 3it come to perfeccioun, oftentymes sche [i.e., the soul] casteth out sencible teeris, þe whiche ben callid teeris of goostly loue. As þus: whanne þe soule desireth goostly cumfortis by mene or mediacioun of ony creature whom [sc]he loueþ goostly, whanne sche is priuyd of þat sche loueþ, or of ynward comfortis or outward, and þanne if temptaciouns folowe, or persecuciouns of men, the herte anon haþ a sorowe, and þanne þe ize þe which feeliþ þat sorowe and payne of þe herte bigynneþ to wepe by tendirnesse. And þat is bycause her owne wille is not 3it fullych forsake. Sicke teeris ben callid sencible teeris of goostly loue, or of goostly compassioun. (194-5, lines 33-4 and 1-10)

Here the soul has reached the second step on the bridge. She has climbed up from Christ's nailed feet to the wound in His side, "which wounde schewiþ þe pryuetees of þe herte," that is, the eternal love contained within and symbolized by Christ's own heart (68, lines 28-9). In God's words, "þe soule bigynneþ to taaste þe loue of þe herte, fastnyng þe ize of intellect in þe herte of my dere sone, where þe soule schal fynde þe eendid parfizt loue" (lines 30-2). This echelon of imperfect weeping is one and the same

²⁹ Augustine maintains that the human soul should continually and selflessly seek the benefit of her neighbors in order to please God. See *Confessions*, 213-6.

with the “more perfect” second stage of the soul.³⁰ While still struggling with its own will and the desire for spiritual comfort, the soul has experienced divine love and is beginning to understand how and through whom that love must be reciprocated. Sorrow for her sins alone will not be sufficient for the soul to achieve divine union. When the soul finally understands and internalizes this need for active and outward expression of Christian compassion, she will come to the first level of perfect weeping: that of perfect charity and selfless love for her neighbors in which she abandons her will for God’s.

4. The tears “of hem þat ben come to perfeccioun in charite of her neizboris, louynge [God] wiþout ony maner biholdynge of hemsilf.”

At the fourth level of weeping the penitent soul, simultaneously climbing up the cross and over the bridge, reaches Christ’s mouth and the third stair. The fourth level of weeping is the first level of perfection in relation to both the stages of the soul and the hierarchy of tears. Here the soul achieves calm and security from the fear of persecution, desiring only to preach God’s word for the benefit of her fellow human beings, completely free of self interest. This is the point at which internal spiritual growth begins to be manifest in a constructive exterior activity. The passage from the *Orcherd* that illustrates this is worth quoting at length.

[S]che cometh to þe þridde gree, þat is, to þe moup, where is wel schewid þat sche is come to þe staat of perfeccioun, comynge þidir by þe myddis of þe herte, þat is, in hauynge mynde of þe blood in þe whiche sche is baptizid, leuynge vnparfyzt loue by þe knowleche þat sche drewe out of þe hertly loue, seyng and taastyng and feelyng by experience þe brennyng fere of my charite.

Alle siche ben come to þe moup, and þefore þei excercise & schewe opinly þe office of þe moup. For ryzt as þe moup spekeþ wiþ þe tonge þat is in þe

³⁰ Although it is referred to as “more perfect,” this state is ultimately still not completely perfect and therefore remains imperfect, reconciling and equating it with the second level of imperfect tears. See 49n20 above.

mouþ, and þe taast taastþ, þe mouþ resceyueþ and zeeldeþ þat is resceyued to þe stomak, þe teep chewen and breken þat is resceyued, for it may not ellis be swelewid: riȝt so a soule spekeþ wiþ þe tonge of holy contynuel preyer. Sich a tonge zeldeth to me boþe actualy and mentaly : [mentaly,] for heelpþ of soulis, riȝt swete, goostly desirys and myrre; actualy it spekeþ in schewynge, admoneschinge, counceilynge, and knowlechingþ þe doctryne of my verry truþe wiþoute ony fere of peyne, what peyne þat euere þe world zeueþ, but booldly and hardily afore euery creature sche knowlecheþ þe truþe afore alle creaturis, and to euery creature aftir his estaat, in dyuerse wises. (166-7, lines 30-1 and 1-18)

The fourth level of weeping is the point along the scale at which the will—the third and last power of the soul—is completely caught up in the service of God. Sensual or worldly desire has died and no further thoughts are given by the soul to her own well-being, but only to the glory of God and the salvation of others. Further, the yearning for spiritual consolations has fallen away. The soul now fervently desires to see her neighbors saved; she no longer looks upon them primarily as a source of spiritual consolation, therefore, the individual human will of the soul has been replaced with the eternal and divine will of God. The soul admonishes others to be mindful of Christ's sacrifice and to lead their lives according to His teachings. She does this for the benefit of her neighbors and without fear of pain or persecution because her own will has been laid aside. It has in fact died, and as God puts it, "to a wille mortified it is no peyne, for wilfully and frely in my name and for my name sche suffreþ peyne" (168, lines 27-8). This, the fourth level of weeping and the third step on the bridge, is joined inextricably with the next stage through the exercise of the three glorious virtues: patience, strength, and perseverance. Since she has achieved perfection, the only thing remaining for the soul to do at this point is to endure in spiritual perfection until the end of her life. This persistence is the core element of the next level of weeping, the next stage of ascent, on Catherine's scale.

5. The “Teeris of swetnesse.”

This is the point at which the soul achieves union with God after her initial conversion by means of continually loving and preaching to her neighbors, a level reached only by perseverance in the face of all obstacles. No matter what worldly hardships or scorn are heaped upon the penitent soul for expounding God’s message, she must endure if she is to reach this level (and of course, her faith in God will sustain her in the face of all opposition). Through the three glorious virtues of patience, strength, and perseverance the soul will attain this level and demonstrate to others that she has done so. As the human will has now been replaced by that of God, the soul embraces these virtues in order to maintain her high level of spiritual achievement; she does not allow her discipline to slacken or her faith to waver in the face of earthly gain or persecution:

But alle þese [i.e., worldly distractions] þei schulen listly ouerepasse by goostly strengþe and verry perseueraunce, bycause her affeccoun is verrily come out of þe affeccoun of charite, taastyng þe mete of þe heelp of soulis with verry parfyt pacience. The which pacience is a tokene þat a soule loueth moost parfytly and withoute loking aftir ony reward. For if sche louede me and her neizbore for ony profyt or reward, sche were vnpacient, and schulde waxe slow and dulle in her iourney. But for þat þei loue me for me, bycause I am moost souereyn good and worþi to be loued, and also þei loue hemself for me and her neizbore for me, þat þei schulden zeelde louyng & preisyng to my name, þerfore þei ben pacyent and stronge and also perseueraunt for to suffre. (168-9, lines 32-5 and 1-9)

In cultivating this extreme and selfless patience that allows the soul to persevere in her spiritual journey, she has finally and permanently subordinated her will to God’s. Her will and desire are no longer those of selfish human individuality. She loves all humanity—the greatest part of all of God’s creation—without self interest so that she might thereby reciprocate the Lord’s unutterable, perfect, and total love for her. What is

more, by directing all energies outward for the benefit of others, the third stage of the soul, as God explains, is joined

with þe fourþe staat [i.e., stage], þat is, inasmyche as a soule is rise fro þe þridde staat, the which is parfȳt [i.e., more perfect], in þe which þridde staat sche hæp taastid and putt forþ vertu for to encreesse in her neiȝboris, by þe which vertu sche receyueþ anopir, þat is, þe last staat of parfȳt vnicioun and oonheed in me. Þe whiche two staatis ben knyht togyderis, for þat oon may not be withoute þat opire. For riȝt as my charite may not be wiþoute charite of neiȝboreheed, ne charite of neiȝboreheed may not be wiþoute my charite, þat oon may not be departid fro þat opir, in þe same wise it fareth of þese two statis. Þat oon may not be withoute þat opir. (162-3, lines 35-7 and 1-7)

The notion is that since one must first cast aside selfish, disordered love before beginning to love others without any self interest and therefore prior to coming to love God, this level—the fifth level of tears and the fourth stage of the soul—is linked to and indeed cannot exist without the previous stage, that is, the level at which the soul loses all self interest (that is, the fourth level of tears).

While in fact none of the individual stages in this progression are truly independent of one another, each level leading to this particular point has been distinguished by a substantial shift in the focus and outlook of the penitent soul. In achieving the second level of tears she desires forgiveness for her own sins, at the third level the soul begins to lose spiritual consolation in order to make her realize that she must begin to look beyond her own sufferings and see to the needs of others if she is to continue her journey. At the fourth level of weeping, the soul completely gives herself over to the pursuit of Christian charity for the sake of her fellows. The fifth and sixth levels are defined by the patient maintenance of the high degree of devotion attained at the fourth level over the remainder of the soul's earthly existence. Nothing is new here *per se*, but the intensity and focus of the soul must from here on continually increase or at

least be sustained if she is to proceed. Only this sustained effort can bring her to the final and highest levels of spiritual growth.

6. The “brennynge teeris wipoute wepinge of þe ize.”

This, the pinnacle to which all the various imagery has led, is characterized by an incendiary and yet completely internal desire to continue God’s work. The soul still desires the gift of physical holy tears but these are withdrawn in order to prove her faith in God. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit weeps for the soul’s benefit, as God explains:

Alle siche þefore . . . han teeris of feere, in þe whiche teris of fier þe holy goost waylyth & wepiþ for hem and for her neiȝboris afore me. Þat is, my dyuyne charite brenneþ feruently a soule with þe flawme of þe holy goost, þe whiche offreþ up afore me longynge desiris withoute teris of ize. (201, lines 5-10)

The respite from physical weeping eventually allows the soul to continue the work of God in some other form and yet in a manner no less perfect than before. For as the *Orcherd* makes clear “it seemeth þat teeris of feere be as fruytful as teeris of watir, and ȝit oftentymes moore, aftir þe quantite and mesure of loue” (lines 17-8). The soul has transcended the bridge and the imagery of the Crucifixion by persevering in love for God and for her neighbors and has therefore arrived at total perfection. She has completely surrendered her worldly self determination in favor of a focus on all things spiritual and immaterial with the intention of serving God by seeking the salvation of her neighbors. She loves God through her fellow Christians, which brings her closer to her own salvation. Acting as a clear example of patient perseverance for her neighbors through virtuous and selfless living, she demonstrates for them a possible way in which they might achieve salvation as well.

From the outset, a soul is denied access to God unless the desires of her heart are set in the proper order, that is, the soul must place the spiritual well-being of others before her own and therefore reciprocate God's love for her as well as she is able through her fellow human beings. In this matter then, honesty and selfless intent are spiritually more valuable than any external action. The three powers of the soul—memory, understanding, and will—are the keys and the means to realigning one's life to conform to the path of the bridge (that is, the teachings of Christ that lead to heaven). But before a soul can employ these powers even to find the bridge, she must abandon all secular concerns and conceive a true and deep desire to live for God in harmony with her neighbors; that is, she must put her love in the proper order. Since humankind is not capable of loving God as truly as He loves them—in having created humanity without any self interest or need on His own part—the only means by which human souls might reciprocate God's ineffable adoration is through selfless love and service to their neighbors. Only when a Christian person is in the company of another can the three powers of the soul even begin to operate, starting with the first (the memory) which, through the remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, allows the soul to start her ascent toward union with God. The penitent is able to come to the understanding that she must suffer for her neighbors in order to reach God only if she is able to experience their company (or, as is more often the case in Margery's narrative, their scorn). This understanding is the second power of the soul. Once she has realized that selflessly loving her fellow human beings is the only true path to God, the penitent will then focus exclusively on working for their salvation without regard for her own suffering. The third power of the soul (the will) is therefore finally activated.

God discusses the necessity of fellowship for the soul who wishes to climb the stairs of the bridge, and He signals the extent to which one is exiled from Him when, while attempting to climb the stairs, she is unwilling to engage other people for their spiritual benefit:

Oon is fully excludid fro me, for in þe myddis of hym may I not be, and bycause he haþ no felaw I may not stonde in þe myddis. He lackep a felawe and is aloone þat abydeþ and tarieth in his owne propre loue. Sich oon is departid from my grace, and fro þe charyte of his neizbore. And so depnyed fro me bycause of hise synnes, he is turnyd verrily to noȝt. Therefore sich oon þat is so aloone and oon by his owne propre loue is vnnoumbrid and vntoold of my sone, soopfastnes. (125, lines 14-21)

So the message of the *Orcherd of Syon*, at least insofar as the matter of tears is concerned, is one of salvation and union with God through selfless, unending service and love for Creator and neighbor alike. The path toward spiritual union can only be found when the soul willfully abandons her interest in ephemeral worldly gain and actively seeks forgiveness for her own sins, the eradication of her own selfish desire, and when she finally cultivates a longing to suffer for her sins and for those of her neighbors according to the will of God. Such a journey would indeed prove both difficult and long for any who attempt it, whether in today's world or in early fifteenth-century England, not long after Catherine's treatise was first recorded. No doubt such a journey would also prove difficult to imagine, difficult to explain, and difficult to elucidate for someone unfamiliar with Catherine's system of thought. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, however, as a record of one woman's pursuit of a holy life outside the walls of an official religious enclosure in late medieval England, provides an unparalleled documentation of Catherine's model of spiritual progression toward God through the hierarchy of tears in action. To this magnificent and contemporary example this study now turns.

CHAPTER III

WORLDLY AMBITIONS: MARGERY'S SWIM THROUGH THE RIVER OF SIN

Having considered the organization of Catherine's spiritual system, it is now possible to bring the matter as a whole to bear on Margery's text and indeed on her own spiritual progression. When we initially encounter Margery in her book, she has just given birth to her first child, which has proven a particularly trying experience. Overwhelmed by fear of death caused by a difficult labor and a long prior sickness, she summons a priest so that she may be shriven.¹ Soon after he arrives, however, the holy man begins to rebuke her severely for some great sin, which she has only now confessed for the first time.² Feeling utterly confused between the prospect of eternal damnation (if she were not to complete her confession) and the immediate chastising of this priest, the young woman begins a long period of suffering and vexation at the hands of Devils that ends months later with a vision of Christ. During her torment, the Devils command her to renounce her faith, her family, and her friends—something she does in short order. Finally, driven to the point of suicide by the intensity of her demonic oppression (or what might even be described as demonic *possession*), Margery is prevented from taking her own life only by being tied down on the bed. Even after her miraculous vision, when her restraints are removed and she is able to move about freely, Margery does not

¹ As she ascends Catherine's scale and relinquishes her self-interest, Margery's fear of death will be replaced by the fear only of dying in pain. See for instance, chap. 14, 29-30, lines 32 and 1-6. Note that Margery's desire to die painlessly is ascribed not only to her "dred for þe poynt of deth" but also directly to her "dred of incacyens." By chap. 14, Margery has reached the third level of weeping: the level at which the soul—according to the *Orcherd*—must suffer in order to learn patience.

² This unnamed transgression, the reader discovers, has been hidden over the course of her life through the wiles of the Devil, who has insinuated to Margery that she need not express it to anyone and that she is capable of performing penance for it on her own. Her desire, at what she perceives to be the end of her life, to have a priest come and hear her confession of this sin supports the notion of Margery's orthodoxy and stands against claims (charged by various detractors whom she encounters throughout the book) that she held Lollard sympathies, as she obviously feels it necessary to be shriven through auricular confession. See Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (2001), 7n7.

immediately appreciate the full import of her heavenly visit. As Margery's own text relates it,

whan þis creatur was þus gracyowsly comen a-geyn to hir mende, sche thowt sche was bowndyn to God & þat sche wold ben his *seruawnt*. Neuyr-þe-lesse, sche wolde not leeuyn hir *pride* ne hir *pompows* aray þat sche had vsyd be-for-tym, neipyr for hyr husbond ne for noon oþer mannys counsel. (chap. 2, 9, lines 7-12)

Here, the text refers to Margery's pride and "pompows aray" following the parturition as being of the same sort that she had displayed "be-for-tym," a significant detail in that it grants a glimpse into her daily demeanor prior to the beginning of the narrative. Both before and after her first pregnancy, Margery's behavior and supercilious manner situate her at the first level of tears according to Catherine's scale—those tears shed by a soul concerned with nothing more than vain and worldly pursuits. The fact that she feels "bowndyn to God" and purposes to be his "*seruawnt*" is then ironic and magnifies her true concern for worldly profit, because at this point any desire expressed on her part to follow God's teachings does not seem very sincere when examined in light of her narrated behavior. Indeed, any faith or humility that Margery here expounds is likely to be insincere and nothing more than one of her designs to win honor and admiration from her fellows—crocodile tears, really. For "[s]che had ful greet envye of hir neybowrs þat þei schuld ben arayed so wel as sche. Alle hir desyr was for to be worshepd of þe pepul" (lines 25-6). A reader also learns here that Margery heeds not the advice of those people, including her own husband, who tell her to leave her pride. She, in fact, scorns him whenever he asks her to abandon her proud dress and egotistical manner, telling him that he was never the type of man to have married her since she herself was of a worthy family and her father was at one time the mayor of Lynn (lines 18-25). She sports

fashionable clothing and will not “be content wyth þe goodys þat God had sent hire, as hir husbond was, but euyr desyryd mor & mor” (lines 28-30). Since Christ has already appeared to Margery, asking her why she had forsaken him, her persistence in living solely for material gain and worldly adoration (and all the while purporting to lead a pious existence) intensifies her error and creates a tension that will be broken only when Margery completely recognizes God’s call and submits to it willingly.

The sinful nature of her deportment at this, the first of Catherine’s six levels of weeping, can be further elucidated by direct reference to her behavior during her episode of “possession” by Devils. With the obvious exception of the lack of violent or suicidal tendencies, Margery’s behavior following her visitation from Christ is not so very different from that which she exhibits while under demonic influence. At both times she disparages others, including her husband and neighbors, and it could easily be said that she knows no virtue or goodness even after she rises from her sickbed.³ Although Margery actively renounces her Christianity while bedridden, her stubborn unwillingness to heed God’s call after her recovery (and then to live according to it) is perhaps a worse infraction. Since she is no longer under the influence of evil spirits, there is little excuse that Margery can offer for not adhering to a more pious way of life. Indeed, by claiming to live piously and in fact living only for the social profit that such a claim might win her, Margery demonstrates her lack of thankfulness for (and perhaps even her lack of acknowledgment of) God’s intervention in her plight. The soul must exercise the memory—the first power of the soul—to recall and accept God’s eternal goodness and her own imperfection in order to rise up from the first level on the scale of tears.

³ The reader is told that, during her torment, Margery “slawndred hir husbond, hir frendys, and her owyn self,” that she “knew no vertu ne goodnesse,” and that “sche desyryd all wykkydnesse.” 7, lines 33-7.

Margery is at this point completely free from thoughts of God's grace and benevolence, especially insofar as she fails to recognize, and to be truly thankful for, His aid in rescuing her from demonic torment. She is passing through Catherine's "river of sin."

When Margery expresses envy and disgust at the notion that her neighbors might be as well dressed as she, and simply when she desires their praise and worship, she is not living in harmony with them in the manner that *The Orchard* prescribes. She, in fact, looks on her neighbors as little more than a source of personal social gain; her attitude toward them is hardly an improvement over her renouncement of all human company at the goading of her demonic tormenters.⁴ Even at the outset, Margery's spiritual growth toward union with God is a matter of incremental progress. She is slowly working toward a total realization of God's intent for her life: a blend of self knowledge and humility (recognizing that without God she cannot be free from sin) with pious, active ministry among her fellows. This blend of knowledge and activity will in turn allow her to begin her progression up Catherine's scale—but even this initial movement must take place in stages. She must abandon her worldly concerns and think on her own sinfulness before she can enter into the second level of the scale, that of the tears of fear, but Margery has not yet even realized that there is more to serving God than by simply announcing it.⁵ Immediately after the heavenly visitation that ends her hellish torment, Margery no longer desires her own death, but she certainly has not made much progress in terms of her feelings toward those around her, that is, in replacing pride with charity.

⁴ For the passage in which Margery forsakes her family, friends, and God himself, see 7, lines 28-35.

⁵ Margery's approach to faith and prayer at this, the beginning of her spiritual journey, is akin to what the *Orchard* describes as "vocale" or outward prayer. Barry Windeatt specifically identifies the study of the ways in which the *BMK* "defines, classifies, and categorizes" Margery's prayers as "one neglected but crucial key to the structure and unity of the *Book*." See the introduction to *A Companion to "The Book of Margery Kempe,"* 7. Indeed, as will be discussed later (chap. 4), the structure of Margery's text and of her spiritual growth can be better examined and understood when considered in light of the differentiation established in Catherine's text between "vocale" and "mentale" prayer.

Margery remains at Catherine's first level of weeping and so her awakening to a life in which she will follow God willfully is not yet complete, but will occur only when she experiences her first commercial failure.

Margery begins, "for pure coveytyse & for to maynten hir *pride*," a brewing enterprise that soon fails due to a repeated and inexplicable fouling of her ales (9, lines 30-31).⁶ After being abandoned by her servants, Margery gives up her vain disposition and relinquishes her efforts and brews no more, all the while thinking "how God had punched hir be-for-tyme" and how he now has punished her through the "lesyng of hir goodys" (10, lines 3-5). The earlier punishment that Margery here recalls must be her postnatal period of demonic torment. As God controls all aspects of the human condition throughout Margery's tale, it was undoubtedly, to Margery's mind, His will that she suffer through such an ordeal in order to begin her spiritual journey. His "punishment" for Margery is to show her the horrors of Hell, and His aim is to inspire her to the highest spiritual achievement through the stirring of her mind to remembrance of His beneficence in saving her from eternal suffering. Margery is here, by thinking about her "possession" and other punishments, exercising her memory in the remembrance of God's recent intervention in her life.

⁶ For a concise overview of the involvement of medieval English women in the art of brewing, see Judith M. Bennett, "The Village Ale-Wife: Women and Brewing in Fourteenth-Century England," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 20-36. Bennett observes that brewing was specifically the sphere of married women on 22-5. For a more comprehensive discussion of the matter, see her more recent work entitled *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Sheila Delaney observes in her article on sexual economics in both Margery's book and Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale" that although Margery is "free to own property, run a business, and enter a guild, . . . she is not free to dispose of her own person" (112). Margery accepts this inability to control her own destiny as the result of her exposure to "the most damaging aspects of bourgeois society"—i.e., the commodification of people and things (109). Delaney, therefore, suggests that "[r]eligion is Margery's way of asserting her ownership of herself—that is, of overcoming alienation while simultaneously providing the most poignant testimony to that alienation" (114). See Delaney, "Sexual Economics, Chaucer's Wife of Bath, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Minnesota Review* 5 (Fall 1975): 104-15.

According to Catherine's text, the memory is the first power of the soul needed to bring the penitent to the second level of weeping—the tears of fear—in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice and His overflowing mercy.⁷ Margery has not yet reached the second level of weeping, the tears of those who fear punishment for sin, but she is beginning to move in an upward direction. She apologizes to her husband for not following his advice, and she acknowledges that her sinfulness and pride are the causes of her failings in business (10, lines 6-10). Yet Margery does not leave "þe world al hol," but instead attempts to reestablish an income through the management of a corn mill (lines 10-13).⁸ And before long, of course, this latest effort also flounders and Margery is abandoned by all save her husband.⁹

Catherine's second echelon of imperfect tears is marked by the fear of punishment for sin. This is the point at which the penitent soul has made her first important contact with Christ: she has come, symbolically, to His nailed feet and to the first step on the

⁷ See table one, 46 above. The "remembrance" of Christ's sacrifice is, of course, not the recollection of an actual memory in the mind of the individual Christian, but a personal acknowledgment by the penitent of Christ's death and resurrection as it is known through the teachings of the Church. At the second level of weeping, the soul recognizes (or "remembers") the fact that Christ died for her sins and by then realizing the import of such an action she chooses to begin following God.

⁸ Noteworthy is the fact that Margery's career change in itself is symbolic of a move away from everyday secular society. While brewing was traditionally the domain of women, the position of miller was not (see 67n6 above). Carlo Ginzburg observes that, at least by the sixteenth century, millers were often at odds with the local peasantry and regarded with more than a little suspicion due to the fact that millers were generally dependent on local feudal lords. He also notes that mills were often "located on the peripheries of settled areas" and that "the particular social position of . . . millers tended to isolate them from the communities in which they lived." Ginzburg further points out that millers were frequently members of heretical sects. In the light of these considerations, Margery's move to the occupation of miller indicates a deliberate step away from not only established social and religious roles but gender roles as well. Her text recognizes and emphasizes the universality of God's desire; namely, that everyone, male and female, should pursue God's will to the fullest extent that he or she is able. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992). For the discussion of the social position of medieval millers and specifically for the quotations above, see 119-20.

⁹ Isabel Davis explores the notion that Margery's contemporaries expressed disapproval of her activities precisely because she transgressed not only religious standards but also gender norms in "Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy," in *A Companion to "The Book of Margery Kempe,"* 35-54. See esp. 48-9. I consider Davis's views on gender more thoroughly beginning on 95 following.

celestial bridge by remembering—through the exercise of the first power of the soul, the memory—not only His sacrifice for all humanity, but also her own imperfect and sinful nature that separates her from God. This remembrance is the crucial first step upon which the later levels of progress will rest. The memory must continually and without respite focus on and contemplate Christ’s perfect sacrifice for an imperfect human world in order to achieve higher levels on the scale of tears. Without acknowledging its own imperfection, the human soul cannot muster the necessary desire to strive for union with God via the heavenly bridge of the *Orcherd*. This knowledge (of the soul’s own imperfection before the perfection of God) continually provides the soul with an impetus and even a mode of engaging divinity. This impetus, contrition for one’s wrongdoings against God, will later develop into a sorrow for the sins of all humanity that further spurs the penitent onward toward perfection. At the end of chapter two, while “seyng alle þis aduersytes comyng on euery syde,” Margery finally accepts that her troubles in business, “þe skowrges of owyr Lord þat wold chastyse hir for hir synne,” cannot be avoided unless she submits completely to God’s will and call (11, lines 4-7). At this point she officially forsakes “hir pride, hir coueytyse, & desyr þat sche had of þe worshepys of þe world, & dede grett bodily penawnce, & gan to entyr þe wey of euyr-lestyng lyfe” (lines 7-10). That is, this is the point at which Margery truly establishes herself upon the first step of the heavenly bridge or level two of Catherine’s text.

According to the *Orcherd*, at the second level of the scale the soul turns to “sencible” or sensual weeping, sensual in the sense that tears are shed out of a selfish concern for the condition of the soul herself and not yet out of any direct hatred of sin.¹⁰

¹⁰ See the *Orcherd*, 194, lines 18-25. Within the *Orcherd* tears shed out of selfishness or out of imperfect love are referred to as “teeris of þe herte and sencible teeris” (194, line 20), while Noffke renders the Italian

Nevertheless, this is still a holier activity than weeping for purely earthly endeavors and undoubtedly brings the penitent closer to God. Margery herself, in the third chapter of her narrative, begins her life-long weeping one evening after a mystical experience of heavenly music.¹¹ The melody fills her with a desire for the merriment of heaven, something for which she now begins actively to yearn. While Margery does not at this point express any immediate fear of punishment, her newfound desire for eternal bliss might be read as anxiety for whatever else might await the impenitent soul, namely, punishment in Hell. Her worry is essentially selfish in nature, since it stems from a concern about the future condition of *her* soul and not *exclusively* from a reverence for God's goodness or from a sorrow for the trespasses she and her neighbors have committed against God. Thus, Margery's behavior and outlook place her at the second level on the scale of tears.

The text is at pains to make clear the fact that our protagonist has now abandoned all worldly concerns, for in conversation with others "sche wold not her no speke of wordly thyngys as þei dedyn & as sche dede be-forn-tyme" (11, lines 32-34). Then, when Margery tries unsuccessfully to persuade her husband to live chastely with her, she announces that "þe lofe of myn hert & myn affeccyon is drawyn fro alle erdly creaturys & sett only in God" (12, lines 4-6). This statement points toward the later levels of

"lagrime cordiali e sensitive" (Cavallini, 201) as "tears . . . heartfelt but sensual" (*The Dialogue*, 162). The *Middle English Dictionary*, quoting the *Orcherd*, defines "sencible" as [c]arnal, sensual, unspiritual" and "worldly, temporal, outward." The notion is that those who shed tears of this variety have not yet come to perfection and still place secular concerns over spiritual ones. See the *Middle English Compendium*, <http://ets.umd.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=173411504&gdisplay=compact> (accessed May 29, 2006).

¹¹ Note that according to the twenty-eighth chapter of Margery's book, her life-long weeping seems to begin only after her visit to Mount Calvary, which sparked "þe fyrst cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon" (68, lines 23-4). Such a statement obviously does not square with the remaining chronology of Margery's weeping in the text. The problem that chap. 28 raises in regards to Margery's spiritual progression will therefore be evaluated beginning on 119 following.

spiritual attainment, when the penitent will concentrate intensely on God and His works (most important among these created works are, of course, other Christians). However, by focusing all of her energy on God alone, she is shunning her fellow “creatures”—a tendency that must and will be overcome later, before she can ascend to the first level of perfect tears (level four). This selfish obsession with God further indicates that Margery is situated at the second level of sacred weeping. She is quickly starting to focus all of her attention on her Creator but has not yet begun to consider the sorrows and sins of those around her.

When her neighbors begin to criticize her for keeping “so streyt a levyng,” Margery is happy that she is “repreuyd, skornyd, or japyd for ower Lordys lofe, & mych mor mery þan sche was be-for-tyme in þe worshepyys of þe world” (12, line 30, and 13, lines 2-5). As yet, Margery is not so much concerned with the fact that these people scorn God’s work in her as she is with the notion that in reproving her, they are excluding her from worldly society and driving her into the arms of Christ. The *Orcherd* clearly explains that in failing to love one’s neighbor, one is prevented from loving God, and Margery’s neighbors obviously fail here to use the “eye of the intellect” to discern the truth behind her weeping: that her tears, imperfect as they are at the moment, are still inspired by an honest love for God. In criticizing Margery, the townspeople of Lynn, therefore, do themselves grievous spiritual harm in that they are denying the possibility of a holy source for Margery’s gift of tears and cutting themselves off from God and salvation—something with which Margery does not, however, concern herself at the second level of weeping. As God explains in *The Orcherd*:

he þat loueþ not me is not in charite to his neizbore. Of þis come alle yuelis and wickidnes, bycause þe soule lackeþ charite, and haþ no loue to me ne to his

neizbore. In þat he worcheþ no good, he dooþ yuel first to hymself, and to his neizbore; not to me, for he may not harme me, but forasmyche as I take it do to me þat is do to his neizbore. Perfore he harmeþ hymself by þe perel of synne, which synne bynemeþ hym grace; & so he may [do] no wors to hymself. He offendeþ also his neizbore whanne he zeldeþ not dewe loue and affeccioun to his neizbore, wherewiþ he schulde helpe hym; þat is to seye, wiþ deuoute preieris and holy desires, whiche he schulde offere up tofore me for his neizbore. (29, lines 23-34)

At this early point in her spiritual growth, Margery essentially looks on the scorn of her neighbors only as a personal benefit, a tool that magnifies her penitence in God's eyes and that will help to bring her to heaven. These are, of course, self-centered concerns.¹² Yet Margery's emphasis on her own sins and on her longing for all things supernal—readers learn that “sche desyryd no-thing so mech as Heuyn” (13, lines 11-2)—are not mistakes on her part but necessary early developments in the ascension of the penitent soul to the second level of Catherine's scale of tears. Margery's selfishness with regard to salvation is here elucidated by a rather excessive (perhaps even obsessive) level of church attendance and by repeated confessions:

Sche was schreuyng sum-tyme twyes or thryes on þe day, & in specyall of þat synne whiche sche so long had conselyd & curyd Sche 3af hir to gret fastyng & to gret wakyng; sche roos at ij or iij of þe clok & went to chereh & was þer in hir prayers on-to tyme of noon and also al þe aftyrnoon. (12, lines 23-9)

¹² Throughout her book, Margery repeatedly suffers slander and verbal abuse from others willingly for God's love and is happy to do so in that it helps her stay focused on God and magnifies her piety in His eyes. The critical difference at this early point is that Margery does not just look on the scorn of others as a vehicle by which she will draw closer to heaven, she even deliberately provokes their scorn; later, as she moves up the tear scale, her focus will shift to a concern that those who mock her also mock God and His works and thereby do themselves spiritual harm. At that time, while she will still concern herself with the personal spiritual benefits of suffering ridicule, such concern will ultimately become secondary to her distress over the spiritual well-being of her neighbors. With Margery having attained the second level of weeping, interesting to note is the fact that she looks on her neighbors in much the same way as she did whilst still leading a “worldly” existence. That is, at both times Margery sees her neighbors as a source of personal benefit and gain, although now the focus has shifted from social profit to spiritual. At no point as of yet has Margery actually concerned herself with the well-being of her fellow townspeople: at first jealous of their clothing if it approached the quality and extravagance of her own and now looking favorably upon them only insofar as they provide her with heightened spiritual status through their scorn.

The fact that Margery continually asks forgiveness for the great unnamed sin from chapter one highlights the nature of her spiritual concerns at this point. She is not at all concerned with the sins or wrongdoings of others but only with the forgiveness of her own transgressions that would potentially bar her from heaven. At the second level of weeping, she cries for all of her own sins against and “vnkyndnes” toward God since her childhood; she cries because she cannot live chastely with her husband; she cries for fear of God’s punishment.

MUST SELL—BREWING EQUIPMENT AND CORN MILL, WIFE MOVING TO HEAVEN:
MARGERY’S ASCENT TO THE SECOND LEVEL OF WEeping

The *Orcherd* states that the third level of weeping (corresponding to the second step along the bridge and to the penitent soul’s reaching the wound in Christ’s side) is characterized by the soul’s realization that sincerely devout action—not simply a fear of punishment—is required to carry it to eternal life. As God explains in the *Orcherd*,

[a]ftir . . . þe soule haþ excersisid h[ir] in vertu, sche bigynneþ to leue þat dreede [i.e., of punishment for sin], for sche woot wel þat dreede is not sufficient inouȝ for to graunte hir þe blisse of heuene And þefore sche ariseþ with loue for to knowe hersilf, and my goodnesse in her, and so bigynneth to presume of hope in my mercy, in þe which þe herte feeliþ gladnes medlid with sorowe of synne and hope of my mercy toȝeders. (194, lines 26-33)

Such an awareness that the *anima* must engage in other activities beyond mere fear of punishment and weeping for sin is garnered through the exercise of the second power of the soul—the understanding—tempered by a desire for spiritual consolation taken not only from God but from loved ones as well.¹³ After the penitent has become mindful of Christ’s sacrifice through the exercise of her memory, the understanding or “intellecte”

¹³ These consolations are, specifically, the joy and comfort that a soul would feel in the company of loved ones or the security that one desires from God. Eventually, however, the penitent must learn to accept God’s love and guidance through faith, with as little direct intervention in her life as possible.

begins to contemplate the import of this sacrifice and the penitent's role in its own salvation. As Christ opened the way to heaven by forging the bridge through His crucifixion, so the soul must take an active role in actually attaining heaven—first by recognizing its own sin and error, then by finding the first step on the bridge through fear of punishment, and then by coming to understand (at the second step on the bridge and the third level of weeping) that more than just fear is necessary to move farther along the path to God. What is needed is active engagement with and involvement in the lives of her fellow Christians.

As the quotation above illustrates, this, the third level of weeping, is an extension of the previous level in that sorrow for sin is now combined with a hope of God's mercy. The desire for spiritual consolation that marks this particular level is best overcome, the *Orcherd* states, by experiencing temptation and the chastisement of one's fellow persons. This is a reversal of wills, for the human soul desires comfort and freedom from pain or punishment but God wills that such things may not yet be enjoyed; in fact, He sees to it that the soul receives exactly the opposite of what she now desires. That is, she suffers the loss of spiritual consolation in order to come to an understanding that her own self will is not compatible with a holy life and that her will must be subsumed into God's own. But at this point the soul has not yet entirely abandoned its own resolve and replaced it with that of the Creator. This will only occur at the next stage (the fourth level, in which the penitent reaches the third step on the bridge and Christ's mouth) when the soul "conceyueþ a maner of displesaunce and parfiet haate in herself," and begins "to confoorme hir wille to [God's] wille" (*Orcherd*, 195, lines 12-3 and 15). At that point,

the sinner no longer cares for herself, and focuses all penitential energies instead on the sufferings of her neighbors and on the intent of God.

Margery herself realizes that suffering is a necessary prerequisite of salvation toward the end of the third chapter in her narrative. She acknowledges her sins against God and the fact that the only way to reach heaven is through suffering the “dyspite of þe world” because “Cryst hym-self ches þat way” (13, lines 7-9). Just after Margery has come to an awareness of the necessity of suffering, her neighbors explicitly criticize the nature of her weeping for the first time:

Hir wepyng was so plentyuows and so contwynyng þat mech pepul wend þat sche mygth wepyn & leuyn whan sche wold, and þerfor many men seyde sche was a fals ypocryte & wept for þe world for socowr & for wordly good. And þan ful many forsokyn hir þat louyd hir be-for whyl sche was in þe world & wold not knowyn hir, & euyr sche thankyd God of alle, no-thing desyryng but mercy and forȝefnes of synne. (lines 22-9)

Those who witness her crying fits demonstrate exactly the sort of reaction that the *Orcherd* warns against. The people of Lynn assume that Margery is weeping solely out of a desire to win their praise and admiration.¹⁴ In asserting that her tears can be summoned up and put away at will, they demonstrate their complete lack of understanding of her spiritual state. The *Orcherd* repeatedly declares that God will send tears to the penitent soul as and when He wishes to do so.¹⁵ By failing to acknowledge even as a possibility that it could in fact be God’s will that Margery weep, the residents of Lynn are obviously not attempting to perceive her situation with the “eye of the intellect,” that is, with true faith in God’s work. Instead of approaching Margery with

¹⁴ As the preceding quotation demonstrates, Margery is concerned in chapter three primarily with her own salvation. She looks on her neighbors as a source of spiritual gain (through their scorn), but she is not seeking the worldly approval or approbation of her fellow townspeople as they believe.

¹⁵ See the *Orcherd*, 201, lines 19-31. See also 44-5, lines 31-4 and 1-5.

patience and understanding, Margery's neighbors quickly pass judgment on her behavior and push her away. As Margery now is beginning to perceive the next stage of her spiritual journey, so too is she contrasted with the townspeople of Lynn—and thereby all worldly people who would tend to see her and her conduct in a negative light—who fail to see even the source of Margery's sorrow—a legitimate faith in and reverence for God and the sacrifice of His Son.

Of course, Margery is still, as she was at the beginning of chapter three, looking upon the scorn of her fellow townspeople only as a means to win more pardon in God's eyes, focusing all of her energy on achieving mercy and forgiveness for her sins.¹⁶ However, she is working her way *toward* the third level of spiritual weeping by virtue of the fact that she is suffering for her faith in God or, more specifically, for the expression of that faith. The major remaining obstacle that she must overcome is her concern for personal salvation, placing sorrow for her own sins and the longing for personal salvation over that of others. For she does not yet realize that, although her suffering in faith will always please God, the scorn of her neighbors is indeed harmful to them on a spiritual level in that, as mentioned, they are denying and even disparaging God's work through her.

In describing the nature of the fourth level of weeping in the *Orcherd*, God explains that a soul who has reached this level “exercyseþ and vseth herself in þe lizt of her owne knowleche,” and that she therefore

conceyueþ a maner of displeaunce and parfiet haate in herself, of þe which displeaunce & haate sche drawiþ out verry knowleche of my goodnes wiþ þe fier of loue, and bigynneth to oone hersilf and to confoorme hir wille to my wille.

¹⁶ At the beginning of chapter three, Margery does not dread “þe schamys & þe spytys of þe wretchyd world” (11, line 23). The final sentence of chapter three finds Margery “no-thing desyryng but mercy and forȝefnes of synne” (13, lines 28-9).

And so sche bigynnep to feele ioye and compassyoun: ioie in hersilf by affeccioun of loue, and compassioun of her neizbore. For þanne þe ize, which wole alwey satisfie to þe herte, wepiþ for hertly loue in me and for compassioun of þe offence þat is doon to me, boþe for offence þat her neizbore doop to me and also for her owne trespas, and not for þe peyne þat sche or þei ben worpi for to haue for her trespas, but for þe offence þat is doon to me. (195, lines 11-22)

But Margery has not yet come so far up the scale; indeed, she is not yet quite half way to the fourth level (which is the first level of perfect tears). She is, at the beginning of chapter four, still wending her way *toward* the third level of weeping. Even after Margery has initially managed to scorn the world and secular living, she still finds herself struggling with vainglory at the beginning of her spiritual journey. In chapter four, some two years after her initial awakening at the failing of her second business, Margery begins to conceive a sense of pride in her faith; she feels “strong, as hir thowt, þat sche dred no devylle in Helle, for sche dede so gret bodily penawnce. Sche thowt þat sche louyd God mor þan he hir. Sche was smet wyth þe dedly wownd of veynglory & felt it not” (13-4, lines 34-6 and 1-2).¹⁷ At this point Margery’s self-assuredness places her—in her own mind—even above God. In feeling that she has no cause to fear any Devil in hell and that she loves God more than He does her, Margery attempts to claim the impossible. For in the *Orcherd* God explicitly states that His pure love for the human soul cannot be reciprocated directly, but can only be approximated through one’s neighbors.¹⁸ Each level of the scale can be attained only after the previous level has been completely worked through and the soul cannot ever allow herself to lose sight of the impetus for attaining each and every level. The penitent must first remember God’s

¹⁷ The text states that for the first two years after Margery’s initial vision of Christ she experienced no temptation to sin (see 13, lines 30-2). Her vainglory comes at the end of this period and God punishes her for this by sending her three years of lecherous urges (see 14, lines 4-7).

¹⁸ See 54 above for more on this point.

sacrifice and contemplate it, never again letting it slip from her mind. Next she will suffer in order to understand her own nature and ultimately come to desire only the spiritual well-being of others and the praise of God. But as she moves up, she must continually remember what inspired her to abandon the concerns of society in the first place—the recollection of Christ’s sacrifice, sorrow for her own sins, and knowledge of her own imperfection. If the soul does not continually bear in mind each new understanding as it is acquired along the journey toward union with God, she risks falling into pride, as Margery herself has done in chapter four. God warns Catherine that the soul must allow each level to build on the previous one if she wishes to make progress and to avoid the danger of pride in one’s spiritual accomplishments, for

it were ful necessarie þat oon [i.e., level of weeping] were medlid with anopir, ellis it schulde turne to presumpcioun, by þe which schulde entre a sotil wynd of elacioun and of her owne reputacioun, and so it schulde falle fro heizþe to þe infirmyte of þe firste vanyte. For þis cause it is riȝt necessarie for to kepe contynuely with verry knowleche of hersilf charite of neiȝboreheed. (*Orcherd*, 196, lines 20-6)

In response to the development of Margery’s pride, Christ suffers the Devil to send her three years of lecherous temptations, during which time she has no desire to sleep with her own husband, but instead harbors unclean thoughts only of other men. In the second year of her temptation, just before evensong on St. Margaret’s Eve, Margery is confronted by a man “wech sche louyd wel” who announces to her his intent to “ly be hir & haue hys lust of hys body” (14, lines 27-9). During the evensong service Margery is so distressed by the man’s words that she is not able to concentrate and instead begins to listen to the insinuations of the Devil:

þe Deuyl put in hir mende þat God had forsakyn hir, and ellys xuld sche not so ben temptyd. She leuyd þe Deuelys suasyons & gan to consentyn for be-cause

sche cowde thynkyn no good thowt. þerfor wend sche þat God had forsake hir.
(15, lines 7-11)

After spending a restless evening considering the matter in bed beside her husband, Margery finally gives in and consents “in hir mend” to commit the sin of adultery. Only later does she discover that the man who propositioned her had never harbored any intention of following through on the matter, purposing all along only to test the resilience and sincerity of Margery’s faith (15, line 25).¹⁹ Of course, she is seriously distraught by this turn of events and begins to reflect on the past few years of her life. Recalling the spiritual stability that she experienced during the two years immediately following her conversion, she compares it with her present inability to resist, and indeed her willful consent to commit, sin. Margery is once again exercising that first power of the soul, the memory, in remembering her own sinfulness and God’s mercy. But through her recent experience with temptation Margery is also beginning to utilize the second power of the soul (the understanding) in that she is now realizing that she must rely entirely on God’s support in order to withstand sin. The *Orcherd* clearly states that the soul’s will must be abandoned and replaced with God’s through both a loss of consolation—specifically a loss of consolation taken from people whom the soul “louep

¹⁹ The fact that Margery merely consented to commit adultery is enough to prove to her the extent of her own spiritual instability. The significance of intention over action which Margery’s consent to commit adultery illustrates finds expression throughout Catherine’s text, where the value of an internal focus in the life of the penitent over an external one is often revisited. To consider committing a sin is as bad as actually doing so, just as the intention in the hearts of His servants to perform good works is often accepted by God as if the deeds were actually completed. For an example of this sentiment, in which God explicitly states how all deeds “actual and mental” are drawn into union with Him when performed by a soul whose three powers (“myztis”) have been drawn by love to Christ, see the *Orcherd*, 70, lines 3-12. Although Margery is prevented from physically engaging in the act of adultery when the man who initially propositioned her refuses to follow through on the matter, the most important consideration is that she consented to commit sin with him. At this point, the actual deed does not need not to occur. With her weakness before sin proven, Margery realizes her error and God allows her spiritual journey to continue once Margery willingly announces her failure and submits to Him.

goostly”—and through the sufferance of temptation. Noteworthy is the fact that the man who tempts Margery to adultery is one whom “sche louyd wel.”²⁰

Margery’s behavior and her reflection on her temptation situate her, by the end of chapter four, at the threshold of the third level of weeping. These are the tears of those whose self wills are not yet subdued and replaced with God’s own and who must therefore suffer contempt and a loss of spiritual stability in order to discover their own true nature, which is, in itself, nothing without God. In thinking about the episode involving the man who had propositioned her, Margery begins to despair and she believes that she is “worthy no mercy for hir consentyng was so wylfully do” (16, line 6). This admission that her decision to commit sin was done “wylfully” reinforces the reading that places Margery on the verge of the third level of weeping according to the scale of the *Orcherd*. Not until reaching the fourth level is the soul’s will finally subdued and supplanted with the will of God—and therefore the fourth level is the one in which the soul begins to carry out God’s will completely free from fear of persecution or concern for personal well-being, consciously suffering for the love of God and the benefit of her neighbors.²¹ But while still at the third level of weeping, the penitent soul loses faith in the power of her own resolve, as well as in her sense of spiritual security through experiences contrary to her own desire. The soul must come to know herself; namely, to realize that without God’s direct aid she is incapable of avoiding sin and of

²⁰ See 55 above for God’s pronouncement in the *Orcherd* that the soul must abandon her will through the loss of consolation from those she “loueþ goostly” and through the suffering of temptation.

²¹ Prominent in Catherine’s text is the notion of suffering for God and neighbor without self-concern once a soul has reached the higher levels on the scale of tears. Souls that have attained the upper echelons are described, for instance, as “so stidefast and stronge in goostly strengþe in her owne wille þat þei goon myȝtily by þe way and in þe way of truþe, and waxe not wery, but feiþfully and truly þei seruen & mynystren to her neizboris, takinge noon heede to þe ignoraunce and vnkyndenes of her neizboris, ne þouȝ a vicio[u]s man seye to hem opirwhile wrong, and repreue þeir gode deedis. But rapir þei crien goostly in [God’s] sizt by holy praier, preiinge for hem, hauynge moore pytee and ruþe for þe offence þat is doon to [God], and for þe harme of her soulis, þan for her owne iniuries and wrongis.” *Orcherd*, 170, lines 11-20.

accomplishing any truly good thing in her life. The soul must understand her own nature via adversity and must acquire virtues through contact with their opposites, as God explains to Catherine in the *Orcherd*.

I seye to þee þat sumtyme a man in his neizbore by experyence of wronges feeliþ þe vertu of pacience in hymself in þe tyme of wronges, whiche wronges he receyueþ [of his neizbore]. Also a man haþ experyence of mekenes þoru þe pryde of a proud man, and so feiþ in an vnfeifful man, and tristi hope in him þat mystristeþ, and riztwiisnes in hym þat is vnrihtful, pyte also in a cruel man, and softnesse and benygnyte in an yrous man.

Riht as wickide men receyuen vyce by her neizbore, so anopir man receyueþ vertu by his neizbore. . . . For whanne he seep his neizbore vnfeifful & mystrusty boþe in me and in hym (bycause he þat loueþ not me may not haue feiþ ne hope in me, but rapir haþ sett þat feiþ and hope in his owne propre sensuualyte whiche he loueþ) my trewe seruauent ceesseþ not for al þat, but þat he loue hym þat is so vntrewe, and þat wiþ a tristy hope in me he seekeþ þe heelp of his neizbore. (35, lines 4-27)

This is the essence of the third level on Catherine's scale—self knowledge and the destruction of the self will through adversity—specifically the adversity presented by her neighbors' lack of faith and charity. The soul must complete a final stage of emptying before it can be completely filled with God's grace at the next level, the fourth. Initially overflowing (before embarking on her spiritual journey) with both sin and secular concern, the soul must make an honest sacrifice of these things in order to open her heart to God's grace. The necessity of emptying the heart first of sin and then of all worldly anxiety prior to approaching or indeed even attempting union with divinity is explained by God in the *Orcherd* through the metaphor of the human heart as a vessel of water presented to one's lord:

For þat sacrifice moste be actuel and also mental oonyd togyderis, riht as a vessel is oonyed wiþ watir which schal be presentid to a lord. For þe watir myzte not be presentid wiþoute a vessel. Also if þe vessel be presentid to a lord wiþoute watir, it is not acceptable to þe lord. Riht so I seye to 3ou þat 3e schulen offren vp to me a vessel ful of actuel laburs in euery sich maner as I wil graunte 3ou þat 3e schulen

offre, not in 3oure maner as ech of 3ou wil, but in my maner as I wil putte in 3ou, 3e not chesyng place ne tyme ne labours. (44-5, lines 31-4 and 1-5)

Resuming the matter later in the text, God further points out that the penitent,

as sche goop, sche bereþ with hir a vessel voyde fro alle vnordynat affeccioun of þe herte and wordly loue. And anoon bycause it is so voyde it is fillid agein, for it may nott be voyde, liik as a vessel may not be voyde; for eipir it moste be fulfillid wiþ sum material þing, or ellis wiþ þe aier. So þe herte is a vessel þat may in no wyse stonde voyde, for whanne it is voidid fro alle þingis of transytorye vanyte it is ful of aier, þat is, with myn heuenly and moost swettist dyuyn loue, by þe which mene sche comeþ to þe water of liifly grace, rennyng as a ryuer qwikly in me, þat am þe pesable see. (127, lines 15-26)²²

In climbing the scale, the penitent must proceed with a purely altruistic intent, that is, she must truly desire the salvation of others, ultimately without concern for her own welfare, and she must strive only for the praise and glory of God. Catherine's text repeatedly focuses on the greater value of interiority, of pure intent, over external action.²³ One should note that in this metaphor of the heart as a vessel, God clearly states that the penitent is powerless to decide the form of the labors (that is, sufferings) which she must endure for God. Indeed, God declares that He will send to each soul the most appropriate form of labor when and where He decides. What is implicit in this statement is again the notion that the soul must completely abandon not only the concerns of the world, but her own desire, will, and intent with regard to God, thereby becoming the perfectly empty vessel that will bear His message, love, and labor to her fellow human beings in the manner that God Himself decides. Only through the "labours," or sufferings that God

²² See also the epigraph on 1 above for a further expression of the sentiment that the soul must continually strive to move forward, that even when emptied of sin initially the soul's journey can only continue through perseverance of the will. See Augustine's statement in the *Confessions* that "[t]here is no place, whether we go backwards or forwards; there can be no question of place," 201. Note also that, according to the *Orchard*, all tears come from the heart. See 47 above.

²³ See 79n19 above.

allows the soul to endure may holy grace and therefore spiritual life be received.²⁴ In the third and fourth chapters of her narrative, as she works her way toward the third level of weeping, Margery empties her heart of all worldly concern and later her strivings are finally replaced with the divine will of God through her experience of powerlessness before temptation.²⁵ At the end of chapter four, she does penance and obeys her confessor but finally she contends that God has forsaken her as He will not withdraw her temptations. And so she continues to suffer a third year of lecherous thoughts, punctuated each day by two hours that God gives her to weep for her own sins.

Surveying feminist approaches to Margery's text, and explicitly to her tears, Helen Clare Taylor notes that "blood, sweat, and tears link the moisture of menstruation and of childbirth to an inscribed femaleness."²⁶ Expanding on this notion, Taylor employs the imagery of woman as a broken vessel in a manner that relates to the concept of the heart as vessel in the *Orcherd*:

This fluidity [blood, sweat, and tears] would seem to bar women from mystical identity with Christ, since the female body (that is, one that possesses the opened

²⁴ See the *Orcherd*, 45, lines 9-11. Compare this to the passage in chap. 83 of Margery's book which states that she only receives grace from her visions when she believes that God is their source. See *BMK*, 201, lines 11-34.

²⁵ Note that, in the *Orcherd*, the heart as vessel analogy is developed further when a soul full of God's grace is contrasted with an empty container that rings aloud when touched. "Thou woost wel þat a voyde vessel zeueþ a sown whanne it is touchid; whanne it is ful it dooþ not so. In þe same wyse whanne mynde or memorye is ful wiþ þe liȝt of vndirstondynge or intellecte and wiþ affeccoun ful of loue, if it panne be touchid eiþir wiþ tribulaciouns of þe world [or] delectaciouns, it crieth not by vnordynat ioye, ne also by vnpacience weileþ not, for it is ful of [God who is] al good" (see the *Orcherd*, 126, lines 24-30). Based on this passage it might be argued that Margery's weeping signifies a *lack* of grace within her and therefore her inability to ascend the scale of tears. However, implicit in this passage is the fact that the soul full of grace will make no sound as a result of inordinate joy or through impatience when her faith is tested by the world. While Margery's weeping is no doubt boisterous and loud it is anchored in her desire to reach union with God, not in any love of or longing for worldly gain on her part. And while Margery's weeping during chapters three and four (when she is at the second level of tears) is due in some degree to her lack of patience to receive forgiveness and salvation, her further trials and sufferings through the later levels of weeping void her of such impetuosity and replace it with grace, patience, and a desire to suffer ever more for God's will.

²⁶ Taylor, "Holy Tears in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," 363. Taylor draws on Luce Irigaray's *Speculum de l'Autre Femme* in discussing the "fluidity" of femaleness. *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (1974; repr., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

orifices of the menstruating/sexually active woman) signifies her corrupted state. Thus, she fails to emulate the Christian conceptualization of the soul as a chaste and unbroken vessel, an ideal to which only men can aspire. But in Irigarayan analysis Christ's wounded body also displays these signs, so that female blood and tears approximate to an *imitatio Christi*. (363-4)

For Taylor, "Kempe weeps . . . as a woman subversively exaggerating her supposedly female characteristics" (364). She reads Margery as a literary construct based on an historical woman who employs the trope of tears—as it is found in saints' lives, devotional treatises, and the liturgy itself—to develop her exemplary status (365). In my reading, the desire that Margery harbors to live chastely with her husband, which surfaces immediately after her experience of heavenly music in chapter three is an expression of her longing to become, symbolically, a pure, empty, and virginal vessel for Christ's "swettist dyuyn loue" (as it is described in the *Orcherd*).²⁷ When John Kempe finally grants her desire in chapter eleven, Margery receives a significant boon in her pursuit of spiritual perfection that becomes outwardly visible only when she dons the white mantle of maidenhood for the first time in chapter thirty-one. While Margery's tears can be read as a parallel to the blood flowing from the wounds of Christ crucified, in terms of her need to achieve freedom from worldly concerns on her journey toward spiritual perfection, the fact remains that she must abstain from sexual relations with her husband if she is to be made a suitable bride of Christ.

When she enters the third level of weeping, Margery is prepared to suffer the loss of spiritual consolation that is prescribed in the *Orcherd*. Her spiritual calm is not disturbed by the criticism of her neighbors, but has been seriously upset by the temptations God has sent her. The third level of weeping is composed then of two major

²⁷ See 82 above.

elements—suffering for God via the reproofs of the world and the loss of and consequent desire for spiritual consolation. In effect, the soul must spend this time completely cut off from any manner of rest or equilibrium. She is cursed and marginalized in the secular world, and her sense of spiritual accomplishment is called into question in such a way that she realizes just how much her well-being and spiritual progress depend on God, as opposed to any power of her own. In withholding spiritual rest, God seeks to prove to the penitent soul that she is powerless to rise above the temptations and distractions of the world without His direct support.²⁸ The soul must come to face her own innate weakness by encountering the sinful pressures of human society, and she must do so seemingly alone.²⁹ Only in this way will the soul realize—through the exercise of the understanding—that without God, she is truly nothing.

One may even choose to view this in an Augustinian-Neoplatonic light, acknowledging that sin is in itself nothing and that anything outside of or absent from God is also nothing.³⁰ Only by abandoning sin (“nothing”) and accepting God can the

²⁸ As discussed on 54-6 above, the penitent must take on an active role in her own salvation upon attaining the third level of weeping. This active role is, essentially, the striving to suffer for the spiritual well-being of her fellow Christians. While she is not quite able to take on this charge at the third level of weeping, by enduring in her trials, the soul will eventually come to the first level of perfect tears. At that point, she will have lost all concern for herself and focus exclusively on the salvation of her neighbors. By consciously not turning aside from the path to God while He suffers her to endure a loss of spiritual consolation, the soul takes an active role in her own progression, and she comes to understand that her journey is not quite even half complete.

²⁹ At the end of chapter four Margery mourns as though God has forsaken her, but this is of course not the case. She is beginning to approach the third level of weeping, wherein she will work toward the complete subversion of her own will by suffering adversity and doubt. Her desire for consolations does not end here even though she feels that she is not worthy to receive them. Indeed, her fall into despair demonstrates the desire that she retains for spiritual comfort. In achieving the third level of weeping, the soul will begin to mingle sorrow for her own sins with a hope for God’s mercy, a hope for the spiritual consolation which she must be denied in order to prove her faith. See the *Orcherd*, 194, lines 26-33.

³⁰ The sinner is outside of or absent from God in the sense that he or she has, through sinful actions, partaken of that which is most imperfect and alien to the supreme perfection of God’s divine being: sin itself. Hackett notes (as also the reader most likely has by this point) that “Catherine’s understanding of self-knowledge and knowledge of God is pure Augustinianism” (34). See Hackett, “Catherine of Siena and William of England.” Hackett further observes that although Catherine’s thought is undeniably Augustinian in flavor and although Flete was an Augustinian friar, indeed a theologian, by whom Catherine

soul achieve life eternal. Catherine's text itself often employs the concept that "[s]ynne is nouzt," and that therefore those who follow it "art bicom to nouzt" (84, lines 18-9). God relates the matter to the soul's knowledge of herself and the attainment of virtues, explaining that without Him and while living in sin, the soul can neither achieve self knowledge nor partake of any true goodness, for sin is not a part of God's wonderful whole and thus, it is nothing. God explains that temptations are necessary elements of the progress toward self knowledge and union with Him. He allegorizes the situation by declaring the human will a sword to be used against the Devil, but also against the soul herself, if care is not taken:

Napelees, if a man take not þis scharp swerd of his wil into þe hondis of þe feend, þat is to seye, þat he assente not to hise temptaciouns and greuauncis, he schal neuere be hirt wiþ deedly synnes þoru ony temptaciouns. But rapir þo temptaciouns schulen strenkþen hym, so þat he opene his ize of intellecte to biholde my charite. Which charyte suffreþ 3ou to be tempted oonly þat 3e schulden come to þe reward þat is ordeyned for vertu.

No man may atteyne to vertues but þoru þe knowyng of me and of hymself. Which knowyng is moost parfytly had in þe tyme of temptacyouns, for þanne a man knowith hymself þat he is nouzt of hymself, whanne he may not remoue and put away þe peynes and greuauncis whiche he desiride to voyde. He knowiþ also þanne me in his wille, for his wille is maad strong of my goodnes, forasmyche as he consentiþ not to siche wickide þouztis. Mooreouere, þe ize of his intellecte seep þat my charite suffre þo þouztis, for þe feend is feble [and] of himself he may do nouzt, but inasmyche as I suffre and wiþdrawe my hond. I suffre hym, not for hatterede þat I haue to 3ou but for loue; not for 3e schulden be ouercome of hym, but þat 3e schulden ouercome hym, þat 3e mowe þereby come to þe parfyt knowyng of me and of 3oureself; also þat vertu mowe haue experience þereby, for vertu hap noon experience but by his contrarie. (*Orcherd*, 100-1, lines 24-32 and 1-13)³¹

was directed during her own period of spiritual development "there is no actual evidence, no acknowledgment on Catherine's part, that she was indebted to friar William or anyone else except Christ for her teaching" (34). Noffke herself points out that Catherine's writings are "strongly biblical, drawing especially and continually from the Pauline and Johannine writings" (109). For Noffke, the "patristic echoes in her works . . . certainly reflect the influence of her Augustinian and Dominican mentors" (*ibid.*). There is also a "heartily affective thread" garnered from "mentors of other orders" mixed with the "Thomistic-scholastic bent of her own order, which grounds all of her writings squarely in reason and doctrine" (109-10). See Noffke, "Mystical Writings." In her introduction to *The Dialogue*, Noffke states that she recognizes "multiple influences in Catherine's writings" (*The Dialogue*, 10).

³¹ See also 58, 79, 109, and 200.

God explicitly states here the fundamental reason for suffering in human life—that the soul may, through temptation and self reflection, become strengthened in her faith. Nothing is done without God’s divine consent, including the sufferance of souls through the wiles of the Devil. By suffering and then by reflecting upon that suffering, the soul cannot help but realize her own helplessness when bereft of God’s aid thereby fostering a desire to live with virtue and love in accordance with God’s divine will. At the close of chapter four, Margery is able to escape the period of her temptation without falling into sin only because the man who propositions her decides not to pursue the matter later when she consents to engage in adultery with him. Having now suffered for her spiritual pride and having come to know herself and having been made ready to abandon her haughty and self-righteous behavior, Margery is now ready to take the next step of her journey and to move up to the third level of holy weeping.

One may ask at this point why Margery’s ascent has been so rapid. For within a few brief chapters she has jumped from an average woman selfishly concerned only with the issues of her daily life and business to a highly penitent individual actively seeking to follow God’s Word. Both Margery’s *Book* and the *Orchard* place extreme emphasis on patience and perseverance, for there is no time at which a soul should slacken her love for God or fellow Christian. If Margery is intended to be an example of pious living for her neighbors (clerics and lay people alike), the fourth and fifth stages of Catherine’s tear scale are then the most important.³² Only by deliberate perseverance over the long duration of her life (the majority of which is spent at the fourth and fifth stages of weeping) can the penitent soul demonstrate to her neighbors the proper manner of living

³² In several places Margery’s book explicitly states that the story of her life, conversion, and suffering is a model of spirituality for her neighbors and, of course, for her readers. See for instance 14, lines 4-14; 99, lines 9-13; and 186, lines 2-17.

in and for God's love. Followers of Christ must not allow their faith to slacken in the face of adversity but instead must strengthen faith by patiently and persistently engaging opposition; they must continue their whole lives to serve Him selflessly.

The fourth and fifth stages, by their very nature then, are the longest of the series, the levels at which the *anima* is tested in her faith over the course of the remainder of her life. If the soul were to fall from grace during the earlier stages of spiritual achievement, the effect on the observer would be relatively minor in comparison to a fall from the heights of perfection. Augustine, discussing the lapses he experienced in his own quest for God, observes that "[i]t is one thing to rise rapidly, another thing not to fall."³³ Maintaining a high level of spiritual achievement, once attained, and not receding into sin or error is the true test of faith. Few people note if a sinner sins again, but the mistakes of holy people rarely go unnoticed.³⁴ For this reason, the temptations and tribulations experienced on the later levels of Catherine's schema provide a better example of perseverance to the keen observer watching the penitent soul with the "eye of the intellect." Upon entering the third level of weeping, the soul begins finally to abandon her own will and to learn patience: "bycause wille is mortified wip riȝt swete wepynges & desyres, þe soule bigynneþ to taaste þe fruyt of teeris and of riȝt swete pacience" (*Orcherd*, 212, lines 2-4). The spiritual fruits of the final stages are only attained through "labour, wepingis and sizhynges;" suffering as an example for one's

³³ *Confessions*, 213.

³⁴ Note that even Margery's confessor points out, in chap. 18, that it is no wonder if someone cannot accept her rapid conversion to a life of faith. For he "knowyth wel ȝe [i.e., Margery] han ben a synful woman, & þe for he wenyth þat God wold not ben homly wyth ȝow in so schort tyme" 44, lines 26-8. Raymond of Capua observes, in his biography of St. Catherine, that one should not be surprised if God allows His "saints to fall into some fault, so that rising re-invigorated, and living thenceforth more wisely, they strive more ardently to reach the highest state of perfection and to bring off a glorious victory against the Enemy of man." *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, trans. George Lamb (London: Harvill Press, 1960), 36. Even those at the height of perfection are liable to experience temptation and setback.

fellows for the length of one's life (216, lines 30-1). So Margery rises quickly through the early stages of Catherine's system of tears in order to exemplify most effectively the highest mode of Christian living—long and patient suffering for God.

In reference to patience, there is a sharp contrast to be noted in the reactions of Margery's neighbors to her weeping. The *Orcherd* clearly asserts that worldly people, those who remain in the river of sin beneath the celestial bridge, express their sorrow for any loss of temporal goods through "þe weilyng of inpacience þat turmentēþ [the soul]" (208, line 20).³⁵ Furthermore, in their impatience these individuals, unwilling to climb the scale of tears to achieve perfection and knowledge of themselves; having "blyndfeld þe iʒe of [their] intellecte by [their] owne sensible loue," pass erroneous judgment on the work of God and the actions of His servants based on external signs alone (205, lines 17-8). In so doing, they spawn "myche yuel" and harm themselves spiritually, for "a wrecchid man knowynge not ʒit hymself . . . wil take upon hym for to knowe þe herte and þe affeccioun of anopir man or womman by o deede þat he seep, or by word or wordis þat he heereþ or seep of hem, and so deeme þe affeccioun of her hertis" (lines 22-6). For the greatest part, Margery's neighbors judge her solely on the basis of her actions without stopping to consider the intentions, causes, or purposes behind them. At the same time that she is rising from impatient imperfection, her critics signal their own lack of spiritual attainment by failing to perceive the message of salvation in Margery's histrionic outbursts with the "eye of the intellect." If Margery is to be an example for her fellows, she must begin to cultivate perfect patience by quickly rising to the third level of weeping in order to endure the scorn that they heap upon her in their own impatience with her

³⁵ The worldly soul's impatience is proven in the face of loss or adversity: "forasmyche as ʒoure freelte is vttyrly corrupt & wipouten ony knowyng, it [i.e., adversity] distrieb þe fruyt of pacience." 208, lines 14-6.

tears. Only through a lifetime of suffering hardship without falling back into sin can the penitent soul be a true example to her fellows. Margery must, therefore, ascend rapidly to the level of weeping that will facilitate her exemplary role.

THE HOME STRETCH: MARGERY ARRIVES AT THE FINAL STAGE OF IMPERFECTION

Chapter five of Margery's book begins with an account of how she, kneeling in the chapel of St. John in St. Margaret's on a Friday before Christmas day,³⁶ "wept wondir sore, askyng mercy & forzyfnes of hir synnes & hir trespas" (16, lines 29-30) before experiencing her second visitation from Jesus. He tells her that her sins are forgiven "to þe vtterest point" and that she "schalt neuyr com in Helle ne in Purgatorye" (lines 35-6). Noting that Margery wears "an hayr vp-on [her] bakke," Christ instructs her to remove it and informs her directly that He will put "an hayr in [her] hert þat schal lyke me mych bettyr þan alle þe hayres in þe world" (17, lines 6-9). And, finally, Jesus commands her to take Him as her love, to abandon the "etyng of flesch" and in its place to accept the Eucharist every Sunday from that point on (line 11). Pertinent to the discussion of her spiritual progression, Jesus declares that Margery shall "ben eytn & knawyn of þe pepul of þe world as any raton knawyth þe stokfysch" (lines 16-7), for it is here that we have the official notice of Margery's suffering and of her ascension to the third level of spiritual weeping, the "teeris of hem þat aftir tyme þei ben risen fro synne . . . bigynne to serue [God]" (*Orcherd*, 193, lines 19-21).³⁷ Her spiritual stability has suffered through

³⁶ For images of St. Margaret's Church and other locations related to Margery's life and text, see Sarah Stanbury and Virginia Raguin, *Mapping Margery Kempe: A Guide to Late Medieval Material and Spiritual Life* (Worcester, MA: Holy Cross), <http://www.holycross.edu/departments/visarts/projects/kempe/> (accessed May 29, 2006).

³⁷ Note that Margery begins her *imitatio Christi* when she reaches the third level of tears. This is the point at which she begins to suffer for God and to travel about England for validation of her feelings. This culminates in her trip to the Holy Land where her fits reach a frenzied height at Calvary. Carol M. Meale reads this sort of tearful suffering not as an imitation of Christ, but as Margery's appropriation of the role of Mary Magdalene. See Carol M. Meale, "'This is a deed bok, the tother a quick': Theatre and the Drama of

the punishment received for her pride in chapter four and she has come to accept the fact that without God she is not capable of freeing herself from sin. But even more important than Margery's own realizations regarding her spiritual state here, is the acknowledgment of her pious suffering by Christ. While Margery will continue to hunger for spiritual consolation for some time, God has now openly affirmed her anguish—past, present, and future—and He has thereby validated her activities thus far and those she will continue to perform in His service as she ascends the scale of tears. Within a short time, the path on which she travels will lead her to the renunciation of her own will, a deliberate self annihilation that allows for the total adoption of the will of God.

Margery's struggle has so far been largely concerned with the need to subordinate the "self" to God—a step in the journey that, once completed, will mark her progression not only upward on the scale of tears toward perfection, but also inward.³⁸ As the penitent soul rejects her own desires and replaces them with those of the divine, she undergoes an internal, spiritual shift manifest in a realignment of her immediate, external aims. That is, she will live from then on only for the benefit of her fellow human beings and for God, having no thought of her own well-being or worldly status whatsoever. The soul completely understands herself when she understands that she is dependent on God for her avoidance of sin and therefore ultimately for her salvation. She completely understands herself when she desires to exert herself only in the service of God and neighbor in the continuing attempt to maintain the highest reverence for her Savior.

Salvation in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 49-68 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000). See the discussion beginning on 119 below for my consideration of the chronology of Margery's weeping in relation to the episode on Calvary.

³⁸ This is, of course, another Augustinian notion. The soul eventually moves inward on her journey to God by utilizing the power of the memory and by submitting totally to her Creator. See *Confessions*, 183-7.

When commanded to remove her literal hair cloth, to replace it with a spiritual one, Margery is being prepared for this further progress up the scale of tears in which her resolve will be replaced with God's. The act of shedding the physical garment is itself symbolic of the internal nature of the later levels of spiritual attainment where the soul struggles primarily with herself, having to persevere in faith and patience, suffering for God and her fellow Christians without heeding external pressures or criticisms. While Margery's progress up the scale of tears thus far has been mostly invisible to the external eye—being only apparent through the more or less unchanging and undeniably physical activity of weeping itself—the symbolic act of removing her tangible hair cloth and replacing it with a spiritual one marks for her readers one of the few external indices to her development. As she ascends the scale, the penitent is drawn inward, away from all secular and material issues. Her progress is, therefore, by its very nature, invisible to all but those who look patiently with the "eye of the intellect." Her progress is invisible to anyone incapable of "reading" symbolic action. From this point on, as Margery approaches the levels of perfection on Catherine's scale, her spiritual journey will be completely internal; any further progress will be discerned by her neighbors only through a thoughtful consideration mixed with faith that looks beyond the external act of weeping. The spiritual hair cloth that Margery dons is an internal, invisible garment that is explicitly more pleasing to God and that, in conjunction with weekly communion, brings her into closer alignment with His will. Indeed, Christ announces that it is His "wyl" that Margery take the Eucharist each Sunday and that she repudiates the eating of meat (17, lines 9-16).

The entirety of chapter five is then concerned with the shift of Margery's focus from the external, weeping primarily for her own sins, to the internal, understanding how she must serve God better by loving others, and with the imminent subordination of her will to God's. In addition to the instructions Christ has already delivered, He finishes with two new injunctions. First, that she no longer pray as long or as often as she has been accustomed to do, instead praying only until six o'clock, at which time God will send her "hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon" (lines 30-1). Second, that she visit "þe ankyr at þe Frer Prechowrys" to reveal the "preuyteys" and "cownselys" that God has shown her, and that she then carefully follow the man's advice since God's spirit will be speaking to her through him (lines 31-2).

The initial order, that she pray less and listen more, is indicative of her turning inward and distancing herself from the physical world. The mode of Margery's life is becoming more contemplative as she draws ever closer to complete knowledge of herself, ascending higher on the scale of tears. The second command brings Margery closer to the "continental" model of spirituality that she follows throughout her book, in that those women whose lives influenced her own were guided by at least one orthodox male confessor, if not more.³⁹ In examining the influence of the lives of continental holy women on Margery's book, specifically as it can be discerned through the relationship between a holy woman and her confessor, Janette Dillon points out not only how critical it was—in the eyes of the Church—for a woman to be guided by a male confessor, but also the degree to which the confessor was responsible for proving that the woman under his guidance was orthodox in her beliefs and yet exceptional in her spiritual gifts and

³⁹ St. Birgitta of Sweden had, for instance, the spiritual assistance of four different churchmen over the course of her life. See *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, ed. Marguerite Tjader Harris, trans. Albert Ryle Kezel (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 16-7.

abilities.⁴⁰ To Dillon, “*The Book of Margery Kempe* gives full expression both to the mystic’s need to obtain clerical support and to the weight of this responsibility on the confessor’s soul” (124), for indeed the confessor is “in the position of having both to test and to testify” (123). The Dominican anchorite is the first of many holy men whose aid Margery will pursue during the course of her narrative, as she seeks confession and validation of her experiences. Of course, when Margery reveals her “reuelacyons” to the anchorite, he praises God’s work in her and counsels that she “receyueth swech thowtys whan God wyl zeue hem as meekly & as deuowtly as ze kan & comyth to me and tellyth me what þei be, & I schal, wyth þe leue of ower Lord Ihesu Cryst, telle zow wheþyr þei ben of þe Holy Gost or ellys of zowr enemy þe Deuyl” (18, lines 4-8). The anchorite’s prevalent concern with the origin and nature of her visions is both significant and logical—especially with regard to the authorization of Margery’s experiences thus far and for those yet to come. Upon the threshold of the third level of weeping, when the soul is about to complete the last step toward spiritual perfection in which she will devote her energies to the well-being of her neighbors, her need for official validation is greater than ever. In submitting to God’s command and revealing her visions to a holy man of recognized authority, Margery is beginning outwardly to subsume her own will into God’s, one of the most important developments to occur at the third level of weeping. This external manifestation of her internal experience is another of the few visible indices to her spiritual progress besides her tears. Although she has already acknowledged her debt to God and her desire to follow His will by accepting the spiritual hair cloth she must continue to express these sentiments externally, now through the hierarchies of the

⁴⁰ Janette Dillon, “Holy Women and their Confessors or Confessors and their Holy Women? Margery Kempe and Continental Tradition,” in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden, 115-140 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), see esp. 120.

Church. If Margery is to climb farther up the scale and to continue to live as an example for others, she must receive the approval of men who represent God's authority on earth.

Like Dillon, Isabel Davis directly explores the relationships between men and women as they are depicted in Margery's book, yet she does so specifically within the context not only of religion but also of patriarchy. Davis approaches medieval patriarchy "not simply as a deplorable inequality between the sexes but as a complex set of compromises between women and men, and also between men and other men" (39), and she asserts that "just as Margery is pressured to conform to gender-specific ideals, men's responses to her are conditioned by social expectations" (36). As has already been noted, male confessors were responsible for demonstrating the orthodoxy and the exceptional spiritual quality of the women they guided.⁴¹ Margery's confessors themselves were then part of the social, political, and religious hierarchies that relied on subordinate and dominant masculinities to inform the ways in which medieval people conceptualized and understood their society (43).⁴² Margery's submission to her spiritual directors, the visible and official ministers of Christ's authority on earth, must precede any further movement up the scale of tears.⁴³ Since her activities are often disruptive to the

⁴¹ See 93-4 above.

⁴² Exploring medieval notions of patriarchy as they are expressed by Thomas Hoccleve in his "Ballade to Sir John Oldcastle," Davis observes that "[e]lite masculinity . . . is signalled through religious submission" (40). See Davis, "Medieval Patriarchy." John Arnold notes, while evaluating the episode in which Margery meets the Bishop of Lincoln in chap. 15, that "the policing of religious orthodoxy happened not simply according to the whims and wishes of individual bishops, but via a legislative framework . . . and a professional class of ecclesiastical officials" (80). See Arnold, "Margery's Trials: Heresy, Lollardy, and Dissent," in *A Companion to "The Book of Margery Kempe."* The political and religious institutions of Margery's day were carefully structured according to specific hierarchies of power. Just as in today's world, these hierarchies relied for their continued survival on the compliance of individuals; those who challenged these power structures without the proper license were not likely to be tolerated. The example of Sir John Oldcastle and the Lollard movement are perhaps the best contemporary illustrations of this fact. Margery must obtain permission to relate her experiences to others before she can continue her spiritual journey.

⁴³ In the *Orchard*, there is no direct mention made of a need to submit specifically to God's earthly ministers in the section on tears. However, just as the *anima* is incapable of directly loving God and must

community, Margery must have proof of her conformity to contemporary religious standards. This will in turn allow her a place from which to speak; a place from which to challenge those around her without the fear of being immediately silenced. This is a concession that Margery has to make partly because of her inferior status as a woman living outside a sanctioned religious community in a world governed primarily by men. Prior to chapter five, Margery's experiences with Jesus are direct and unmediated; she does not require the physical presence of the Church or its ministers to commune with God. However, if she is to be more or less free to move about, to suffer, and (most significantly) to relate her experiences to others in an effort to guide them toward God, she must secure the approval of the Church lest it prevent her from continuing in these activities. As Davis suggests, "Margery's challenges to the Church and its personnel are matched and balanced by her deference to their authority. Continually seeking support from religious men—confessors, priests, bishops, archbishops, and clerkly scribes—Margery shows herself willing to be led by them" (49).

While Margery must accept the Church's guidance, her primary spiritual guide and the ultimate source of her authority is God Himself—recall that Jesus grants her "grace j-now to answer euery clerke in þe loue of God" (17, lines 19-20).⁴⁴ Margery's spirituality is intended to be an example for her neighbors—men and women, laity and clergy. But

do so through love for her neighbors, she must also demonstrate obedience to God through obedience to those who control His Church on earth. The seventh part of the *Orcherd* deals at great length with the topic of spiritual obedience. See the *Orcherd*, 377-421.

⁴⁴ In discussing the spiritual marriage of Margery to the Godhead that occurs in chap. 35, Davis observes that the book "presents a glamorized portrait of its protagonist's obedience in order to borrow authority from the first person of the Trinity: God the Father" (40). Davis also notes that Margery exercises influence over her husband early in the narrative by reminding him of her superior social standing due to her father's place in the community. See Davis, "Medieval Patriarchy," 39 and 44. Clearly, Margery uses the structures of masculine society against the men in her life, both lay and ecclesiastical, when it suits her purpose. For example, once she has obtained validation of her orthodoxy she can argue with churchmen about the ways in which they lead their lives and about the nature of her own activities, a fact carefully noted by Arnold. See, "Margery's Trials," 87.

before Margery is able to express criticism of the manner in which her contemporaries live, before she can continue to live and to grow as a spiritual example for them, she must obtain the official validation, sanction, or permission to speak. Just as she begins her ascent up the scale of tears at the lowest level, so too Margery must first seek validation from a local and relatively minor member of the ecclesiastical power structure, the Dominican anchorite, before she can later seek validation for her more extravagant manifestations of faith from bishops and their superiors.

Reconsidering the function of female mysticism in relation to medieval hierarchies of masculine power, particularly as it can be understood through the lens of modern feminist scholarship, Sarah Beckwith asserts that

the league between God, Christ and woman in female mysticism is one which has been crucial in the debates surrounding French feminist theory—the question as to whether female mysticism is a possible space for the disruption of the patriarchal order, or whether, on the contrary, it exists to act out rigorously its most sexist fantasies, to reinforce the relegation of ‘woman’ to a transcendent, mystified and mystificatory sphere where female masochism is spectacularly redeployed in the pose of crucifixion/crucifiction.⁴⁵

While Davis reads Margery’s book as evidence of the ways in which woman could subvert patriarchal structures, Beckwith argues that mystical experience, while oftentimes the site of self construction for the mystic herself, did not allow women to escape the social boundaries of their day, but instead reinforced female social and familial roles. She supports this point of view by reference to the body of literature, rapidly growing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, that she terms the “Holy Family Romance.” Texts like Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris*, Hilton’s *Scale of Perfection*, *The Chastising of God’s*

⁴⁵ Sarah Beckwith, “A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe,” in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, & History*, ed. David Aers (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 36.

Children, and other similar works encouraged the female mystic “to see herself as mother to the infant Jesus, as his wife and sometimes his daughter in ways which clearly solidify her in . . . social roles” (46). For Beckwith, “[t]he existence of this body of literature is a salutary reminder of the extent to which mystical relationships with God are not immune to relations of power and that far from being direct and unmediated, dissolving subjectivity in an escape out of the social and symbolic order, they only take place through the social relationships that mediate them” (47). There is no doubt that Margery submits to masculine structures of authority when she seeks out the spiritual guidance of the Dominican anchorite. And certainly Margery’s interactions with Christ—in which she is often cast in the role of daughter and, later, of wife—seem to support the patriarchal hierarchies, both secular and ecclesiastical, that dominated medieval English society. Yet her privileged position in the narrative as direct recipient of the Word grants her a certain degree of authority. Her role as exemplar is realized only when she subsumes her will into God’s and by submitting to the earthly Church; Margery acknowledges her own inferiority before God and readies herself to continue her progression upward through Catherine’s system of tears. Chapter five concludes with Margery having attained the third level of weeping, the final stage of imperfection through which she will labor until she finally is able to complete the most crucial of her physical and spiritual journeys—the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROAD TO PERFECTION IS PAVED WITH TEARS

VISIONS FROM GOD OR “DISCEYTIS OF ðE FEEND”? (THE THIRD LEVEL OF WEeping)

In the first chapter of the *Orcherd's Quarta Pars*, Catherine delineates the manner in which a soul can determine whether visions have been sent by God or by the Devil. Significantly, a soul who values and desires visions and spiritual comforts above all else is most liable to be tricked when God withdraws these sacred gifts. This is linked to the differentiation, expressed in the same section of the *Orcherd*, between what God refers to as “vocale” and “mentale” prayer, as well as to the soul’s own attitude toward her revelations.¹ The notion is that the soul should not approach prayer as a perfunctory activity, praying outwardly only as if reciting empty forms. Rather, the penitent must pray with truly meek and humble intent if her prayers are to have any real effect on her own progress or salvation. The progression from vocal (or outward) to mental (or inward) prayer mirrors the shift from imperfection to perfection on the scale of tears between levels three and four. Recall that, in chapter five, God commands Margery to stop her prayers by six o’clock in the afternoon so that she can turn inward and listen to His divine instruction (17, lines 25-31). This is a command that marks the shift in Margery’s progress from the external to the internal, from vocal to mental prayer. By exercise of the “vndirstondynge,” the penitent will gain self-knowledge, shed her imperfection, seek only God’s praise and glory, and at the same time ascend to the practice of contemplative mental prayer.² But as God explains, caution must be exercised

¹ The concept of vocal as opposed to mental prayer is introduced in the *Orcherd* on 147.

² See the *Orcherd*, 146-7.

to retain the meaning, focus, and intent of prayer, while eschewing any thought that it is a purely external activity:

Napeless vndirstonde not so þat a soule wyneþ oonli sich brennyng of loue by longe vocale praier, as manye soulis vsen, whos praier is rapir in wordis þan in affeccioun. Þe whiche setten her entent to noþing ellis but to seye manye psalms & manye pater noster, and whanne þei han fulfillid þe noumbre sett, hem þinkeþ þanne þei han doon inow³. It semeþ þat alle siche setten her entent and her affeccioun oonli in vocal preier. & so schulden þei not do, for, if þei doon noon opirwise, þei wyne riȝt litil fruyt, and to me also it is but riȝt litil worþ. (*Orcherd*, 147, lines 17-25)

The distinction made between “vocale” and “mentale” prayer highlights the importance of intention in Christian behavior—the difference is between prayer focused “rapir in wordis þan in affeccioun” (147, line 19). Vocality does not simply indicate audible prayer said in the company of others but any sort of activity, supposedly pious in nature or focus, that is ostentatious or intended to attract the attention of others, especially if this attention comes at the expense of accomplishing good works. Those who come to mental prayer may very well express their piety through its actual utterance, while their intent is completely and solely focused on the benefit that such a prayer might have for their neighbors. They do not pray to attract attention or for their own well-being but in selfless charity for God and others.³

The soul must not focus on vocal prayer to the point of neglecting the special visions that God will send and she must not desire the comfort of spiritual revelations alone—she must be willing to express her faith outwardly, directly, and aloud to God. The penitent who suffers anxiety when visions distract her from saying her regular prayers and who therefore tends to ignore her revelations works against God’s will and

³ Augustine discusses the concept that one should not seek to be praised but to provide spiritual benefits to one’s neighbors in the *Confessions*, 215-7.

labors under “oon of þe disceytis of þe feend” (*Orcherd*, 150, lines 6-7). On the other hand, one should not feel despair (as Margery, in fact, does at the end of her fourth chapter) when God withdraws his special grace, for, in doing so, God intends that the soul will humble herself and experience His divine charity.⁴

If the soul fails to maintain her focus, to say her prayers meekly, and to heed all of God’s special visitations, she risks falling into the snares of the Devil.⁵ If he cannot persuade her that her prayers are useless and empty forms that she need not continue, the Devil will seek to convince her that her journey to perfection is complete and that she has pleased God, and that she is no longer in need of wailing or saying prayers aloud. And in order that the soul is able to identify any such insinuations, God offers “a verry tokene for to knowe wheþir a soule be visitid of me or of the feend” (*Orcherd*, 155, lines 16-17).

He relates that if the Devil sends a false revelation to the soul

in þe first apperynge þei [i.e. souls] fynde a greet dreede, parceyuyng boþe in þe myddis and in þe eende hungir of vertu. Also, opirwhile, a soule whanne it is blyndid of þe feend, first it resceyueþ gladnes, and at þe laste it is brouzt into confusioun and derkenes of þe soule. Lo, þus haue I schewid þee a tokene for to knowe þe disceyt of þe feend, þat if a soule wole be meke and go wisely sche may not ben disceyued. And if sche wole algatis go rapir wiþ vnparfyzt loue of her goostly comfortis þan with þe perfeccioun of my loue, as I haue seid, sche moste nedis be disceyued of þe fend. (lines 17-26)

The essential factor to consider in determining whether a vision is divine or infernal in origin is, according to the *Orcherd*, the presence or absence of a hunger for virtue following the vision itself. The Devil may bring a sense of gladness to the soul just as God always does, but without a final desire for virtue on the part of the visionary, the

⁴ See the *Orcherd*, 153, lines 20-34.

⁵ See 154, lines 8-25.

mystical experience undoubtedly derives from a demonic source.⁶ Observe that Margery, at the very end of her book (chapter eighty-seven), fully accepts that her visions come from God, because through them she experiences the “most encresyng of vertu” (*BMK*, 215, line 6).

The next step seems clear for Margery, who, at the end of chapter four, despairs that God has forsaken her. She must avoid the danger of Devilish intervention in her spiritual journey by seeking validation of her revelations, by officially accepting the guidance of the Church, and therefore by beginning to relinquish her own will externally (as well as internally) according to God’s command.⁷ God states, in the *Orcherd*, that a soul who experiences “true” holy revelations will deem that she is not worthy of them,⁸ and Margery thinks toward the end of chapter four that she is “worthy no mercy” and that she will be “neuyr worthy to don hym [i.e., God] seruyse for sche was so fals vn-to hym” (16, lines 6-8). Margery begins to acknowledge her own weakness before sin and temptation as she draws nearer to the third level of weeping. She loses hope in God’s mercy only to regain it later, once she understands that choosing to abandon her own will for God’s is the prime requirement for moving up the scale. Margery must choose to relinquish all of her own comfort and turn to the aid of her fellow Christians in the manner of a continental holy woman like Catherine herself.

In evaluating the translation and reception of *The Orcherd of Syon* in fifteenth-century England, Denise Despres notes the specifically continental style of Margery’s active and outward religious experience:

⁶ For further expression of this concept see the *Orcherd*, 237-9.

⁷ The question of whether or not Margery’s visions are infernal or divine in origin becomes a more serious issue in later chapters of her book (see specifically, chaps. 23, 30, 59, and 89).

⁸ See 155, lines 12-5.

Kempe understood the relationship between visions and charity, the necessity of integrating the active life and contemplative, that is forcefully conveyed in *The Orchard*. The writings of and about Continental women and the practice of visual meditation no doubt predisposed her toward this synthesis, despite the practical discouragement she sensitively recognized through the lack of spiritual models in her daily experience.⁹

Margery begins this synthesis of the active and contemplative lives in the fifth chapter of her book, when God officially recognizes her suffering and piety, thereby also signaling her ascent to the third level of weeping. As discussed earlier, at the third level the penitent soul will begin turning more to the exercise of mental prayer, which in turn will support the third and final type of prayer delineated in the *Orchard*: common prayer.

“Thus I haue toold þee how þou maist come to mentale preyer,” God explains,

þat is, by excercise and perseueraunce of vocale preyer; & how þou schuldist leue vocale praier for mentale prayer whanne I vistye þi soule. I seyde þee also what is comowne preyer, for I seyde it was prayer of good wille; þat is, exercise of charitable bisynesse boþe in þee & in þi neizbore, þe which schulde be do wiþ a good wille. Thus a soule schule neuere be ydil from praier, but eiþir actualy or mentaly schulen praie, leste sche falle into dulnesse of spirit and into an inparfizt loue. For þe moore þat sche loueþ, þe moore sche schal feelee profizt and loue, boþe yn me & her neizbore. (*Orchard*, 151, lines 21-30)

As the understanding of the soul becomes more complete and the self-will is remitted to God the penitent turns inward, away from worldly distractions, in order to listen more intently to divine guidance while equally turning outward to lend spiritual aid to her neighbors. Considering the passage from the *Orchard* quoted above, specifically in reference to the intentions of Catherine herself and her text’s Middle English translator, Despres posits that

⁹ Denise L. Despres, “Ecstatic Reading and Missionary Mysticism: *The Orchard of Syon*,” in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), 156.

Catherine no doubt envisioned her apostolic service and even her political intervention as ‘common’ prayer, an active laboring in the Vineyards of Christ that resulted from the contemplative life. The translator, however, was bound by another ideal of service and an implicitly narrower, intercessory definition of prayer. In his Prologue, he incorporates Catherine’s imagery of the Vineyard of the soul and of Holy Church, but he transforms this allegory into a distinctly monastic image of an enclosed garden. The fruit and herbs are doctrine upon which to chew, or meditate, thereby enriching spiritual labor, as opposed to the tilling of one’s neighbor’s fields described by Catherine in her exposition of the Vineyard. (146)

Margery’s behavior toward her neighbors in her book as a whole—constantly reminding those who will listen about the bliss of heaven, chastising those who swear oaths, and later ministering to the sick and insane¹⁰—seems to indicate that Margery adopts, or models herself on, Catherine’s original concept of spiritual service to others. She does not follow the “narrower definition” of service that Depres identifies as the one proposed by the translator of the *Orcherd*. Margery’s life certainly becomes more active in relation to her neighbors once she enters upon the third level of weeping in chapter five. From this point on, hers is a story of travel, of interaction with and spiritual support for those whom she meets and who are amenable to her aid.

Margery’s active desire to serve others for God—the means by which she will further ascend the scale of tears toward union with her Savior—is made explicit in chapters seven and eight of her book. First, readers learn that, during her visions of the Holy Family living in Bethlehem and their exile in Egypt, Margery weeps for long hours “in þe mend of owyr Lordys Passyon wyth-owtyn sesyng, sumtyme for hir owyn synne, sumtyme for þe synne of þe pepyl, sumtyme for þe sowlys in *Purgatory*, sumtyme for hem þat arn in pouerte er in any dysese, for sche desyred to comfort hem alle” (19-20, lines 38 and 1-4). Significantly Margery’s own sins are mentioned and yet, because they

¹⁰ See chaps. 3, 50, 74, and 75 for examples of these activities.

are listed first among those given, they become less prominent in relation to all the sins of the other people. This is indicative of Margery's progress through the third level of weeping and toward the fourth. Catherine's first level of perfect tears (the fourth level of weeping) is marked by an express lack of concern for oneself and total devotion to fellow Christians and to God—sentiments that Margery has not yet fully attained. For when the soul reaches the first level of perfect tears, God explains in the *Orcherd* that

panne þe ize, which wole alwey satisfie to þe herte, wepiþ for hertly loue in me and for compassioun of þe offence þat is doon to me, boþe for offence þat her neizbore doop to me and also for her owne trespas, and not for þe payne þat sche or þei ben worþi for to haue for her trespas, but for þe offence þat is doon to me. (195, lines 18-22)

While Margery is crying for the sins of others and the Passion of Christ in chapter seven, she is still concerned (at least partly) with her own trespasses. For this reason—coupled with her selfish obsession with God manifested in her compulsive prayer, church attendance, and consumption of the Eucharist¹¹—she is situated at the third level of Catherine's scale. Although Margery is concerned throughout her spiritual journey with the offence her sins give to God, as she makes further progress, anxiety over her own often minor, if not wholly imagined transgressions are subordinated to worries about and efforts for the salvation of her neighbors.¹² Indeed, as the passage from the *Orcherd* above makes clear, concern regarding one's own sins is an element even of the higher levels on the scale of tears. Margery herself is, after chapter five, working through the third level of weeping in an effort to suppress her own will completely and to pursue only the spiritual benefit of her neighbors in her love for God. But it is not until reaching the

¹¹ See the third chapter of Margery's text.

¹² See for instance chap. 57, wherein Margery, then at the fourth level of weeping, cries for an hour on Good Friday "for þe synne of þe pepil, hauyng mor sorwe for ther synnys þan for hir owyn," 140, lines 30-1.

fourth level that a soul is entirely “arayed with charite of neizboreheed, by the which charite sche draweth into hersilf a maner weilynge of loue, and also a sorowe [for] offence þat is doon to [God], and for harme þat her neizbore resceyueþ by offence þat is doon to [God]” (*Orcherd*, 199, lines 13-17).

SUBMISSION TO THE CHURCH AND TRUE INTENT (THE THIRD LEVEL OF WEeping)

Awareness of the fact that Margery’s tears are both her martyrdom and her message is of supreme importance. She must begin to serve her neighbors diligently and to suffer more of their scorn before she can reach the fourth level in which she will love and continue to serve them without self interest. The spiritual service that she renders for her neighbors—both the living and the dead—comes not only in the form of tearful prayers for their sins and in heartfelt entreaties to God for their salvation, but in the exemplary model of Christian humility that her life provides for their emulation.¹³ Her weeping symbolizes a mindfulness of Christ’s sacrifice for all humanity, which should remain constantly in the heart and mind of the penitent soul who climbs the scale of tears. Such mindfulness on the part of all true Christians and the gratitude it should engender is at the core of Margery’s message for her fellows.¹⁴ In relation to this notion of Margery as messenger, Catherine S. Akel has noted that at the time the *Book* was written, vernacular texts of saints’ lives penned for women and uneducated men were enjoying wider and wider dissemination.¹⁵ This was concurrent with an overall increase in the display of affective piety on the part of devotional lay persons: “The focus on the actions of the saints in hagiographic writings appealed to an illiterate laity and had long been

¹³ See *BMK*, 19-20, lines 34-8 and 1-4, and 14-8.

¹⁴ Margery states this explicitly toward the end of chap. 60, after she has wept at the grave of Richard Caister at St. Stephen’s Church in Norwich. See 148, lines 10-7.

¹⁵ Catherine S. Akel, “‘...A Schort Tretys and a Comforybl...’: Perception and Purpose of Margery Kempe’s Narrative,” *English Studies* 82, no. 1 (February 2001): 1-13.

encouraged by the Church” (6). Just as popular culture today influences the actions and decisions of those who absorb it, medieval hagiographies and the treatises of various saints inspired their audiences and listeners to emulation of the holy person’s actions—although not necessarily to the point of martyrdom. Margery does just this by internalizing the writings of authors such as Walter Hilton, Birgitta of Sweden, and Richard Rolle (among others) and creating her own form of affective piety through their influence.¹⁶ Akel observes that “[b]oth [Rolle and Hilton] discuss the value of contemplation and the move toward affective piety that contemplation can arouse. Margery evidences their advice through her emotional outbursts of wailing and tears when contemplating the Passion” (8). Margery’s tears—obviously inspired directly by the theological writings of contemporary authors such as those mentioned above¹⁷—become holy exempla for her varied audiences springing from an inward reflection on the nature of the self and God. By employing her tears as an inspirational example for her fellow Christians, the penitent is consciously readying herself for the fourth level in which she will also begin to accept God’s will as her own. Margery differs from Catherine, as well as from other writers whose works she possibly knew and admired,

¹⁶ Joel Fredell observes that “Margery’s Book differs from [the writings of St. Birgitta and Julian of Norwich] in its translation of mystic status to the body politic, where Kempe was neither an avowed anchoritic virgin nor an established visionary in residence, but a lay wife and mother struggling all her life for redefinition.” See “Margery Kempe: Spectacle and Spiritual Governance,” *Philological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 140. Richard Kieckhefer discusses the purpose of the saintly *vita* in fourteenth-century hagiography, that is, its ability and aim to incite both admiration and imitation in audiences, in the introductory chapter to his *Unquiet Souls* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). For his analysis of Margery’s text and its possible role for the reader in relation to contemporary *vitae sanctorum*, see chap. 7.

¹⁷ For the places in the narrative where Margery’s experiences and piety are compared to (and shown to be influenced by) those of famous holy authors and their writings, see chaps. 17, 58, and 62. Most scholars have acknowledged the influence on Margery’s text of contemporary spiritual writings. See for example, Allen’s prefatory note to the *BMK*, liv–lv; Julia Bolton Holloway, “Bride, Margery, Julian, and Alice: Bridget of Sweden’s Textual Community in Medieval England,” in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York and London: Garland, 1992), 215; and Dillon, “Holy Women and their Confessors,” 116–8. For a reading of Kempe’s book that willfully disavows the study of possible influences upon Margery’s text and indeed that disavows the influence of Margery’s text on her contemporaries, see Lochrie, *Translations*, 5–6, 8–9, and 204–5.

most significantly in that she is a lay woman with quotidian concerns. And yet by abandoning self interest and devoting herself entirely to God, Margery's divinely inspired weeping becomes an example of holy devotion that stirs piety in the hearts of her audience.¹⁸ As Despres observes, Margery's book and the depiction of her character in it demonstrates a tendency to read and absorb hagiography in a continental style or mode. This is evident in that Margery's piety is highly visible through her weeping and through her intense focus on her neighbors, the fellow Christians whose salvation becomes for her the highest of priorities in accordance with the teachings found in the *Orcherd*.¹⁹

Margery makes a statement of absolute devotion to God's will when the Virgin Mary appears to her in the eighth chapter of the book. When Margery is asked by the Holy Mother whom she would see saved along with her the devout woman responds, "I aske [for] my gostly fadyr Maystyr R" (20, lines 24-25). Her reasoning is that she cannot repay her "gostly fadyr" in any other way for the blessings he has visited upon her during confession. By asking for the salvation of her confessor, Margery is now expressly accepting that she cannot repay God for His love directly; instead, she must immerse herself in His will and submit to His official earthly agents. This contrasts sharply with her proud feelings in chapter four and demonstrates her progress through Catherine's third level of weeping. At the same time, Margery announces her recognition of the fact that she must live only for the benefit of her neighbors:

Lord, sythen þow hast for-zouyn me my synne, I make þe myn executor of alle þe god werkys þat þow werkyst in me. In *praying*, in *thynkyng*, in *wepyng*, in

¹⁸ See chaps. 16, 38, 45, 46, 53, and 89 for instances where Margery's "comunycacyon" is so pious that it brings tears to the eyes of her listeners, where "affect" becomes "effect."

¹⁹ See Despres, 156-7. For more about Margery's concern regarding her neighbors see chap. 59, where the reader finds her distraught over the notion that not every soul on earth is destined for salvation. Note also that in chap. 78, when God tells Margery the names of those who will die within the following year, she is no longer troubled over receiving such information as she has by that point progressed to the fifth level of tears.

pilgrimage goyng, in fasting, er in any good word spekyng, it is fully my wyl þat þow zeue Maystyr R. halfyndel to ences of hys meryte as yf he ded hem hys owyn self. And þe oþer haluendel, Lord, sprede on þi frendys & þi enmys & on my frendys & myn enmys, for I wyl haue but þi-self for my mede. (20-1, lines 31-6 and 1-4)

The human soul is, according to *The Orchard*, unable to repay God for the love he has bestowed upon her.²⁰ This is exactly why we are given our neighbors, our fellow human beings, to love and serve them as fully as possible and thereby to offer some form of reciprocation to God for his undying, ineffable love in having created the human race. Margery herself has been appointed directly by God to pray and to suffer for the sins of others and thereby to save their souls,²¹ and in repayment for her charity toward others and her willingness to accept this responsibility, God promises to double her reward in heaven.²² The importance of charity for and toward others, of yielding unconditional love to one's neighbors if one seeks to climb the scale of tears, is a sentiment that God repeats throughout the *Orchard*.²³ Margery's desire to comfort her fellow Christians in accordance with this sentiment is plainly apparent at the end of chapter eight.

If the third level of weeping, according to Catherine's system, is marked by the desire for and consequent loss of spiritual consolation, the fourteenth chapter of Margery's narrative illustrates this reversal of desires and the subsuming of the human will into God that occurs at the third level. Margery here desires to die for God; indeed,

²⁰ See the quotation from the *Orchard* on 54 above.

²¹ See *BMK*, 20, lines 10-2. Although God does not explicitly state at this point that part of Margery's earthly charge is to preach or to teach, the model of patience in the face of suffering that is her life can no doubt be considered a form of teaching by example.

²² "Dowtyr, I xal be a trew executor to þe & fulfyllyn all þi wylle, & for þi gret charyte þat þow hast to comfortyn þin euen-cristen þu schalt haue dubbyl reward in Heuyn," (21, lines 4-7). The exact nature of this "dubbyl reward" is not made explicitly clear, but see 50-1, lines 29-33 and 1-6, where Christ promises Margery a "synguler grace in Hevyn."

²³ See quotation from the *Orchard* on 59 above. Margery's desire to serve others becomes more explicit as the narrative proceeds. See, for example, chap. 57.

she fantasizes about it, hoping for a quick and painless end. Such longing contrasts sharply with the fear of death that plagued Margery in her postpartum episode with the caustic priest in chapter one. The benefit of Margery's yearning for a pious death in the name of her Savior is, as God himself acknowledges, wholly spiritual; her desire indicates the preeminence of interiority over exteriority, of intent over action found in the upper echelons of Catherine's scale of tears. Margery is, in chapter fourteen, turning more directly inward and fervently seeking spiritual perfection while moving toward these upper levels. God responds to her wishes, and promises heavenly profits merely for her desire to suffer and die for him: "I thank þe, dowtyr, þat þow woldyst <suffer deth> for my lofe, for, as oftyr as þow thynkyst so, þow schalt haue þe same mede in Heuyn as þow þu suffredyst þe same deth" (30, lines 7-10).

As Margery is still working through the third level of weeping, she has not yet completely given over to God's desire. Although He has promised to withdraw vainglory from her, since she now fears her own pride and the obstacle it presents to her spiritual progress, Margery is not totally free of selfish human impulses.²⁴ Margery, in chapter fifteen, fears the slander of the people when she is commanded by God to don a white mantle. He gently rebukes her, reminding Margery that "þe mor wondryng þat þow hast for my lofe, þe mor þu plesyst me" (32, lines 22-3). Her initial hesitance is then overcome, and throughout the remainder of the chapter Margery's resilience and her adherence to God's will are contrasted with the fear and concern about provoking popular opinion as is expressed by her husband, her handmaiden, her confessor's servant, and even the bishop of Lincoln. All of these people fail to support Margery at one point or another during the course of chapter fifteen as a result of their dread of violating social

²⁴ See chap. 10, 22-3.

acceptability and of rousing secular animosity. In making her way toward the fourth level of weeping, a soul must be tested in order to prove her growing detachment from popular sentiment, her dependence on God, and her need to abandon self will. Margery herself begins to experience such testing early on as she learns to rely on God and to ignore secular matters. Her trials, persisting throughout her narrative, serve continually to prove her faith and her submission to God.

In noting that “[t]he question of will was crucial to establishing the true presence of the holy spirit in visionary women,” Dillon cites the authority of St. Birgitta’s final spiritual guide, bishop Alphonsus Pecha of Jaén, who outlined in his *Epistola Solitarii ad Reges* that “[o]bedience is the first issue about which the visionary must be questioned” (133).²⁵ After determining whether or not a given visionary lives a spiritual or secular existence the examiner must then, according to Alphonsus, look to

an eciam viuit sub disciplina et obediencia speciali, continua, spirituali alicuius senioris, discreti, virtuosi et maturi, catholici et experti patris spiritualis vel an in proprio arbitrio et voluntate, . . . item vtrum temptaciones suas et illas tales visiones, quas habet, statim supposuerit examini et iudicio sui patris spiritualis vel aliorum discretorum seniorum patrum spiritualium, cum humilitate timens illudi vel an eas occultauerit nulliusque examini et iudicio eas supposuerit . . .

whether she lives under the discipline and specific, continuous, spiritual obedience of some senior, distinguished, virtuous, and mature spiritual father, orthodox and expert, or in accordance with her own judgment and will, . . . whether she immediately subjected her temptations and other such visions, which she has, to the examination and judgment of her spiritual father or of another distinguished senior spiritual father, with humility, fearing to be deceived, or

²⁵ The *Epistola* was the preface that Alphonsus wrote for the eighth book of the *Sancta Birgitta Revelaciones*, and it delineates the tenets of *discretio spirituum* in an effort to demonstrate how closely Birgitta herself adhered to them. The text was translated into English probably by the late 1430s. See Arnē Jonsson and Rosalynn Voaden, “Recommended Reading: Defining the Medieval Visionary, A Facing-Page Comparison of the Middle English and Latin Texts of the *Epistola solitarii ad reges* of Alfonso of Jaén,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, n.s. 16, 1 (2001): 149-51. The *Epistola*, and therefore the doctrine of *discretio spirituum*, were possibly known by Margery through Alan of Lynn. See Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, “*Discretio Spirituum* in Time: The Impact of Julian of Norwich’s Counsel in the *Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VII*, ed. E.A. Jones (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 121n9.

whether she hid these visions and subjected them to the examination and judgment of no one.²⁶

Margery seeks to live up to these sorts of requirements early on. In going to the Dominican anchorite, she not only seeks confirmation that her visions are truly from God but that she has not been somehow deceived by the Devil. In escaping from her time of temptation, she seeks confirmation that her will can be and, in fact, has been given up for God's own. By virtue of the fact that she goes to the anchorite, Margery proves outwardly what she has already decided internally—her intention to follow her own resolve no more and to pursue God's instead.²⁷ At the same time that Margery's journey becomes more inwardly focused by the loss of consolation and the subsequent understanding of the soul's dependence on the Creator, her outward activities mirror her submission to God. Throughout the course of one's ascent to divine union, there is a constant interplay between the inner and outer experiences of the soul. Although the penitent begins her journey in spiritual selfishness and with external demonstrations of piety ("vocale" prayer), she soon realizes that a careful focus on God's will that abnegates her own is the only way to pursue grace. The outer life of the soul is then drawn into consonance with the inner life.

Among the penitent's most powerful tools in the long quest for union with divinity are, therefore, the virtues of patience and perseverance. Without them, there is no hope that the soul will endure the necessary suffering and testing to reach the upper levels of perfection on Catherine's schema of tears. In abandoning her anxiety about the

²⁶ Jonsson and Voaden, "Recommended Reading," 165. Translation is my own.

²⁷ Rosalynn Voaden maintains, however, that Margery's behavior—specifically toward her confessors and the authorities whose sanction she seeks—does not always and completely conform to the tenets of *discretio spirituum*. See Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), esp. chap. 4.

opinions of worldly people while she navigates her way through the early levels of imperfection (levels one through three), the soul becomes a spiritual support for her neighbors, whether or not they in fact support her. During her early travels to validate her feelings and to determine the source of her visions, Margery visits a “Whyte Frer,” the Carmelite William Sowthfeld, in chapter eighteen of her narrative. He praises God’s work in Margery, counseling that the grace of the Holy Ghost is at work within her and that she should “[t]hankyth hym heyly of hys goodnes,” adding

for we alle be bowndyn to þankyn hym for 3ow, þat now in owyr days wel inspir
hys grace in 3ow to þe help & comfort of us alle which am supportyd be 3owr
preyers & be swech oper as 3e ben. And we am preservyd fro many myschevys
& dysesyys which we schuld sufferyn & worthily for owyr trespas ne wer swech
good creaturys a-mong vs. (41, lines 15-21)

In being so praised, Margery is here recognized as a pious aid to her fellows—one of the goals of the soul seeking the higher echelons on Catherine’s scale of tears. Sowthfeld believes that Margery retains in her “wyl” and “affeccyon” a meek and contrite heart, further signifying the fact that she is beginning to relinquish her own will for God’s (41, lines 29-35). Note that his comments closely echo the differentiation propounded in the *Orcherd* between vocal and mental prayer; that the key to piety is found not in “wordis,” but in one’s “affeccioun.”²⁸ These sentiments are echoed by her next evaluator, Dame Julian. The anchoress bids Margery to be obedient to God’s will and to

[f]ulfyllyn wyth al hir mygthys what-euyr he put in hir sowle yf it wer not a-geyn
þe worshep of God & profyte of hir euyn-cristen, for, yf it wer, þan it wer nowt
þe mevyng of a good spyryte but rapar of an euyl spyrit. (42, lines 20-4)²⁹

²⁸ See 100 above.

²⁹ See 101-2 above to compare the manner in which Julian counsels the discernment of the source of visions to that advocated in the *Orcherd*.

Julian advises patience and perseverance for Margery, pointing out—in agreement with Catherine’s image of the sinful river roaring beneath the heavenly bridge—that a doubting soul is unlikely to receive God’s gifts since she “is lyke to þe flood of þe see, þe which is mevyd & born a-bowte wyth þe wynd” (42, lines 31-3).³⁰ She also reminds Margery that her worldly suffering increases her “meryte in þe sygth of God” (43, line 16). There is no doubt that the focus of chapter eighteen is on the interiority of Margery’s experiences as well as on the patience and perseverance necessary for discerning the truth behind experiences Margery must garner in order to continue her spiritual journey.³¹

Besides Sowthfeld and Dame Julian, Margery visits many erudite men, both religious and secular, in order to validate her experiences. They all encourage her to persevere in her faith, “[f]or here most dred was þat sche xuld turnyn & not kepyn hir perfeccyon” (43, lines 26-7). Indeed, these men marvel at her since “[s]che had so many enmys & so mech slawndyr þat hem semyd sche myte not beryn it wyth-owtyn gret grace & a mygty feyth” (43, lines 28-30). These men, their understanding of Margery’s situation, and the advice they offer are then immediately contrasted with the lack of understanding displayed by those who fail to look patiently for evidence of her spiritual progress with the eye of the intellect. The book describes the result of their focus on Margery’s outward behavior alone:

³⁰ Compare this notion to Catherine’s “river of sin,” roaring underneath the celestial bridge to God.

³¹ Yoshikawa argues that Margery begins to learn about *discretio spirituum* through her contact with the spiritual authorities whose validation of her feelings she seeks. Specifically Yoshikawa suggests that Julian’s advice, which highlights the work of the Holy Spirit in the human soul, informs Margery’s ability to discern the origin of her visions and the influence of the Holy Spirit within her own soul. Yoshikawa maintains that the doctrine of *discretio spirituum*—“a dynamic process through which the believer discerns his/her whole experience, as guided by the Holy Spirit”—is a process through which “we can assess Margery as one who had been in close touch with God and made spiritual progress as the recipient of grace,” (123). See Yoshikawa, “*Discretio Spirituum* in Time.”

Oþer which had no knowlach of hir maner of gouernawns, saue only be sygh
 owtforth er ellys be jangelyng of oþer personys, peruerting þe dom of trewth,
 seyð ful euyl of hir [& cau]syd hir to haue mech enmyte & mech dysese, mor þan
 sche xuld haue ellys had, had her euyl langage ne ben. (43, lines 30-5)³²

The necessity of looking carefully and patiently within in order to discover the truth, all the while maintaining faith in God's work, is a concept propounded throughout the *Orcherd* and demonstrated here by those who fail to perceive the true nature of Margery's weeping episodes because of their reliance on external appearance and secular opinion. While these other people do spiritual harm to themselves in shunning Margery, they exalt her in the eyes of God by allowing her to suffer for Him.

As Margery ascends the scale of tears, she becomes an example not only for the characters within her narrative but for her readers as well, those who "read" her actions or her words. While she has struggled to understand her own experiences and to come to terms with her growing separation from the world, Margery has gradually taken on the role of a spiritual exemplar for her peers. Since Margery has questioned her own tears and revelations, noteworthy is the fact that she is approached at the outset of chapter twenty-three by a self-doubting vicar who seeks her advice. He questions the efficacy of his own preaching and therefore wonders whether or not he should abandon his benefice. Christ commands Margery to "[b]yde þe vykary kepyn styлле hys cure & hys benefyce & don hys diligence in prechyng & techyng of hem hys owyn persone . . . & 3yf þei do neuyr þe bettyr, hys mede xal neuyr be þe lesse" (53, lines 13-9). Margery's role as spiritual model, an important element of her ascent up the scale of tears, has no doubt developed rather quickly as she is now lending advice—albeit under Christ's direct

³² See *Confessions*, 180-1, where Augustine observes that human beings cannot have certain knowledge of one another's souls because they can only perceive their neighbor with the physical senses, such as the eye and the ear.

guidance—to a man responsible for preaching God’s word. Indicative of the authority perceived in Margery’s counsel by the faithful (that is, God’s authority), the vicar accepts her advice and retains his position.

In order for a soul to reach the fourth level of weeping, she must lose interest in herself by spiritually serving her fellow Christians, all the while acting as an example of holy living for them. Following the episode with the questioning vicar that begins chapter twenty-three, Margery prays variously not only of her own accord, but at the behest of a priest as well as of her “gostly fadyr,” for the souls of several sick people who are near the point of dying.³³ While some are saved from death by her prayers, others pass on but are granted God’s mercy through Margery’s intervention on their behalf.³⁴ And although the chapter closes with mention of Margery’s apprehension over the source of her revelations regarding the fates of the living and the dead, the section as a whole serves to illustrate both her acceptance of the role of spiritual aid to her neighbors and her progress toward the complete abandonment of self concern—something she will accomplish upon reaching the fourth level of weeping. Margery is afraid to accept her visions, not only because she is, as of yet, not entirely certain of their source, but also because her concern for the well-being of her fellow Christians is taking a more prominent place in her religious experience. To learn that any of them might not reach heaven is a painful thing for her to endure.³⁵

³³ See 53-4, lines 21-34 and 1-29.

³⁴ One wicked woman is specifically granted mercy for her sins through Margery’s weeping and praying. See 53-4, lines 29-34 and 1-4.

³⁵ “Þes felyngys & swech oper many mo þan be wretyn, boþe of leuyng & of deyng, of summe to be sauýd, of summe to be dammyd, weryn to þis creatur gret peyn & ponyschyng. Sche had leuar a sufferyd any bodyly penawns þan þes felyngys & sche mygh a put hem a-wey for þe dred þat sche had of illusyons & deceytys of hir gostly enmys,” 54, lines 32-8.

Margery's text is intended as a guide, as instruction for those who read the record of her life. Indeed, the book is in itself a spiritual benefit for her neighbors.³⁶ But in keeping with the notion expressed in the *Orcherd* that the soul must be subsumed wholly and humbly into God's will, we are reminded that Margery's revelations in chapter twenty-three were "wretyn for to schewyn þe homlynes & þe goodlynes of owyr merciful Lord Crist Ihesu & for no commendacyon of þe creatur [i.e., Margery herself]" (*BMK*, 54, lines 29-32). Margery has not completely relinquished her own will or her pride, both of which are obvious in her dread of Devilish deceit at the end of chapter twenty-three, and, therefore, she is not yet upon the threshold of the first level of perfection, that is, the fourth level of weeping. Her journey is a long one.

The greatest hindrance to those observing Margery's activities, insofar as their inability to discern the truth behind her behavior is concerned, is an unwillingness to exercise the mind's eye in faith, and the narrative contains no shortage of comparisons between those who are able and willing to seek out the source of Margery's tears and those who are not. In this context, there are often parallels to Catherine's own terminology in Margery's book and one of these parallels is to be found in chapter sixty-six when Margery's confessor is said explicitly to exercise the "eye of discrecyon" in determining whether or not she should be discharged from her vow to fast weekly in honor of the Virgin Mary (162, line 18).³⁷ In chapter twenty-four, after an unwilling Margery is questioned by her priest-scribe regarding the outcome of various future events, we receive a final example of the need to exercise the mind's eye immediately

³⁶ For explicit mention of the sentiment that Margery's book is a text of instruction see, for example, 1, lines 1-19 and 14, lines 4-14.

³⁷ While there does not appear to be an extremely substantial body of shared language in Margery's text and Catherine's revelations, there is enough to raise the question of a direct connection between the two when coupled with the other observable elements of Catherine's tear schema in the *BMK*. See, for instance, 166 following for God's use of the word "creature" in the *Orcherd*.

before Margery departs for the Holy Land. The sequence demonstrates the result of failing to look upon God's work with the eye of the intellect. According to the text, the amanuensis of the book decides to seek alms for a young man who has appeared in Lynn, presenting himself as one who has "takyn holy orderys for to be a preste," but who has now fallen on hard times (55, lines 27-8). Margery (although she has not met this young man who sports a "prestly" gesture) is moved in her spirit against the stranger and argues against giving him any alms and proclaiming that the people of Lynn

haddyn many powyr neybowrys whch þei knewyn wel a-now hadyn gret need to ben holpyn & relevyd, & it was mor almes to helpyn hem þat þei knewyn wel for wel dysposyd folke & her owyn neybowrys þan oper strawngerys whch þei knew not, for many spekyn & schewyn ful fayr owtward to þe sygh of þe pepyl, God knowyth what þei arn in her sowlys. (56, lines 19-25)

Margery is here directly expressing the importance of interiority over exteriority, of intention over action, of looking beyond the external to distinguish truth, sentiments that run throughout Catherine's treatise.³⁸ And Margery is implicitly issuing a warning to her own detractors that they themselves ought to reconsider the criticisms they have leveled, perhaps too hastily, against her. God alone is the supreme judge of humankind, and individuals who are critical of Margery when they cannot be certain of the source of her tears act both sinfully and presumptuously.³⁹ Immediately after Margery's pronouncement, the priest is unable to secure alms for the destitute fellow; he lends, against Margery's advice, a quantity of his own silver to the young stranger. The man leaves with the money and never returns, thereby proving the validity of Margery's

³⁸ Margery herself claims, in chap. 49, that she takes "lytil heed" of a man's external appearance (neither his "bewte" nor his "face") therefore soon forgetting him. See 119, lines 1-3.

³⁹ The *Quinta Pars* of the *Orcherd* deals with judgment, with God's exclusive right to exercise it, and with the folly of the human soul who arrogates such a privilege. See, for example, the *Orcherd*, 233, lines 17-29.

feelings about him. The episode concludes when another man arrives in Lynn and attempts to sell a breviary to the priest. Of course, he is now willing to listen to Margery's counsel regarding strangers and, therefore, decides not to give any money to this latest visitor—a wise decision, since the man vanishes and never returns with the breviary as promised. The notion of looking beyond external appearances, as rendered in Catherine's text, is made both explicit and immediate in chapter twenty-four of Margery's book.⁴⁰

PERFECTION ATTAINED UPON THE MOUNT OF CALVARY (THE FOURTH LEVEL OF
WEeping)

The journey of the penitent soul toward God begins, according to Catherine's system of thought, in the extremity of secular distraction and ends in a perfect, spiritual and internal calm that permits the deepest contemplation and response to God's holy work. But such a voyage requires a lifetime of both willful suffering and patient self-understanding in the name of God. Margery's own text records her journey through the levels of weeping, from imperfection to perfection, often lucidly if not always succinctly. One particular section of her narrative, while capable of being explained via reference to the somewhat jumbled chronology of the text itself, can, however, be more clearly understood in relation to Catherine's system of holy weeping.⁴¹ The passage in question (found in chapter twenty-eight) claims that Margery experienced her "first cry þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplyon" while she wept grievously upon Mt. Calvary during

⁴⁰ Staley reads this particular vignette as a carefully-aimed criticism of the issue of clerical wealth. See *Dissenting Fictions*, 73-4.

⁴¹ See 5, lines 12-6 of the poem for the admission that the book is not written in chronological order.

her pilgrimage to the Holy Land (68, lines 23-4).⁴² Confusingly, the text seems here to assert that Margery's wailing only began once she had made the journey to the Levant. She is clearly unable to withstand her tearful fits when God sends them and the text maintains that

bis maner of crying enduryd many zerys aftyr þis tyme for owt þat any man myt do, & þerfor sufferyd sche mych despite & mech reprefe. Þe cryeng was so lowde & so wondyrful þat it made þe pepyl astoynd les þan þei had herd it be-forn & er elly[s] þat þei knew þe cawse of þe crying. & sche had hem so oftyn-tymes þat þei madyn hir ryth weyke in hir bodily myghtys, & namely yf sche herd of owyr Lordys Passyon. (68-9, lines 24-31 and 1)

This "maner of crying" is presented as if it were an entirely new development in Margery's religious self expression. Similar to all of the tears described in the book thus far, this species of crying is disruptive to everyone save those who have heard it before or who know "þe cawse of þe crying." And yet these tears are seemingly more extreme, for both the frequency and the intensity of Margery's weeping episodes are also related as if for the very first time:

Fyrst whan sche had hir cryingys at Ierusalem, sche had hem oftyn-tymes, & in Rome also. &, whan sche come hom in-to Inglonde, fyrst at hir comyng hom it comyn but seldom as it wer onys in a moneth, sythen onys in þe weke, aftyrward cotidianly, & onys sche had xiiij on o day, & an-oþer day sche had vij, & so as God wolde visiten hir, sumtyme in þe cherch, sumtyme in þe strete, sumtym in þe

⁴² Scholars are divided as to whether or not Margery actually made this journey to the Levant. However, even if the sequence is pure narrative invention, it does not affect a reading of Margery's text that seeks to elucidate the influence of Catherine's work on it. If the episode is completely fictitious, it serves as a metaphor for Margery's spiritual growth and her ascent to the first level of perfection according to Catherine's schema. If the event actually occurred as reported, the effect is the same. In fact, Margery's own text deals directly with the idea that her pilgrimage to the Holy Land never occurred. In chap. 54, when brought once again before the Archbishop of York, Margery's detractors claim that "sche had [nowt] ben at Ierusalem ne in þe Holy Lond ne on oþer pilgrimage, liche as sche had ben in trewth" (*BMK*, 132, lines 15-7). By foregrounding this charge, the book highlights the importance of the pilgrimage sequence, and when the accusations leveled against Margery are dismissed by the Archbishop the veracity of her account of time spent in the Levant is vindicated. Again, whether or not modern readers accept the truth of her pilgrimage, the episode itself serves an undeniable narrative function, elucidating Margery's ascent to the fourth level of weeping. Beckwith addresses notions of truth and reality in mystical narrative in "Problems of Authority in Late Medieval English Mysticism: Language, Agency, and Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Exemplaria* 4, no. 1 (March, 1992): 171-99.

chawmbre, sumtyme in þe felde whan God wold sendyn hem, for sche knew
neuyr tyme ne owyr whan þei xulde come. (69, lines 8-18)

Even in the light of the text's apparent lack of chronological coherency, the placement and claims of this section appear difficult, *prima facie*, to reconcile with the remainder of the narrative—especially for a reading such as my own that seeks to determine the possible existence of a hierarchy and an order inherent in the text. How could the tears of sorrow that followed her demonic postpartum torment have preceded the journey to the Levant if we accept the notion that she had not wept before her visit to Calvary? How could Margery have even conceived a desire to seek the Holy Land at all before she first left her worldly pursuits behind? Indeed, she was commanded directly by God “in hir mend” to go there at the beginning of chapter fifteen, some two years before she was actually to set out on her journey (32, lines 1-9). Margery's wails upon Calvary are, purportedly, the first “þat euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon,” but determinedly earlier episodes clearly depict her weeping amidst “hey medytacyon” and “very contemplacyon”—indeed Christ promises to send her these very things in chapter five.⁴³ Another revealing statement about Margery's pilgrimage, regarding its place in the chronology of her ascent through the scale of tears, comes at the beginning of the twenty-sixth chapter, when she is seeking companions for her journey. Here again the fact is stressed that Margery's knowledge of her visit to the Holy Land was “had be reuelacyon 3erys a-for” (60, lines 19-20). Significantly, one should recall that from the very outset Margery's text connects her weeping with her revelations from and visions of Christ—therefore she could not have conceived the desire to seek the Holy Land prior to having

⁴³ For examples of episodes involving Margery weeping in contemplation, see chaps. 6 and 7. Christ's promise of contemplation and meditation comes after Margery's consent to adultery in chap. 4. See *BMK*, 17, lines 30-1.

experienced tears and revelations, the sources of her desire, at home in England, following the birth of her first child.⁴⁴

The matter at hand is, therefore, not a question of the presence of tears prior to Margery's journey, but a question of the sort of tears she displays at different times in her progression. I propose that Margery's experience at Calvary—a weeping so intense that it prevents her from standing or even kneeling, forcing her to writhe miserably on the ground (68, lines 12-7)—indicates her ascent to the first level of perfection, the fourth level of weeping, on Catherine's scale of tears. There is a distinct and undeniable focus in chapter twenty-eight on the strength and, most importantly, on the interiority of Margery's visions. Her compassion is so powerful that she sees Christ suffering his Passion as if “wyth hir bodyly ey,” although in actuality the vision appears only “in þe cite of hir sowle (68, lines 9 and 16).” The sentiment carries throughout the chapter, for “[s]che had so very contemplyon in þe sygth of hir s[owle] as yf Crist had hangyn berfor hir bodily eye in hys manhode” (70, lines 5-7). This concentration on interiority highlights the shift in the life of the penitent soul completely away from her own will and toward an inner focus on the will of her Savior—the interiority of focus indicative of the fourth level of weeping.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Further support for the view that Margery did not experience her first tears of contemplation atop Mt. Calvary is to be found in chapter twenty-nine, when Margery dines with the Franciscan friars who served as guides for pilgrims in the Holy Land. Once Margery has been received into the company of the friars so that “sche xuld not etyn a-lone,” one of them queries a member of her fellowship, asking “ȝyf þat wer þe woman of Ingland þe which þei had herd seyð spak wyth God” (73, lines 30-3). For Margery, this question verifies the truth of God's pronouncement in chap. 5 that he would “flowe so mych grace in þe [i.e., Margery] þat alle þe world xal meruelyn þerof” (17, lines 15-6). For present purposes it verifies the reading that argues for Margery's ascent to the fourth level of weeping once she has cried upon Calvary. If her tears and her visions and conversations with God are intimately connected activities, how could the Gray Friars have heard about Margery if indeed word of her tearful conversations with Christ while at home in England had not spread far and wide *before* her journey to the Holy Land?

⁴⁵ In her analysis of Kempe's criticisms of contemporary notions of community Staley suggests that the careful depiction of communal activities during Margery's pilgrimage to Jerusalem ultimately constructs a

Clarissa Atkinson, essentially differentiating between loud “crying” and gentle, yet still highly visible “weeping,” notes a marked difference between Margery’s violent wailing atop Calvary and the “quieter tears to which she was accustomed” prior to her pilgrimage.⁴⁶ In a reading similar to that which I propose for Margery’s book, one that considers the influence of Catherine’s scale of tears, Atkinson further observes that

Margery’s weeping went through several changes in style and significance during the course of her life. In the first place, her tears did not begin at all until after her conversion. Despite her violence and despair after the birth of her child, when “she would have destroyed herself many a time” (p.2), there is no mention of tears. Nor did she weep when she failed in business and was scorned by her neighbors. Her crying began when she heard the heavenly melody [i.e., in chapter three] . . . At that time she began to weep for joy at the bliss of Heaven, to weep with remorse for her sins, and to weep with compassion for the sorrows of Jesus and his Mother. (61)⁴⁷

The notion that Margery’s weeping changed in style—that is, changed *by and in stages*—throughout her spiritual journey, supports my reading of the narrative. While Atkinson’s assertion that Margery shed no tears prior to the experience of the heavenly melody in chapter three is technically accurate in that no tears are reported before to that point; the argument that Margery’s excessive concern for worldly profit and renown are metaphorical tears—those of worldly fear at Catherine’s first level of weeping—remains valid in light of Atkinson’s analysis. But again, most importantly for the episode at

fiction of community that is “meant to be understood in relation to Margery, whose journey is increasingly *inward*” [emphasis added]. See *Dissenting Fictions*, 191.

⁴⁶ Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The “Book” and the World of Margery Kempe* (London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 61. See also 55 and 60. Until Margery’s pilgrimage, her religious expression is for the greater part limited primarily to “wepyng” alone, as opposed to “crying.” After her experience on Calvary, her expression often includes both “wepyng/sobbing” and “crying” together. See for example, chaps. 30 (77-8, lines 37 and 1 and 7), 57 (139, lines 20-33), and 58 (143-4, lines 11 and 1).

⁴⁷ Atkinson quotes Butler-Bowden’s translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1944) throughout her study.

Calvary and parallel with my own reading of the text, she comments that “a new kind of crying” began for Margery in the Holy Land (60).⁴⁸

Before chapter twenty-eight there is only one reference within the text to “crying” as opposed to “wepying.” This singular mention is to be found near the beginning of chapter seven when Margery “cryed wondyr sor” as she witnessed, in contemplation, the departure of the Three Kings from the scene of Christ’s Nativity (19, line 32).⁴⁹ This particular episode is completely contained within the realm of vision; there is no reference made to external reality. Unlike the majority of the narrative that follows the Calvary sequence, there is no audience in the text to hear Margery’s cries and, therefore, to react to them. Such a circumstance vitiates the force of her wondrously sore crying at such an early point in her progression. While Margery’s tears are rather profuse before her journey to the Holy Land, they are—with the exception of a few scenes involving “greet” or “boystows” sobbing—in general of a relatively calm nature. Margery’s expressions of piety before her excursion are almost exclusively rendered in terms of “wepying” or of “byttyr teerys of compassyon.”⁵⁰ Her “boystows sobbynygs” only occur in chapters three, seventeen, and twenty-six, all of which precede Margery’s pilgrimage. The first of these instances involves Margery’s response to the heavenly melody that rouses her from sleep. She weeps for the bliss of heaven, for the remission of her own sins, and because her husband will not allow her to live with him in a state of married

⁴⁸ Atkinson also reads Margery’s pilgrimage as “an excellent transition from the old life [i.e., her more worldly, less-than-perfect religious life on the first three levels of weeping] to the new [i.e., the levels of perfection]” (52). See *Mystic and Pilgrim*.

⁴⁹ The careful reader will note that in chap. 9, soon after a stone mysteriously falls from the vaulting and hits Margery upon her back while she prays in St. Margaret’s Church, Margery “cries” out to Christ to relieve her pain (which, of course, He does). There is no reference to weeping found here, and it is logical to assume that Margery’s “cry” should be understood as a shout for aid, not a bout of tears. See *BMK*, 21-2, lines 30 and 1.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, 18, line 30, and 19, line 19.

chastity (11-3). Her compunction is expressed specifically as “greet wepyng” and “boystows sobbyngys,” and is essentially selfish in nature. While relating in chapter seventeen the nature of her visionary experiences to Richard Caister, the vicar of St. Stephen’s in Norwich, the text claims that Margery’s

dalyawns was so swet, so holy, & so devowt þat þis creatur myt not oftyn-tymes
beryn it but fel down & wrestyd wyth hir body & mad wondyrful cher &
contenawns wyth boystows sobbyngys & gret plente of terys. (40, lines 1-5)⁵¹

The final time that Margery expresses herself through this kind of outrageous behavior is when she receives the Eucharist in chapter twenty-six, after she has already begun her journey to Jerusalem.

With these few exceptions, Atkinson’s observation that Margery began a new form of violent and vociferous compunction once she had reached Calvary, that is, an uncontrollable crying often perceived as obnoxious by her fellows, is correct. The change that Atkinson notes in Margery’s religious expression is the shift from “vocale” to “mentale” prayer described in the *Orcherd*. Although Margery begins to wail loudly following the episode atop Calvary, her intentions have become purer. She is not crying in order to attract the attention or praise of her neighbors but to humble herself completely before them and before God, hoping to win pardon for them in His divine sight. There is, then, a physical as well as an internal shift that occurs at this pivotal

⁵¹ Hope Phyllis Weissman notes that this sequence, the first to depict Margery writhing about while weeping, specifically lacks reference to any loud *crying*. See Weissman, “Margery Kempe in Jerusalem: *Hysteria Compassio* in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text and Its Contexts, 700-1600*, ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982), 212. In this article Weissman argues that Margery’s writhing at Calvary is indicative of a spiritual childbirth mirroring the difficult labor that opens her book: “by reexperiencing her labor pains at the scene of the Virgin’s Compassion, Margery demonstrates her passage beyond Eve’s biological maternity to achieve a maternity suprasexual and faultlessly pure” (215). This reclamation of feminine purity echoes my reading that places Margery at the first level of perfection upon reaching Calvary. The act of childbirth (or the act of reenacting it) marks a metaphorical and spiritual passage. I am indebted to Prof. Eve Salisbury for this observation.

moment in the narrative. As Margery enters the first level of perfection and relinquishes her will for God's, she signals her now completely realized disregard for temporal and worldly concerns through a form of crying, of bawling, that cannot be as easily ignored as the incessant but more discrete weeping she has displayed up to this point. Her ability to dismiss the scorn of her worldly detractors and to cast aside the desire for spiritual consolation has become consummate. As her journey continues, she becomes increasingly less oriented on her own salvation at the same time that her weeping becomes more raucous. Although there are a few specific glimpses of outrageous wailing and crying before Margery reaches Calvary, there is an undeniable increase in the frequency and force of these occurrences *after* she has scaled the site of Christ's crucifixion.

A ROMAN WEDDING, A MADWOMAN, AND THE COMPOSITION OF A "SCHORT TRETYS" (THE FIFTH AND SIXTH LEVELS OF WEeping)

Catherine's vivid imagery of the tripartite Crucifix, an analogy for the heavenly bridge itself, also supports a reading that places Margery at the fourth level of weeping once she has arrived at and cried aloud upon Calvary. The three elements of the Crucifix correspond to the three stairs on the bridge—that is, Christ's feet, His wounded flank, and His mouth. When the penitent soul reaches the mouth, which is the third stair, she simultaneously achieves the fourth level of weeping and the first level of perfection as she completely accepts God's will in place of her own. Margery's journey is as symbolic as it is physical and actual. She has suffered for several years in the pursuit of perfection in God. She has abandoned her worldly concerns, has willingly accepted tribulations and scorn on his behalf, and she has traveled about her homeland in search of official

validation of her feelings. But the culmination of this spiritual journey occurs on Mt. Calvary, as Margery has come to the very place where Christ's earthly life ended and from where her own life in spiritual perfection will begin. In accordance with Catherine's imagery, Margery has symbolically ascended the first two-thirds of the crucifix through the sufferings and trials that led to this first pilgrimage. She has come now to Christ's very mouth, the third and highest point according to Catherine's tripartite imagery of the Crucifixion, as she stands (or writhes) at the very site of Christ's Passion. As the mouth is intended to spread God's message of hope and salvation, according to the *Orcherd*,⁵² Margery herself will from this point on accept more fully the role of spiritual exemplar, as the bearer of God's message to her fellow Christians, without fear of punishment or pain. She will more willingly suffer for Christ, free from concern for her own welfare.

In chapter eighteen the anchorite of the Friar Preachers in Lynn declares, "on charge of hys sowle" that her visions were holy and free from demonic influence (44, line 2). He further prophecies to Margery that "whan sche xuld gon to-Ierusalem-ward, sche xuld haue mech tribulacyon wyth hir mayden and [that] owyr Lord xuld asayn hir scharply & preuyn hir ful streytly" (lines 4-7). Of course, the prophecy is proven accurate in chapters twenty-six and twenty-seven when she is abandoned by both her fellowship and by her handmaiden. As Margery is, during her journey to the Holy Land, embarking upon the final portion of her quest for perfection she is approaching the fourth level of tears. She must endure the final tests given to her by God in order to prove the perfection of her faith. Indeed, the anchorite supports the notion that Margery's pilgrimage is a final test before her ascent to spiritual perfection at the fourth level of

⁵² See 56-7 above.

weeping when he prophecies to her that through the journey itself the Lord will “asayn” her sharply.

Lochrie contends that Margery’s book constitutes a series of “readings of Christ’s body, beginning with her vision on Mount Calvary.”⁵³ For Lochrie, this initial reading authorizes all of Margery’s spiritual activities both before and, more importantly, after her pilgrimage:

Her vision on Mount Calvary represents a turning point in her narrative. Before the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the visions she reports consist mostly of “holy speeches and dalliance with our Lord Jesus Christ.” Her dialogues with Christ up to this point confirm her ability to hear the divine word, a prerequisite to mystical discourse. In addition, the previous narrative is devoted to her prophetic visions . . . While she mentions dallying in Christ’s Passion early in the narrative, she does not reveal the nature or content of this dalliance. Instead, she concentrates on the effects of her meditation—the fire of love, the wondrous melody, the uncontrollable weeping. Her reason for doing this is that she is seeking confirmation of the truth of her visions from holy learned men. In conjunction with Christ’s own assurances of her grace, these clerical confirmations and her prophecies seem to make up a pretext for her vision on Calvary. In this way the narrative prepares for her readings of Christ’s body by first authorizing her ability to receive the divine Word. (169)

Taking this concept further, and as her mention of “the fire of love” suggests, Lochrie considers the possibility that Kempe had derived the notion of reading Christ’s body as if it were a book from the writings of Richard Rolle (170). The “true end” of Margery’s desire to suffer for God is then to nurture her ability to read and meditate upon Christ’s body: “Her reading of the visible tokens of Christ’s suffering stirs remembrance in her memory and compassion in her heart. Ultimately, it incites the bodily movements and roarings for which she will become notorious” (171). Although she links it to Rolle’s work exclusively, Lochrie finds in Margery’s narrative a perpetual concentration on the suffering of Christ identical to that which is necessary, according to *The Orchard*, for the

⁵³ Lochrie, *Translations*, 169.

penitent soul to exercise continuously via her memory if she would ascend the hierarchy of tears:

Kempe returns again and again to the body of Christ to read its pain and its excess of love. Her own narrative practices what Rolle counsels, namely, that meditation on Christ's body be a continuous and concerted one. While such repetition of her meditations may bore or irritate the modern reader, it serves as a rubric to her mystical and experiential narratives. We cannot read the narrative of her life and visions without being able to read the "sweet writing" of the Christic text inscribed within it. (172)

Ultimately, as one analyses the episode on Mt. Calvary, Margery's shift toward an internal focus—indicative of the fourth level of weeping—that is outwardly demonstrated by raucous and reinvigorated weeping comes to the fore. When the soul ascends to the fourth level, she becomes a completely willing servant of God whose purpose is to seek the spiritual well being of her fellow Christians through active service, contemplative prayer, and her role as virtuous exemplar. All of this is fostered through the soul's growing focus on her internal dialogue with and focus on God and his will. At the end of chapter twenty-eight, Margery's text itself signals her complete appropriation of this role by defending her boisterous crying by means of a comparison with those who weep similarly, but through "inordinat lofe" of worldly things alone (70-71, lines 22-37 and 1-15).

Following Calvary, the next major development in Margery's spiritual evolution is her marriage to the Godhead while in the Apostle's Church at Rome on St. John Lateran's Day (chap. 35, 86-9). The fear with which she greets God the Father's proposal indicates the degree to which Margery has subsumed her will and desire in

Christ alone.⁵⁴ Her fear is also an occasion for the gift of spiritual comforts, something she was denied during the previous portion of her journey to perfection. Spiritual comfort now serves as a reward for her resilience in achieving the state of perfection at the fourth level of weeping. In proper fashion for a soul seeking to climb the scale of tears, Margery deems herself unworthy of such relief.

And þan þe Modyr of God & alle þe seyntyȝ þat wer þer present in hir sowle
preyde þat þei [i.e., Margery and her new husband, the godhead] myȝt haue meȝ
joy to-gedyr. And þan þe creatur wyȝh hy deuocyon, wyȝh gret plente of terys,
thankyd God of þis gostly comfort, heldyng hir-self in hir owyn felyng ryȝh
vnworthy to any sweȝch grace as sche felt, for sche felt many gret comfortys, boȝe
gostly comfortys & bodily comfortys. (BMK, 87, lines 23-31)

Following a short catalogue and description of the physical contentment and outward signs by which Margery is made aware of God's favor and protection she receives the gift of "þe fyre of loue," the "hete of þe Holy Gost" (88, lines 33 and 36). This final token of God's love for Margery brings the entire Holy Trinity into her soul, a boon that she could only have received upon attaining—and a boon which serves as a further marker of her attainment of—the first level of perfection.⁵⁵

At the end of the first part of Raymond of Capua's *Legenda Maior*, Catherine herself is wedded to Christ in mystical matrimony. Just before Lent, when others are celebrating "the vain feast of the stomach," Catherine prays intensely in quiet seclusion to

⁵⁴ Readers learn that Margery desires to be in no way departed from the person of Christ through her mystical marriage to the godhead. See 87, lines 7-10

⁵⁵ The concept of the "fyre of loue" that consumes the penitent soul is found also in the *Orcherd*. The translator sometimes renders this notion as "brennyng of loue" or simply "brennyng." See 59, lines 5-8; 67, lines 22-5; 317, lines 3-12 and 28; 385, lines 17-20; and 394, lines 20-2. Yoshikawa remarks that Margery's mystical marriage in Rome "signals a new era for her spiritual progress and the development of her relationship with the Holy Trinity" (125). The essential premise of Yoshikawa's argument is that Julian of Norwich's advice about the nature and origin of visions, given to Margery in chap. 18, is Margery's first lesson in the doctrine of *discretio spirituum* and that as Margery's ability to exercise *discretio* grows the reader is able to discern—and to test the veracity of—her spiritual progress via her recognition and receipt of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. See Yoshikawa, "*Discretio Spirituum* in Time."

see “the face of her eternal Bridegroom.”⁵⁶ Her efforts are rewarded when Christ appears in the company of His mother, the prophet David, and saints Dominic, Paul, and John to announce His intention “to espouse her to Him in faith.” The ceremony is complete when Catherine receives from Christ a gold ring, topped with a diamond that is encircled by four pearls. No one but Catherine herself is ever able to see the ring and Raymond asserts that it symbolizes the strong faith and consummate purity that define Catherine’s life (100). What’s more, he offers a rationalization and an understanding of the episode for the reader:

I believe that this marriage was meant to confirm the divine grace, and that the sign of this confirmation was the ring which she alone could see, so that when she went on to her task of rescuing souls from the swamps of this world she would never be downcast but always trust in God’s grace as she bore them to the firm ground of salvation.

According to the Holy Doctors, one of the main reasons why Almighty God lets some people know that they will always be in His grace is because He plans to send them out into this perverse world to battle for the honour of His name and to save souls. (100-1)

Margery also has a ring to symbolize her mystical union with Christ, but more importantly, she begins to experience the various signs by which she understands that God’s grace is confirmed in her once the spiritual marriage is made official.⁵⁷ These signs include heavenly scents and melodies, the appearance of “white thyngys flying al a-bowte hir on euery syde as thykke in a maner as motys in the sunne,” and finally “þe fyer of loue brennyng in her brest” (*BMK*, 88, lines 7-9 and 33-4). As Raymond suggests that Catherine’s ring is a sign of divine favor and of spiritual strength in the face of adversity,

⁵⁶ Capua, *Life of St. Catherine*, 99.

⁵⁷ The ring is not given to her during the marriage ceremony in chap. 35, but was apparently fashioned at God’s urging earlier in the narrative, while Margery was still at home in England. See Capua, *Life of St. Catherine*, chap. 31.

the tokens of grace that Margery experiences are symbols of God's love for her. As He explains to Margery at the end of chapter thirty-six:

'Be þes tokenys mayst þu wel wetyn þat I loue þe, for þu art to me a very modir & to al þe world for þat gret charite þat is in þe, & zet I am cawse of þat charite my-self, & þu xalt haue gret mede þerfor in Heuyn.' (91, lines 9-13)

These "tokenys" endure for decades and lose none of their force over time, just as the gifts God bestows on Catherine serve to strengthen her for the duration of her life.⁵⁸

Raymond contrasts Catherine's gifts of grace with those received by God's other servants, including the Apostles at Pentecost:

in her case there was something special, for whereas the signs given to others had been fleeting ones, with her the sign was permanent and she could see it all the time. I believe that the Lord willed this because of her sex and the novelty of what she did and the slack condition of our times, all of which seemed likely to raise obstacles to the mission entrusted her by heaven, so that she needed special and continuous assistance. (101)

Given the circumstances of Margery's mystical marriage and the fact that God intends her to be a spiritual mother "to al þe world," Raymond's lines could have been penned to describe Margery herself. She is strengthened by God's favor and His official sanction as embodied in the marriage ceremony to continue her ascent through Catherine's schema of tears. As the journey progresses, Margery will strive more boldly for the salvation of souls by serving as a model of pious living for her neighbors.

As is made clear in the *Orcherd*, the soul who achieves the fourth level of weeping, the tears "of hem þat ben come to perfeccioun in charite of her neizboris, louynge [God] wiþout ony maner biholdynge of hemsilf" (193, lines 24-6), can only continue to progress forward through the exercise of willful desire and patient

⁵⁸ The reader learns that Margery had endured her heavenly experiences daily for "þe terme of xxv 3ere whan þis boke was wretyn" (*BMK*, 88, lines 3-4; see also lines 26-33).

perseverance. The second level of perfection—the “teeris of swetnesse”—is reserved only for those who can and do continuously suffer for God over the course of their lives without falling from grace through a lack of charity for others. Margery’s progression will now consist primarily of more difficult tests of her patience and her perseverance in faith, since these are the necessary virtues required to attain the unitive level of perfection, the fifth level of tears. In addition, Margery will now directly serve as an explicit example of pious living and unwavering faith in God for all her fellow Christians. This role of holy exemplar becomes most pronounced for and, indeed, of most use to her neighbors when she is made to suffer for her faith and her unusual expression thereof.

There are instances, far too numerous and varied to be fully examined here, that run throughout the remainder of Margery’s text wherein she is repeatedly tested in her faith, suffers intensely and willingly for God, and acts as an example for those who witness her hardships.⁵⁹ Evaluating only a few of the most salient of these exempla will serve to highlight her progress toward the fifth level of weeping (the “teeris of swetnesse”) and her fulfillment of the role of spiritual paradigm. It should be noted that immediately prior to the interrogations in both Leicester and York, Margery prays to God that she might answer her inquisitors in a manner “most plesawns . . . to hym,” of the “most profyth to hir sowle,” and most importantly, in a manner that would serve as the “best exampyl to þe pepyl” (115, lines 2-3).⁶⁰ Margery here actively engages in her

⁵⁹ There are, for instance, the charges of Lollardy brought by the mayor of Leicester (chaps. 46-9), the heresy trials at York and Beverley (chaps. 51-4), and the rebukes of the famous preaching friar who forbids Margery to attend his sermons if she cannot control her weeping (chaps. 61-3).

⁶⁰ See also 121, lines 1-9, and 124, lines 8-12, for further statements by Margery that her service to other Christians is manifest in setting for them an example of pious living.

appointed role, which has been praised and made known to her not only by God,⁶¹ but by those charitable souls who understand the nature of her weeping,⁶² and indeed by the saints themselves. For it is no one other than St. Jerome who appears as she prays in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore at Rome to announce to her that “Blissed art þow, dowtyr, in þe wepyng þat þu wepyst for þe peplys synnes, for many xal be sauýd þerby” (99, lines 19-21). He further notes that her strength and will are entirely subsumed into God’s, praising “God for þe *grace* þat he wrowt in hir sowle, for les þan sche had an had sweche gostly comfortys it had ben vnpossybyl hir to a boryn þe schamys & wonderyngys þe which sche suffyrd pacyently & mekely for þe grace þat God schewyd in hyr” (lines 26-30). Her suffering is endured not only for, but through the support of, her Savior. Margery announces this transformation to her inquisitors while defending herself against the charges of the Mayor of Leicester, declaring her recognition that she is able to reciprocate God’s love only through her neighbors, for she loves “al men in God & for God” (115, line 35).

Shortly after her arrival in York, having been turned away by an anchoress who had once welcomed her company, Margery is queried in a vision by Jesus about the many tribulations she has already suffered and those that her future undeniably holds. Carefully testing her innermost desire, Christ asks if she would prefer for him to take away her suffering (119, lines 31-4). Her response is quick and decisive: “Nay, good Lord, late me be at þi wille & make me mythy & strong for to suffyr al þat euýr þu wilt þat I suffyr, and grawnt me mekenes & pacyens þerwyth” (119-20, lines 35-6 and 1).

⁶¹ See 20, lines 10-4.

⁶² While still in Rome, Margery’s companions learn from “religyows” men that “þis woman hath sowyn meche good seed in Rome sithyn sche cam hydir, þat is to sey, schewyd good exampyl to þe pepyl, wherthorw þei louyn God mor þan þei dede be-form.” 99, lines 9-13.

God's offer to free her from suffering is intended to prove the extent to which she has accepted his will over her own, for "fro þat tyme forwarde þat sche knew it was owr Lordys wille þat sche xulde suffyr mor tribulacyon, sche receyued it goodly whan owr Lorde wolde send it & thankyd hym hily þerof, beyng ryth glad & mery þat day þat sche suffryd any dise" (120, lines 2-6). The repeated testing she endures in her continuing contact with the secular world is a necessary part of Margery's spiritual ascent through the scale of tears. But the test of her will inherent in Christ's offer to remove her suffering may at first glance seem problematic—for why should she need to be examined in this manner if indeed her will had been subsumed into God's upon reaching the fourth level of weeping? The discussion of tears in the *Orcherd* highlights the fact that the soul will experience the mortification of her own will and the acceptance of God's upon attaining the first level of perfection.⁶³ Not only is the sincerity of Margery's submission tested by God in York, but at several points in her narrative she demonstrates a willful disbelief in her visions, and she maintains desires contrary to the commands she receives in her soul from God.⁶⁴ How can these facts be reconciled with a reading of the *Book* that seeks to elucidate the influence of Catherine's system of tears—a system that demands a soul completely to abandon her own will upon reaching perfection in God?

The *Orcherd* makes it clear that the human soul is not capable of rest before having come, through diligent perseverance, to complete union with divinity: for "[a]

⁶³ See, for instance, the *Orcherd*, 197, line 31. During the progress toward perfection the soul is required, according to the *Orcherd*, to conform its will to God's own and then to forsake it. See 194-5, lines 26-34 and 1-27. In a religious context, the *Middle English Dictionary* maintains that "mortifien" is to "bring (the will, passions, body, etc.) into submission to the divine will through asceticism and the practice of virtue." The dictionary quotes the *Orcherd* as it is preserved in BL Harley MS 3432 to illustrate this definition. See the *Middle English Compendium*, <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?size=First+100&type=headword&q1=mortifien&rgxp=constrained> (accessed May 29, 2006).

⁶⁴ See chaps. 23, 59, and 71. According to chap. 83 Margery only receives grace when she believes that her visions are from God. See *BMK*, 201, lines 11-38.

soule is euere movinge, and perfore if it goop not forþ by vertues, it moste needis go backward in vices. Stande stille may it not” (118, lines 26-8). God declares to the female religious reading the *Orcherd* that those who turn back from the rigors of the path to heaven do so either through impatience or through the “stirynges,” “chastisyng,” or “vexyng of goostly enemyes” (117, lines 30-1).⁶⁵ A soul is liable to falter and to fall, through the wiles of the Devil, at any point in her progress toward perfection as Margery herself does several times throughout her journey. Speaking in Catherine’s text, God declares that no human soul living on earth—regardless of whatever level has been attained on the scale of tears—is above spiritual improvement:

For þere is noon so parfyt a soule in þis liif, but þat it may encreesse to moore perfeccioun, þat is, to perfeccioun of loue. My riȝt swete oonli sone, Ihesu Crist, was and is ȝoure heed, to whom may encreesse no perfeccioun, for he was and is oon wiþ me and I wiþ hym. His soule was and is blessid by vnyoun of dyuyne nature. But ȝe þat ben pilgrymes and hise membris ben able euermoore for to encreesse into gretter perfeccioun. I sey not þat ȝe mown encreesse to anopir staat afir tyme ȝe ben come to þe laste, but I say þat ȝe mown encreesse in þe same last estaat with sich perfeccioun as it is likyng and plesaunt to me for to ȝeuen to ȝou, by mene and mediacioun of my grace. (198, lines 4-14)

Margery plunges into despair and self doubt following her stint of excessive spiritual pride early in her ascent, in chapter four. She is punished with lecherous urges not only for this first offense but again, much later in her spiritual voyage, when in chapter fifty-nine she adamantly refuses to believe that God would reveal to her the names of those who are to be damned, since such knowledge is to her “a gret ponyschyng & a scharp chastisyng” (*BMK*, 144, line 12).⁶⁶ By the time that God sends this second punishment

⁶⁵ See the *Orcherd*, 117-8, lines 6-35 and 1-30 for the full expression of this sentiment.

⁶⁶ In chap. 23, concerned over the possible influence of evil spirits in her revelations, Margery expresses a similar fear with regard to visions concerning the fates of human souls. See 54-5, lines 32-8 and 1-5.

for willful disbelief, there can be no doubt that she has achieved the fourth level of weeping, wherein her will should have been replaced wholly with God's own.

The key to understanding Margery's behavior here and elsewhere is to remember that the soul is ultimately responsible for pursuing her own salvation. All upward progress made on Catherine's scale of tears begins with individual choice, desire, and effort—albeit effort supported by God.⁶⁷ In effect though, God gives free will to humankind so that they may in turn give it up for Him. The chance of achieving, and indeed the very presence of, the fifth and sixth levels of weeping proves that the human will remains a threat to further spiritual growth past level four. For where would the challenge be found if the soul, in coming to the fourth level of weeping, forfeited herself entirely and became incapable of any wrongdoing while she remained on earth? Further testing of her faith, patience, and perseverance would become unnecessary and, indeed, impossible as God, in taking complete control of her actions, would have granted her eternal salvation as soon as she had achieved level four. For continued progress to be possible, the human potential for failure must remain. Although the soul must allow God's will to absorb her own completely in order to enter upon the fourth level of weeping, the possibility of attaining the highest echelons on the scale through patient perseverance insinuates that her will might rise up again and present a threat to her spiritual growth, even after it has been mastered for the first time. Upon reaching the state of perfection—and indeed at any point along the scale of tears—there exists the possibility for failure and regression through a lack of charity for one's fellow Christians or a lack of love for God. The need for constant vigilance is paramount and God notes

⁶⁷ Even though for the greater part the soul is motivated at the beginning of her journey by the fear of punishment for her sins, she must choose *of her own will* to rise from the river of sin and seek the celestial bridge.

this succinctly while discussing the levels of perfection within the tear scale of the

Orcherd.

And 3it þouȝ sche [i.e., the soul] be comen þerto [i.e., perfection], sche may not kepe it, if sche go fro þe affeccioun þereof, by þe which affeccioun sche cometh to be secunde kynde of teeris aforesaid [i.e., the tears of sorrow for the sins of others]. So þat withouten þe same affeccioun to neiȝboreheed, þe lawe of me, þat am eendelees God, may not be fulfillid. For þere ben two feet of affeccioun, by þe whyche boþe þe preceptis and þe counceylis ben obserued and kepte, as I haue toold þee afore. (197, lines 18-24)⁶⁸

Evaluating Julian of Norwich's role in Margery's developing ability regarding *discretio spirituum*, and comparing Margery's disbelief in chapter fifty-nine with one of Julian's experiences of demonic temptation, Yoshikawa notes that

[t]emptation by the Devil paradoxically enables both Margery and Julian to banish the Devil from their souls, and we learn that the experience of temptation, however painful, is necessary because it is a prerequisite to embracing what Julian describes as the working of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

As Margery has already been wed to the Godhead, the ordeals that follow her bout of disbelief in chapter fifty-nine serve as actual "steps by which she develops spiritually" (128). With perhaps the exception of a relatively minor relapse into an unwillingness to believe her revelations in chapter seventy-one,⁷⁰ the lecherous urges that punish Margery's disbelief in chapter fifty-nine serve as her last major encounter with temptation. From here until the end of her ascent up the scale of tears, Margery must

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the image of the "feet of affection" and the work of Rolle, see Vincent Gillespie, "Mystic's Foot: Rolle and Affectivity," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at Dartington Hall, July 1982*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, 199-230 (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1982). Gillespie notes that the image is Augustinian in origin on 203-4.

⁶⁹ Yoshikawa, "*Discretio Spirituum* in Time," 128. Yoshikawa asserts that the chapters following Margery's sexual temptations in chap. 59 "show the ordeals Margery suffered are actually steps by which she develops spiritually," (128). She further maintains that after Margery kisses the lepers in chap. 74, "her spiritual power is now being used to help her fellow humans," (ibid.); both of these sentiments are in line with my own reading of Catherine's tear schema in connection with the *BMK*.

⁷⁰ Margery here fails to believe her revelations regarding the man (John Derham) who will come to serve as the Prior of Lynn following the death of Thomas Heuyngham.

simply persevere patiently in faith to aid and instruct her neighbors spiritually. Indeed, the episode involving the obstinate Gray Friar in chapters sixty-one through sixty-three allows Margery to prove her piety in the face of persecution, and it serves to demonstrate once again the necessity of looking beyond the external, as is advocated in the *Orcherd*. Margery herself is punished in chapter fifty-nine for not believing, for not looking within herself to discern the origin of her revelations, and the episode is juxtaposed almost immediately with the arrival of the undiscerning Gray Friar. Such an arrangement illustrates the sentiment that God expressed in the *Orcherd*, that all souls—no matter what their station in the world or level of progress in spiritual matters—are in need of growth and must continuously search out, praise, and support the work of God in the world no matter where or in whom it is to be found.⁷¹ It should also be noted that Margery makes a statement of absolute devotion to God's will at the close of chapter fifty-nine, proclaiming that she will not ever again allow her own will or disbelief to rise up against God. She acknowledges that although she was able to mortify her will in order to reach the first level of perfection atop Calvary, the process is one of constant review and ongoing effort:

'I xal beleuyn þat euery good thowt is þe speche of God, blyssed mote þu Lord be þat þu [dis]deynyst not to comfortyn me a-geyn. I wold not, Lord, for al þis world suffryn swech an-oþer peyne as I haue suffryd þes xij days, for me thowt I was in Helle, blyssed mote þu be þat it is passyd. þerfor, Lord, now wyl I lyn stille & be buxom to þi wille; I pray þe, Lord, speke in me what þat is most plesawns to þe.' (BMK, 146, lines 26-34)

Note well that Margery also acknowledges that she will not hunger for consolation or comfort from God but must persevere through all things, only enjoying respite when God will send it. After having given up her will entirely on Calvary, Margery must be

⁷¹ See 136 above.

reminded that her progress is not automatic and that she must continue to pursue it actively—through, for instance, her composition of original prayers in a confessional mode such as the one quoted above, as well as through tears.⁷²

The Gray Friar who visits Lynn in chapter sixty-one is a man endowed only with a “holy name” whose disbelief in Margery’s weeping persists even in the face of testimony and support from those more qualified than he to discern the nature of her experiences.⁷³ He trusts “mech in þe fauowr of þe pepil” and argues that Margery’s crying annoys and distracts them (151, lines 4-5).⁷⁴ While Margery prays that the people will be edified by his preaching as much as if Jesus himself were sermonizing to them, the friar proudly assumes that he knows what is best for his audience and refuses to take the time to discern what spiritual benefits, for himself and others, might lie within Margery’s eccentric behavior. Failing to follow the example of those who have preached in Lynn before him and who have patiently endured Margery’s presence at their sermons, the friar is a shining example of the damaging pride that Margery herself has long since left behind. Finally freeing her from her tears long enough to reenter the church, God allows Margery to be deemed a hypocrite and a liar so that she might continue her progress upward, always loving her neighbors while they despise her. And the episode

⁷² Note that Margery’s progress up the scale often operates on a pattern of advancement followed by regression, just before she makes the step to the next level. Compare, for instance, her pride in chap. 4 after having climbed up to the second level of weeping. She has progressed to this point and then suffers a short relapse into sin and punishment before proceeding in chap. 5 to the third level of weeping. As she gets higher on the scale the amount of time she spends on each level increases, giving her opportunities to exercise the necessary virtues of patience and perseverance.

⁷³ Extremely important to note is the fact that readers are directly told at the beginning of chap. 62 that the friar was at “þat tyme neyþyr bachelor ne doctowr of diuinyte” (152, lines 9-10). All of his spiritual authority is then manifest only in the opinion of the people and his “holy name” supported by that opinion. His unwillingness to accept Margery’s spiritual experience is based on his concern for retaining a favorable image in the minds of the general public and his “authority” is rendered completely hollow when juxtaposed with the spiritual clout of the “doctowr of diuinite” and the “bachelor of lawe” who come to plead Margery’s case unsuccessfully before him. See 150, lines 23-34.

⁷⁴ See also 149, lines 32-3.

approaches a close with God's acknowledgment that Margery has found—in the continued submission of her will, in the scorn of worldly people, and in her freedom from pride that contrasts with the arrogance of the friar—the “ryth wey to Heuyn” (156, line 10).⁷⁵

So Margery fares until she finally ascends to the fifth level of weeping, the unitive stage of perfection that is joined to the fourth level through patient perseverance and deepest faith. Chapter seventy-five brings her “full circle” as she assumes the intercessory role of Christ in her interaction with a woman driven mad in childbirth. Margery achieves the fifth level of weeping which, according to the scale of the *Orcherd*, is also the fourth and final perfect stage of the soul.⁷⁶ She has now given herself over to God completely and without question, something realized in a sequence that mirrors the episode opening Margery's text. Kneeling in St. Margaret's Church an anxious man relates to Margery his wife's state of being: she is “newly delyueryd of a childe” and is now “owt [of] hir mende.” Before Margery offers to go visit the woman he adds that “sche knowyth not me ne non of hir neyborwys. Sche roryth & cryith so þat sche makith folk euyll a-feerd. Sche wyl boþe smytyn & bityn, & þerfor is sche manykyld on hir wristys” (177-8, lines 34-5 and 1-4).

While this situation is undoubtedly very similar to Margery's own period of postpartum torment, there are some crucial differences to be noted. First, this woman specifically attacks other people, unlike Margery who directed all of her physical

⁷⁵ Observe that in chap. 68, shortly after the close of the episode involving the Gray Friar, Margery receives the support of a “worschepful doctowr,” who patiently waits for her to stop crying before finishing his sermon, and an Austin Friar, who warns Margery's critics to be less judgmental, for they “wote ful lityl what sche felyth” (167, line 13). For the injunction that one should not judge any of God's servants based on their appearances or their manner of religious expression, see the *Orcherd*, 233, lines 17-29 and 235, lines 17-21.

⁷⁶ See Table 1 on 46 above and also Table 2 on 148 following.

violence against herself. The reason for this, so we are told, is the madwoman's ability to perceive the presence of Devils lurking about the souls and indeed about the physical bodies of sinners. "And, whan . . . folke cam to hir, sche cryid & gapyd as sche wolde an etyn hem & seyde þat sche saw many deuelys a-bowtyn hem. Sche wolde not suffryn hem to towchyn hir be hyr good wyl" (178, lines 14-7). During Margery's own demonic ordeal, we are only made aware of her ability to detect the evil spirits specifically tormenting her, not any in relation to other people. Now, when Margery approaches, we are told that the unfortunate woman perceives "many fayr awngelys" about her and—in sharp contrast with her reaction to the company of seemingly anyone else—that the woman is "gretly comforyd" by Margery's presence (178, lines 12-4). While Margery would have killed herself if left to the insinuations of her demonic tormentors, this woman acts as if she would "etyn" those near her were she not restrained—an image that echoes the visions of Devils with gaping mouths that Margery witnessed during her episode of hellish torture. Since no one has been able to calm the woman, she is finally locked away on the outskirts of Lynn so that she will neither bother nor harm any of the townspeople.

Perhaps, however, this unfortunate woman's ability to discern spirits should not be read solely as the intolerable bane that her community no doubt deemed it. The anonymous woman's plight serves as a highly condensed summation of Margery's own spiritual experience and lifelong ascent. Instead of seeking to cleanse themselves of the Devils who excite the woman's passionate reaction, the townspeople choose to cast her aside, to place her physically outside of their realm of concern where she will be of no consequence to them. Like Margery, she bears a message and, in fact, a warning, albeit

at this late point in the narrative her message is more urgent and somewhat more forceful than even that of Margery herself. She does not weep patiently for the benefit of those who have abandoned her. Instead, she signals the impurity of their living when she informs them, by means of her wailing, of the immediate presence of Devils. Unlike Margery, she is not tortured by visions of hell or demonic spirits; she only perceives such things about the bodies of other people, signaling their impiety and thereby offering a warning of imminent damnation, not the patient prayers for mercy that Margery bears. The woman is a foil for Margery, and her troubled state of mind contrasts with the substantial progress Margery has made in her spiritual development since her own episode of infernal torment. As the end of Book One draws near, the message of salvation and redemption through the acceptance of God's law is still present, but the need for Margery's neighbors to adhere to God's will and to abandon sinful living are no longer things for which a penitent like Margery will long be able to pray. Sinners must realize that God's judgment is drawing ever nearer and that their time is running out.

This episode illustrates the emphasis in Catherine's text on looking with the mind's eye, which must be trained vis-à-vis experience, in order to comprehend the work of God in the physical and temporal world. As Margery, a devout woman who prays for her fellow Christians, has often suffered at the hands of detractors who cannot or will not attempt to understand her piety, so now this madwoman will reverse the dynamic. Although it appears that she is the one suffering torment, the townspeople are the most troubled by her state of being, a state that is only agitated by the sins of the townspeople themselves, signified by the Devils who accompany them wherever they go. Her message is the same one that Margery has cultivated over the course of the narrative—

that judging by external characteristics alone without regard for the inner functioning of the soul will lead one away from God and His work in the world. The sinful townspeople who witness this madwoman's reaction to their presence fail to understand the matter fully and do not realize that they are themselves in need of spiritual adjustment.

The madwoman has been placed on the outermost boundary of society, in fact she is outside of it, the same locale in which Margery's detractors no doubt continually attempt to situate her. From this liminal periphery, Margery begins, however, her greatest work of charity for the world from which she is now symbolically—in going physically outside of society to visit the madwoman—and spiritually separated, that is, the composition of her book. The fact that Margery is now totally and undeniably given over to God becomes obvious when she prays that, “ȝyf it were hys wille,” He would restore the woman to health (178, line 29). As Margery has the power to prepare this woman for a return to secular society and to the society of the Church by cleansing her through prayer, Margery demonstrates not only her wholehearted desire to help her neighbor, but her own “reentry” to the world that has cast her aside. This reentry is neither physical nor literal, but is rendered through the pious example of her life recorded in her text, which will serve to introduce her faith and the truth of her visions to whomever is willing and able to seek out the message.

Over the course of the next several chapters, Margery is made ready to ascend to the final level of weeping, that of the tears of fire, the outward result of which will be the creation of her text. When an aging John Kempe takes a nearly-fatal tumble down a flight of stairs in chapter seventy-six, Margery sacrifices a significant amount of her time for prayers and tears in order to care and provide for him. This sacrifice, made for the

benefit of a fellow Christian to whom she has joined herself in holy wedlock, is a prelude to the weeping of fire that Margery will accept in order to initiate the composition of her narrative. Margery has to learn to be content with fewer tears so that she can redirect her energies toward new good works done for God through her neighbors, that is, the writing of her book. In the *Orcherd*, God clearly states the folly of pursuing penance and other spiritual endeavors when one has been instructed by one's spiritual guide (or even God himself) to suspend such activities:

For if he vside siche penaunce azeins hise prelatis wil or suffraunce, he schulde not oonly haue no merit for vertu, but mooreouere, and rapir, he schulde do synne and offende me. Perfore þou maist se þat sich worching[es] haue an eende. A man schulde take hem as for to vse hem in tyme, but not for principal bigynnyng. For if it were take so as for a principal bygynnyng, þanne of necessite he most sumtyme leue it; and whanne it were forsake and lefte of, þan schulde þe soule stonde aloone and voyde as of ony meryt. (*Orcherd*, 41, lines 16-24)

Perhaps sensing that the time is drawing near for Margery to render her piety in a new form, she requests in chapter seventy-seven that God decrease the amount and intensity of her weeping while she is in church so that she will not disturb her fellow parishioners. He, of course, denies her this, claiming that she must accept His gifts when and where He chooses to send them since they are a benefit to her neighbors.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, God praises Margery's desire to help her neighbors and celebrates her accomplishments thus far by explicitly stating in chapter seventy-eight that He has appointed her as an example for her fellows: "I haue ordeynd þe to be a merowr a-mongys hem for to han gret sorwe þat þei xulde takyn exampil by þe for to haue sum litil sorwe in her hertys for her synnys

⁷⁷ See 182, lines 1-28.

þat þei myth þerthorw be sauýd, but þei louyn not to heryn of sorwe ne of contricyon”
(186, lines 13-7).⁷⁸

Following her marriage to the Godhead in Rome, Margery experienced a new spiritual calm even though her outward expression became louder and more aggressive. By chapter eighty-five Margery has seen her name etched, in a vision, into the Book of Life at the foot of the Holy Trinity, and she has experienced a change in her weeping that draws her closer to the sixth level of Catherine’s scale:

And neuýr-þe-lesse þe fyr of loue encresyd in hir, & hir vndirstandýng was mor illumynynd & hir deuocyon mor feruent þan it was be-for whyl sche had hir meditacyon & hir contemplacyon only in hys manhod, 3et had sche not þat maner of werkyng in crying as sche had be-for, but it was mor sotyl & mor softe & mor esy to hir spiryt to beryn & plentyuows in teerys as euýr it was be-form. (209, lines 8-14)⁷⁹

The text acknowledges the interior calm Margery has cultivated throughout the later stages of her ascent, the calm that culminates in the phenomenon of the tears of fire. The actual composition of the book, while accommodated through a decrease in both the frequency and severity of her tears, is still occasionally interrupted by pious outbursts on the part of both Margery and the scribe:

Also, whil þe forseýd creatur was ocupijð a-bowte þe writýng of þis tretys, sche had many holy teerys & wepingys, & oftyn-tymys þer cam a flawme of fyre a-bowte hir brest ful hoot & delectabyl, and also he þat was hir writer cowde not sumtyme kepyn hym-self fro wepyng. (219, lines 1-5)

⁷⁸ In the previous chapter, 77, God explicitly observes that Margery has reached the height of union with him, echoing the terminology and imagery of the second level on Catherine’s scale of tears, when he declares that in drawing chosen souls to him he turns “þe erthe of her hertys vp-so-down & make[s] hem sore a-feerd þat þei dredyn veniawnce xulde fallyn on hem for her synnys” (182, lines 30-3). He follows this with a description of the five tokens by which Margery can know that she enjoys his love and grace. Tokens three and four specifically acknowledge Margery’s fully actualized role as an example for her neighbors. See 183, lines 4-28.

⁷⁹ Yoshikawa also reads this description of the fire of love as proof of Margery’s “spiritual transformation,” her approach to “contemplative *unitas*” (131). See Yoshikawa, “*Discretio Spirituum* in Time.”

The appropriateness of the composition (indeed, God's willingness to accommodate it by removing any physical hindrances to the book's creation) is signaled by the fact that even though Margery was often ill while her book was being written, working on it would invariably and miraculously bring her back to full health (lines 13-6). The composition is further justified by the glimpse into the truth of Margery's experiences granted to its audience. According to my reading, her experience with the madwoman is one of a variety of sequences that, when approached and explained in a careful manner that is, in light of the spiritual message of the work as a whole, highlight the validity of Margery's mystical encounters with God and the tears that continually express them.

As the final chapter of Book One comes to a close, Margery is once again found dreading the source of her visions and revelations, although to a degree not as severe as "whan sche had hir fyrst felyngys" (220, lines 12-3). Margery no longer doubts her visions as much as she expresses concern over her own inability to interpret them accurately. At the end of her ascent through the scale of tears, Margery's concern over the accuracy and truth of her revelations demonstrates that the human soul's journey toward God is a continual one that will only come to a close when the soul leaves her earthly body behind. In recording the narrative of her life for future audiences, she is anxious to relate only those "true" feelings, those revelations that will be of benefit to others. Such feelings are those that God has proven "true" through Margery's various trials, punishments, and experiences.

Book Two presents a chronological flashback to a point before her attainment of the upper levels of perfection on Catherine's scale of tears.⁸⁰ Depicting Margery's final

⁸⁰ In addition to the bulk of Margery's narrative the prayer recorded at the end of the book highlights, in Margery's own words, themes consonant with Catherine's text, that is, submission to God for the benefit of

pilgrimage to the continent in great detail, the last chapter of this short second book describes, upon her return to England, Margery's visit to the Bridgettine house of Syon, just outside London. The sequence at Syon is brief but, as mentioned at the outset of this study, the implications of such a visit are significant for a reading that seeks to delineate the influence of Catherine's treatise on Margery's text, especially after having now demonstrated in detail the structural parallels between them. The proposition remains: if Margery once visited Syon Abbey in order to worship and to receive spiritual pardon and comfort, might she not also have encountered the *Orchard of Syon* during her brief stay or perhaps during another subsequent visit left unrecorded in her text? The evidence seems to favor such a scenario and, in order to illuminate further the parallel themes between Margery's text and Catherine's scale of tears, the final chapter of this study will examine contemporary readings of both works as evidenced by the marginalia in the surviving manuscripts. If the scale of weeping were instrumental in framing Margery's spiritual experiences as they are recorded in her book, contemporaries reading and annotating Margery's text highlighted themes and concepts that correlate with the structure and flow of Catherine's schema. The reception of Margery's book by medieval readers seems tacitly to highlight the scale of tears within her text.

Chronology	Level of Tears	Chapter Numbers in <i>BMK</i>
6	Tears of Fire	88-89
5	Tears of Sweetness (Perfect)	75-87
4	Tears of those who have lost all self-interest (Perfect)	28-74
3	Tears of those who begin to serve God (Imperfect)	5-27
2	Tears of Fear (Imperfect)	3-4
1	Tears of Damnation	1-2

Table 2: Margery's Ascent through the Scale of Tears by Chapter for Book One.



one's neighbors and the desire to serve as a spiritual example for them. See, for instance, *BMK*, 249, lines 4-34.

CHAPTER V

RECEPTION AND REACTION: *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

British Library Additional MS. 61823, better known as *The Book of Margery Kempe*, is a work that by the end of the fifteenth century seems to have resided at Mount Grace Priory in Yorkshire, judging by the bilingual annotation on the verso of the binding leaf before the first folio that reads “Liber Montis Gracie. This boke is of Mountegrace.”¹ Discovered by Hope Emily Allen in 1934, it had been in the family of Colonel William Erdeswick Ignatius Butler-Bowden since at least the eighteenth century, and most likely a good long while before that. One hundred and twenty-four paper leaves in eleven gatherings, perhaps of Dutch provenance, make up the entirety of the manuscript, with the exception of a letter dated 1440 from a papal notary to a vicar of Soham, Cambridgeshire, which is bound in at the end.² Light and portable, the book is today, with its well-worn, grayish exterior, imbued with a decidedly soapy odor, slightly acrid yet nonetheless of a pleasant sort.³ And as it survives, the work appears to be a faithful copy of the second scribe’s original manuscript, made by one Salthows (certainly a man from Norfolk, based on the dialect of the text),⁴ who left his name near the bottom

¹ The standard description of the manuscript, including the marginalia, is found in Meech’s introduction to the *BMK*, xxxii-xlvi. I rely on both his work and my own observations of BL Additional MS. 61823 for what follows. For the notice of ownership, see *BMK*, 1.

² For more on the letter, see *BMK*, xlv-xlv and 351-2.

³ Meech relates the dimensions of the MS. as follows: “The leaves are about eight inches high and a little less than six inches wide” (xxxiii). There is no doubt that one could easily carry the book around for a long period of time without fatigue as it is compact and fits the hand well. This portability supports the notion that the MS. was intended to be lent to readers outside of Mount Grace. See 151-2 following.

⁴ I am indebted to Prof. Paul Johnston for this observation. Meech discusses the linguistic structures of the *BMK* in his introduction, vii-xxxii. He argues that “Margery Kempe had no influence on the orthography of her *Book*; that the first amanuensis’s spelling, inflections, and style were freely changed by the second to make them conform to his own standards; and that Salthows and any intermediate scribes made few changes” (*BMK*, ix). *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* maintains that the “language of [Salthows’s] version is very consistent internally and is undoubtedly of Norfolk, though it may not be from King’s Lynn” (1:103). See *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, ed. Angus McIntosh, M.L. Samuels, Michael Benskin, et al., 4 vols. (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986). Meech observes

of f.123r. While in the text itself we are told that the second scribe began his work in the mid-to-late 1430s (6, lines 21-24, and 221, lines 7-12), Salthows likely completed his copy sometime in the latter half of the following decade, not long before 1450.⁵

Perhaps the most striking features of the manuscript are, however, four sets of marginal notations, the latest and most prolific of which (written by a man to whom scholars refer as the “red ink annotator”) Meech has dated to the late fifteenth or, more likely, early sixteenth century. His annotations accompany those of the three other readers; one who used large, now faded brown letters, another who employed an ink so dark as to be nearly black, and a final one who left small letters in ink of a brownish hue. The red ink annotator comments not only upon the text of Margery’s book itself, but upon the notations of the other three readers. He draws attention to the opening of chapters and to perceived orthographical oddities; he highlights moments of heightened importance in the narrative, often by modeling for his reader an appropriate response to the situation at hand.⁶ The red ink annotator clarifies matters of potential difficulty,⁷ and

that Salthows may have even come from the town of Lynn itself, viii and xxxiii. Further studies on the language of the *BMK* include Dolores González-Alvarez and Javier Pérez-Guerra, “Profaning Margery Kempe’s Tomb or the Application of a Constraint-Grammar Parser to a Late Middle English Text,” *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 9, no. 2 (2004): 225-51; Inna Koskenniemi, “On the Use of Repetitive Word Pairs and Related Patterns in *The Book of Margery*,” in *Style and Text: Studies Presented to Nils Erik Enkvist*, ed. Hakan Ringbom, et al., 212-18 (Stockholm: Sprakforlaget Skriptor, 1975); Liliana Sikorska, “‘Hir Not Lettyrd’: The Use of Interjections, Pragmatic Markers and Whan-Clauses in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *Placing Middle English in Context*, ed. Irma Taavitsainen, et al., 391-410 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000); Shozo Shibata, “Notes on the Vocabulary of *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *Studies in English Grammar: A Miscellany in Honour of Takano Otsuka*, ed. Kazuo Araki, 209-20 (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1958); Alfred Reszkiewicz, *Main Sentence Elements in “The Book of Margery Kempe”: A Study in Major Syntax* (Wrocław, Poland: Zakład Narodowy, 1962); and Amy Moreno, *The Language of “The Book of Margery Kempe”: Analysis of the Relative Clause Structure* (master’s thesis, Arizona State University, 2002).

⁵ The date for the manuscript is based on paleographic evidence coupled with a datable watermark found in three of the eleven gatherings (numbers nine, ten, and eleven). See *BMK*, xxxiii-xxxiv.

⁶ A particular instance in which the annotator has drawn attention to the separation of chapters, and one that Meech has noted, is found in chap. 18. The chapter ends with a story of a widow who rebuffs Margery while chap. 19 deals with two other doubting widows. The annotator has placed a red “C,” the mark that he generally uses to highlight the beginning of a chapter, at the outset of the story that ends chap. 18, in the middle of the outer margin (see f.22v, *BMK*, 45n1). Even though it is clearly a new section of narrative, the

he creates a marginal index of major episodes that could be easily referenced by a reader searching for a particular scene, concept, or expression. This latest annotator is our ever-present guide, carefully underscoring the most important elements of the narrative and of Margery's spiritual journey so as to assure they will not be lost upon anyone who has come to ponder them. This man's identity is uncertain, but scholars (including Meech) think that he was a member of the community at Mount Grace. Tantalizingly, he makes several references to the mystical experiences of monks at the priory (John Norton and Richard Methley) that parallel or corroborate Margery's own.⁸ Though wherever he was located, he was undoubtedly what Kathryn Kerby-Fulton refers to as a "professional reader," that is,

someone whose job it is to prepare a text for the reading public, someone whose job description (supervisory scribe, corrector, annotator, editor, illustrator) allows him to filter the text for presentation to the patron or reading community.⁹

beginning of chap. 19 specifically lacks one of these "chapter marks"—something which as of yet no one seems to have noted. The annotator most certainly intended to join the end of chap. 18 with the two tales of obstinate widows that make up chap. 19, as Meech had tentatively suggested in his footnote (45n1).

⁷ Note, for instance, an episode in chap. 42 wherein Margery is depicted walking through the fields of "Medylborwgh" with "men of hir owyn nacyon" (101, lines 5 and 14). In the manuscript the original line informs us that Margery had gone into the fields "to sportyn hir" but the annotator has crossed out the offending verb and replaced it with "refresse" in the outer margin (f.49v, 101n1). Apparently, he wanted to be sure that there were no doubts as to Margery's intentions in wandering alone in a field one Friday afternoon, accompanied by "men of hir owyn nacyon"—this is not illicit pleasure and there can be no doubt that Margery is not engaged in a serious spiritual activity. On a more subtle note, he inserts words to clarify context such as in chap. 49, when he adds a name to the margin, linked by means of a caret to the word "sone" (i.e., son), to emphasize the identity of a person with whom Margery is interacting (f.57r, BMK, 117, line 33, n4).

⁸ BMK, 29n3, line 17; 68n7, line 31; 174n5, line 19. For Meech's assertion that the red ink annotator resided at Mount Grace, see xxxvi. See also 152 following. Kelly Parsons supports Meech's assertion. See Parsons, "The Red Ink Annotator of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and His Lay Audience," in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo, 143-216 (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria Press). Parsons includes with her study the first complete appendices of the annotations in the BMK, updating and at times correcting Meech and Allen's original work. *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* notes that the language of the marginal annotation in BL Additional MS. 61823 is of the North Midlands, 1:103.

⁹ Kerby-Fulton, "The Medieval Professional Reader and Reception History, 1292-1641," introduction to *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work*, 8.

As Kelly Parsons has convincingly argued, Mount Grace was in the habit of lending books out to the laity, and the annotator deliberately prepared Additional MS. 61823 for use outside the monastery, specifically for use by women.¹⁰ Building extensively on Meech's early observations, Parsons has even posited an identity for this assiduous reader so fond of red ink who not only annotated but rubricated, edited, and corrected the manuscript:

[T]he *Book* appears to have arrived at Mount Grace unrubricated, and all marks in red ink seem to have been made by one man alone. Who was the red ink annotator? It seems likely that he was either a prior or a vicar of Mount Grace, in office in the sixteenth century, perhaps just before the time of the dissolution. If the annotations referring to Methley and Norton in the past tense imply they were both dead at the time the annotations were written, then the red ink would have been added between c.1528 and the suppression of Mount Grace in 1539. John Wilson was prior of Mount Grace at the time of the dissolution in 1539, and had occupied that office for at least the preceding ten years and perhaps as many as twenty years. It could be, therefore, that Wilson was prior immediately following John Norton, making Wilson a promising candidate for the red ink annotator. (154)

Meech felt that the rubrication and perhaps some additional punctuation were added before the various marginal notes, sketches, and highlightings (*BMK*, xxxvii). Kerby-Fulton verifies this, noting that two batches of red ink were used on the manuscript, indicative of multiple annotating sessions.¹¹ Yet no matter who he was and no matter how long it took him to mark up the text before him, the red ink annotator was interested in carefully presenting those portions of the narrative that he felt were of greatest import,

¹⁰ See Parsons, "The Red Ink Annotator," 143-58.

¹¹ See Kerby-Fulton, "Professional Reader and Reception History," 8n6. Dr. Elizabeth Teviotdale has informed me that the use of red ink for marginal annotation is somewhat uncommon. While one might suggest that the use of red ink was, in the case of Margery's text, deliberately intended to attract attention, and it certainly does, Dr. Teviotdale has noted that since red ink was also used for the initials in the manuscript, it may have been used for the marginalia simply because it was at hand.

of highest interest to specific later readers, and which highlighted Margery's legitimate spiritual progress.¹²

MARGINALIA: THE RED INK ANNOTATOR AND MARGERY'S SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

A careful examination of the marginal annotations within BL Additional MS.

61823 reveals a distinct interest on the part of the annotators, specifically the last of them, in Margery's spiritual growth. Both of the readers using brown ink, and especially the red ink annotator, are careful to draw the attention of later readers to significant scenes and action in the story. The red ink annotator is particularly fond of placing many of his notes within a decorative "scroll" (or to borrow Parsons' phraseology, "a partial 'cartouche'-like line-drawn box") (165). These notations immediately seize the eye not only by virtue of their color, but by their conspicuous presence in the wide margins, and they must have been intended to serve later readers as a reference or index to particular sequences of interest. Large and blocky in nature, the "scrolls" generally contain a word or phrase that summarizes the narrative action in whose margin they reside. Chapter eleven, for instance, the famous sequence in which Margery debates her vow of chastity with John, is signaled in the manuscript by the word "vow" in the inner margin, bounded on three sides by red lines (f.12r, *BMK*, 23, line 36, n2). In chapter fifty-two, when on trial before Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York, Margery relates an edifying parable of a bear and a pear tree. The beginning of the scene is carefully noted by one of the brown ink hands with the word "narracio" in the outer margin, highlighted in a red box or "scroll." Just below it, the red ink annotator has clarified the earlier reader's notation by an explicit

¹² Kerby-Fulton notes that the annotator "is after the stimulation of 'interiority' or 'internal progress'" (see "Professional Reader and Reception History," 10; see also n8).

reference to Margery's moral tale, adding the phrase "of þe preyst & þe pertre" (f.61r, *BMK*, 126, line 24, n5).¹³

Beyond this basic indexing, the red ink annotator takes specific care to guide his reader through the text. On a pragmatic level, he is certain to direct the reader when chronological issues become especially important to the narrative. At the end of chapter sixteen, when the text instructs the reader to skip to chapter twenty-one before proceeding to seventeen, the red ink annotator has not only inserted the opening words of chapter twenty-one in the space immediately following the end of chapter sixteen, but he has drawn two large marginal flourishes indicating where the reader is to leave off and where he or she is to resume. The first flourish is inserted between the end of chapter sixteen and the large rubric "O" that begins seventeen. It is something of an arrow, a sideways "V" pointing into the center of the book, within which "V" is contained a small red circle. The other, nearly identical flourish occurs next to the rubric capital "I" with which chapter twenty-one begins.¹⁴

The annotator also uses "scrolled" text to explain Margery's behavior and to demonstrate acceptable responses to it. In this regard, that is, modeling responses for the reader, the red ink annotator serves a role not unlike Margery's scribes. For instance, in chapter fourteen, when God counsels Margery to accept His gift of tears meekly and to

¹³ There are many other examples of this sort of referencing or indexing within the manuscript. In chap. 56, when Margery develops a sickness that lasts the better part of eight years, the red ink annotator has added the word "seyknes" to the outer margin, and he has enclosed it within a "scroll." See f.66v, *BMK*, 137, line 20, n2. Soon thereafter, when Margery has been prevented from receiving communion with the rest of the congregation because of her disruptive wailing, the annotator adds "Abundance of loue" in the outer margin, completing the notation with a "scroll" to enclose the words. See f.67r, *BMK*, 138, lines 32-33, n4. The abundance to which he refers is directly mentioned in the text at 138, lines 32-33.

¹⁴ Meech does not note these flourishes and Parsons catalogues them in her first appendix—along with several other sketches found in the manuscript—tentatively as a "tears or weeping" symbol. See Parsons, "Red Ink Annotator," 169 and 170. Neither appear to note that these flourishes are an additional guide to the reader.

suffer patiently when He chooses to withdraw them, the annotator has added “meykly & paciently,” enclosed in a “scroll,” in the outer margin (f.15v, *BMK*, 31, line 1, n1). Not only is this descriptive of the current narrative action, but it is instructive in that the same approach, meek and patient, should be utilized by those who would understand Margery’s eccentric conduct. He endorses the responses of specific characters within the narrative as well, offering them up as examples for the reader to follow. The kindly priest who in chapter fifty-eight invites Margery into his home and who has patiently endured her crying is labeled by the red ink annotator as a “good preyst” in the outer margin of folio 69v (*BMK*, 143, line 15, n1). On the other hand, he condemns the actions and responses of others who claim, like the priest in chapter thirty-four identified by the annotator as “A proud prist,” that Margery is possessed by a Devil and not a recipient of divine locutions (f.42r, *BMK*, 85 line 11, n1). The red ink annotator notes sequences in the drama and, in addition, explains Margery’s behavior with phrases like “ebrietas *sancta*” and “Amor *impaciens*,” both enshrined in red “scrolls” to attract the eye (f.48r, *BMK*, 98, line 29, n2, and f.72v, *BMK*, 149, line 33, n3).¹⁵ Observe that this reference to “impatient love” might even be intended to describe and to admonish the behavior of the Grey Friar himself, who, in this episode, is impatient with Margery’s tears during his sermonizing. In response to the Grey Friar’s intolerance, her friends ask him to be patient because in their words, “Sche may not withstand it [her crying]” (149, line 35). The annotator here inserts a marginal note reminding the reader of the power of the Holy Spirit and humankind’s relation to it: “*Non est in hominis potestate prohibere spiritum s[anctum];*”

¹⁵ See f.54r, 111, line 10, n5, and f.71v, 146, line 18, n2. He points out similar behavior in chap. 17, with the remark, “feruent loue,” during Margery’s visit to Richard Caister, Vicar of St. Stephen’s. See f.20r, 40, line 6, n1.

or, “It is not in the power of man to restrain the Holy Spirit” (149n4).¹⁶ With this statement, the annotator places the origin and power of Margery’s tears above the authority of this earthly preacher. Another reference made by the red ink annotator to “amor impaciens” is in chapter forty-five (f.52v, *BMK*, 107, line 35, n3). In this instance the annotation, undoubtably made in response to Margery’s behavior, appears when she exclaims “I dey, I dey,” after having seen the Eucharist born about on Corpus Christi Day. Furthermore, the red ink annotator also directly points out references to the “fyre of loue” made within the narrative.¹⁷

The fact that some of his notes are in Latin and that others are in English could insinuate anticipation of different readers for the text on the part of the annotator. Perhaps his Latin annotations were intended for the priest who would read the text aloud, guiding him or even prodding him to expand on the material within the narrative for the benefit of those to whom he read. There are, by contrast, annotations in English that seem to address matters that could not wait for priestly explanation, if not explication. While the response of the friar in chapter sixty-one to Margery’s behavior is understandable (at least at first), there can be no doubt that Margery’s outbursts are by their nature mysterious and potentially disturbing to a private lay reader. These must be explained quickly, or at least authorized by reference to the proven experience of professed religious. Thus the annotator reminds the reader of Carthusians, Richard Methley and John Norton, who understood the Passion of Christ in terms not unlike Margery herself, when, for instance, she experienced mystical fervor atop Calvary (f.33v,

¹⁶ Translation is my own.

¹⁷ See f.54r, 111, line 10, n5, and f.71v, 146, line 18, n2. He points out similar behavior in chap. 17 with the remark “feruent loue,” during Margery’s visit to Richard Caister, Vicar of St. Stephen’s. See f.20r, 40, line 6, n1.

BMK, 68, line 31, n7). In chapter seventy-four, when Margery tends to the leprous woman so vexed by her fear of the Devil that she dares not openly profess her faith in God, the annotator boldly declares her plight “A sotel & a sore temptacion” and announces that “In sicke a case we shold be more strange & bold a-ga[n]ste *our* gostly enmy” (f.86v, *BMK*, 177, line 17, n2). These sorts of annotations provide the lay reader, and especially one who reads in private, with the necessary information and support to accept and understand not only Margery’s potentially problematic experiences, but those of the people with whom she interacts.

There are also a variety of marginal sketches inserted by the red ink annotator to aid the reader’s comprehension and response. Some of the most famous include the three bleeding hosts at Wilsnack on f.112r and the Virgin’s smock on f.115r in Book Two.¹⁸ In addition, the annotator has inserted a variety of distinctively heart-shaped images whenever the narrative turns to a discussion of Margery’s own heart. This occurs a total of five times.¹⁹ In the Proem, one of these hearts appears, enclosing the sacred monogram, “IHC.” The text here references the inability of many of Margery’s contemporaries to perceive the inspiration of God working in her soul; the drawing literally depicts Christ’s presence within her heart.²⁰ Another heart (this one sporting three small “antennae”) appears in chapter thirty-six, when God reminds Margery that He

¹⁸ See *BMK*, 232, line 10, n1, and 237, line 36, n2, respectively. Kerby-Fulton maintains that many of the drawings in the manuscript are “mnemonic devices, meant to enhance the laborious process of memorization” (9). See Kerby-Fulton, “Professional Reader and Reception History.”

¹⁹ Parsons lists a sixth occurrence, cataloging the sketch tentatively as a “leaf or heart symbol.” (See Parsons, “Red Ink Annotator,” 184). However, given the fact that this particular sketch is not readily identifiable as a heart, especially when compared to the other five hearts drawn in the margins, and given the fact that there is no mention of Margery’s heart in the narrative at this point, I do not think that this sketch is to be counted among the drawings of hearts made by the annotator. For the drawing in question, see f.97r, *BMK*, 199, line 20. Meech does not note it.

²⁰ See f.2r, 3, line 3, n1. Compare the sentiments highlighted by this sketch to God’s statement to Margery in chap. 14 that “I am an hyd God in þe” (30, lines 26-7).

accepts her good intentions in place of good deeds, no doubt highlighting the value of intention over action, a sentiment that Catherine's treatise often repeats. Christ here asks Margery only for her "hert" and the love it represents.²¹ Another marginal heart has been sketched by the annotator in chapter sixty-five, drawing the reader's attention to God's assertion that "Dowtyr, I haue drawe þe lofe of þin hert fro alle mennys hertys in-to myn hert."²² The final two instances of marginal hearts, both occurring near the close of Book One, are drawn with a single red dot within them, not unlike the "bleeding" hosts of Wilsnack in Book Two.²³ These last two hearts appear in chapters eighty-six and eighty-eight, both in reference to a declaration made by God to the effect that Margery has good cause to love Him. What is more, both of these heart drawings highlight God's assertion that Margery should give her heart to Him so that He may reside within her.²⁴ In the second and final of these instances, God declares specifically to Margery that when she relinquishes her heart to Him, He in turn will "ʒeuyn þe þer-a-geyn al myn hert."²⁵ These episodes, especially the latter one, no doubt resemble Catherine's own "heart exchange" with God, related by Raymond in the *vita*.²⁶

Equally important to the current study as these marginal sketches, and an element of the red ink annotator's work that has not been closely considered elsewhere, is the assortment of often solitary "nota" marks scattered throughout the manuscript.²⁷ To

²¹ See *BMK*, 90, line 30, n3.

²² See *BMK*, 161, lines 13-4, n3.

²³ For the hosts at Wilsnack, see 157 and n18 above.

²⁴ See f.102v, 211, lines 26-31, n2 and f.106r, 218, lines 30-6, n3.

²⁵ See 218, lines 33-4.

²⁶ Raymond records this sequence, in which God swaps hearts with Catherine at her request, in the second part of the *vita*. See Capua, *Life of St. Catherine*, 165-70.

²⁷ Parsons includes them in her appendices, but she does not comment on them at any length. The "nota" mark is essentially a lowercase letter "n" with a long, flourished tail. Officially known as "nota bene" marks, these are distinguished by Parsons from actual abbreviations of the phrase "nota bene," which the annotator also uses occasionally.

attempt an evaluation of them all is far beyond the scope of the present work, yet a few words about their relation to Margery's spiritual progress are definitely in order. Perhaps the first of these "nota" marks to which attention should be turned is in chapter twenty-one. God explains to Margery that wives, especially those who would live chastely if they were able to do so, can be as equally pleasing to Him as any maiden, so long as they strive to do His will. He elaborates, saying that

þow þe state of maydenhode be mor *parfyte* & mor holy þan þe state of wedewhode, & þe state of wedewhode mor *parfyte* þan þe state [of] wedlake, 3et dowy I lofe þe as wel as any mayden in þe world. (49, lines 4-8)

The annotator places his "nota" near the word "maydenhode," drawing attention to the various stages of perfection available to women who seek to pursue God's will.

Interesting is the fact that Margery herself, over the course of the narrative, progresses through these particular stages in a backwards fashion. At first a wife, she is made something of a "widow" in her mutual vow of chastity with John, and finally she becomes a holy maiden of Christ, draped in the white clothes of chaste "virginity." The notions that underscore Catherine's scale of tears and the soul's ascent to God—patience, perseverance, spiritual insight, and selfless charity—are often subtly highlighted by the annotator's many "nota" marks. Although the notion that the annotator was hoping, specifically and discretely, to elucidate Catherine's schema within Margery's text seems rather untenable, his annotations often do underline Margery's spiritual growth. In chapter twenty-seven, Margery expresses to the pope's legate fear of Devilish deceit in her visions, fears which the legate then attempts to assuage. The annotator has left a "nota" in the outer margin pointing out Margery's dread of "jllusyons & deceytys," indicating by the proximity of the legate's response within the text that Margery's fears

are unfounded and ought to be let go (f.31r, *BMK*, 63, line 12). In the following chapter twenty-eight, Margery's weeping atop Calvary inspires her scribe to launch into a short diatribe against those who weep for ephemeral and worldly goods. The annotator has noted this crucial matter at a point in Margery's spiritual journey where she has achieved perfection at the fourth level of weeping. He places his mark so as to highlight the final portion of the scribe's invective, where his tirade is directed against those who experience the deaths of friends and cannot restrain themselves from mourning overlong:

No dowt but þei xulde boþe cry & rore & wrekyng hem 3yf þei myth, & ellys men wold sey þei wer no frendys. Alas, alas, for sorwe, þat þe deth of a creatur which hat oftyn synned & trespasyd a-geyn her Maker xal be so vnmesurably mornyd & sorwyd. & it is offens to God & hyndryng to þe sowlys on eche syde. And þe compassyfe deth of owyr Savyowr, be þe which we arn alle restoryd to lyfe, is not had in mende of us vnworthy & vnkende wretchys, ne not we wylle supportyn owyr Lordys owyn secretarijs which he hath indued wyth lofe, but rapar detractyn hem & hyndryn hem in as mech as <w>e may. (ff.34v-35r, *BMK*, 71, lines 4-15)

Here the annotator, in drawing attention to the scribe's rant, is not only directing the reader to reconsider his or her own attachment to worldly things but to accept and understand the high level of grace that Margery has now attained. His "notae" point up spiritual progress throughout the manuscript.

Further instances are found in both chapters twenty-one and thirty-six, when the annotator takes specific care to highlight God's statement that His main concern is not what a person is, but what he or she will become through the pursuit of His will.²⁸

When God announces to Margery His desire that she has no will but His own, and that He will reward Margery by giving her immediate residence in heaven upon her death, the

²⁸ See f. 24v, *BMK*, 49, lines 20-1, n3, and f.44r, *BMK*, 90, lines 14-4. Meech observes that the first of these two "notae" is made in brown ink, although he fails to note that it is also "scrolled" in red ink with a line drawn to the text, highlighting the phrase "I take non hede what a man hath ben, but I take hede what he wyl ben" (49, lines 20-1). Meech does not note the second of these marks at all.

annotator has not failed to mark the passage.²⁹ He has here used a “nota” mark and a curious symbol noted by neither Meech nor Parsons, but one that occurs periodically throughout the manuscript. It is a set of two dots set atop one another, in a manner not unlike a colon. Immediately next to and in between these dots is a third dot with a short tail that curves distinctively downward while winding away from the other two dots and toward the text to its right. The dots form the outline of a lopsided triangle, from the “apex” of which extends the tail.

The annotator further emphasizes in other places the need of the individual to subsume his or her own will into God’s, humbly and patiently, if they hope to approach divine union.³⁰ Here, he has actually drawn to the words “mekenes” and “pacyens,” a pair of lines that extend and converge in a small circle at the uppermost margin (the words are in the first line of text near the top of the folio). Within the rough triangle formed by these converging lines, the annotator has left three small, ascending dots. This sort of image seems to appear when Margery is experiencing, praying for, or discussing direct inspiration or intervention from God. Perhaps the three dots indicate the Holy Trinity descending into Margery’s soul?³¹ This sort of sequence in the text might be considered a moment of divine intervention, and there are others as well. For instance, a red, three-headed and three-dotted flourish (not unlike the sort discussed on 153 and n13 above) in the bottom margin of f.104v that has its apex between the words “wrytyng” and

²⁹ See ff.76r-v, *BMK*, 156-7, lines 30-7 (n3) and 1-20. The annotator’s mark highlights the sentence that begins in the middle of line 30 on 156 in *BMK*: “Than þe sayd creatur seyð vn-to owr Lord. . . .”

³⁰ See ff.57v-58r, *BMK*, 119-20, lines 35-6 and 1-9.

³¹ For other examples see chap. 18, where a pie-shaped image containing three dots is drawn in the outer margin when Julian of Norwich is explaining to Margery that the Holy Spirit weeps for every Christian soul before God (f.21v, *BMK*, 43, line 3), and also chap. 22. At the point wherein God reminds Margery that He has promised her no Purgatory other than the earthly slander of her detractors, there is a triangular flourish of two prongs containing three small adjacent circles in the lower margin pointing to the sentence that begins God’s reminder to Margery (f.25v, *BMK*, 51, line 14). Meech notes neither of these two examples.

“for” (*BMK*, 216, line 19) appears to celebrate the power of God and His direct involvement at salient points in the narrative, specifically when Margery receives some sort of divine grace. A face is also drawn in red ink in the upper margin here (f.105r) at a point in the text where God is discussing the multitudes that will be turned to faith in Him through Margery’s book (*BMK*, 216n3). Faces drawn or redrawn by the red ink annotator also often occur, either marginally or as historiated initials, at points in the narrative where God’s power is seen to have a direct, powerful, or miraculous effect on earth. For example, in chapter forty-three, when God calms stormy seas through Margery’s prayers, in chapter sixty-seven, when Margery’s prayers bring a snowstorm to extinguish the fire in Lynn, and in chapter eighty-five, when Margery sees her name written in the Book of Life.³² One may, of course, argue that the faces in the historiated initial “O”’s are only intended to contrast with the “IHC” monogram that occurs in the remaining historiated “O”’s and, therefore, that these faces do not display any sort of discretion on the part of the rubricator/annotator with regard to the content of the story.³³ Hands, too, are drawn in the margins at points where God expresses His power directly to Margery—in chapters ten and twenty-two. In the first instance, God reminds Margery that she is in Him and that He is in her, and there is a hand drawn in the lower margin (f.11v) pointing to God’s powerful statement “I am.”³⁴ In chapter twenty-two, when Christ promises to take Margery’s soul to heaven with His own hands, the very ones once nailed to the cross, the annotator has sketched a hand in the inner margin, pointing to the text.³⁵ Besides these prominent episodes in which God interacts or converses with Margery in a significant or

³² See f.49v, *BMK*, 102, line 1, n1; f.79r, *BMK*, 162, line 29, n3; and f.100r, *BMK*, 206, line 27, n4.

³³ For the notion that the rubricator and the red ink annotator were the same individual, see 152 above.

³⁴ See *BMK*, 23, line 3, n1.

³⁵ See f.25v, *BMK*, 51n5, lines 29-33.

even miraculous manner, the annotator underscores Margery's continually growing charity for others and highlights the need to abandon worldly attachments if one seeks to pursue a holier life.³⁶ He uses the "notae" to point out sections in the text where God discusses the value of harboring good intentions and charity for others, even when the penitent cannot act upon such feelings.³⁷ The annotator emphasizes themes parallel to those that accentuate the progress of the *anima* up Catherine's scale of tears.

At one significant point, in chapter eighty-eight, the annotator even draws explicit attention to the concept, so important to Catherine's thought, of mental prayer.³⁸ Here God reassures Margery that by writing the book she pleases Him as much as, if not more so than, when she engages in any other holy activity. He further explains to Margery that He accepts her desire to suffer more reproofs for Him than she is actually able and commends her spiritual guides, specifically Robert Spryngolde and Aleyn of Lynn. The chapter closes with God reminding Margery to focus always on Him and to subsume her will into His. But when God begins to verify that Margery best understands herself and God when she engages in silent, contemplative prayer, the red ink annotator has scrawled the words "mentall praer" in the outer margin, using vocabulary that is a direct parallel of Catherine's own. He highlights the contemplative respite granted to Margery, a soul who has achieved Catherine's sixth level of weeping, that of the fiery spiritual tears, and who

³⁶ For charity toward others, see f.68v, *BMK*, 141, lines 11-26, n2 and n4. Margery here, in chap. 57, prays for mercy for the sins of others and asks God for a "welle of teerys" with which she might pacify His anger against the sinners of the world. The annotator has noted this with the phrases "*nota charitatem eius*" and "wel of ters." For the abandonment of worldly attachments, see f.85r, *BMK*, 174n7, lines 26-8. He highlights the following sentences in chap. 73 with an "asterisk" (set atop one in black ink): "Sche [i.e., Margery] felt many an holy thowt in þat tyme wech sche cowde neuyr aftyr. Sche had forȝetyn alle erdly thyngys & only ententyd to gostly thyngys."

³⁷ See f.99r, *BMK*, 204n2, lines 3-36. In this long section, wherein God discusses the rewards Margery will receive in Heaven for her good will and desire, the annotator has placed one "nota" mark (*BMK*, 204, lines 7-8) and one "*nota bene*," both in the outer margin, to draw the attention of the reader.

³⁸ See f.105r, *BMK*, 216n5, lines 22-6.

is now beginning to compose her narrative according to God's desire. This is a momentous phase to note in Margery's spiritual progress and, in fact, all of the sentiments in this penultimate chapter of Book One sum up the major elements of Catherine's tear schema quite succinctly. Apparently the red ink annotator has not failed to notice this.

MARGINALIA IN THE *ORCHERD*

In comparison to BL Additional MS. 61823, specifically in the matter of marginalia, the Harley *Orcherd* is rather inferior. While the manuscript as a whole contains a wealth of marginal flourishes or doodles, and sometimes small floral or facial sketches, nearly all of it has been completed with what appears to be lead point and therefore lacks the striking contrast of color that characterizes the annotation in Margery's book. Given the overall length of the *Orcherd*, only the marginalia in the section on tears (which is curiously the least annotated portion of the entire text) will be discussed briefly here. The marginal writings are often of a merely corrective nature, either in the original hand or that of a later reader, although sometimes they act as signposts to the content of the text, much as do the notations of the red ink annotator in Margery's book. The reader(s) who has/have left the various notations also seem to be interested in highlighting and drawing the attention of later readers to important points of Catherine's thought. Much of the marginalia, with the exception of that which appears between the two columns of text found on each folio, is located in the vertical ruling lines that were used to establish the *mise-en-page*. This results in marginal flourishes that, while clearly highlighting a given section of text, are often located some distance from it, sometimes nearer to the fore edge of the folio than to the writing itself. Many of the

marginal drawings are plant-like or organic in nature, adorned with leaves and tails, and are very often tripartite in design. In the section on tears, and also throughout the remainder of the manuscript, one of the most commonly repeated marginal sketches or symbols are a small paraph mark that resembles an uppercase letter “C” with a downward stroke running through its center, curving into a tail with a distinctive leftward hook beneath the main body of the mark. The other is a tripartite flourish consisting simply of three dots arranged in a triangular fashion and with a long, straight tail proceeding from the “base” of the triangle to some point beneath it, depending on how much of the text the annotator has chosen to mark.³⁹

The few marginal flourishes in the section on tears underscore some of the most important elements of the scale. The left-hand column of f.91r has a flourish highlighting the sentiment that the penitent soul must align her will with God’s and that patient and humble suffering is required to proceed along the path to divine union: “But sche schulde desire hem with a wille acoordinge **wip my wille. For opirwhile I wil not graunte her bodily teeris, bycause I wolde pat sche contynuede in lownesse and mekenesse afore me, taastyng me oftentymes wip** contynuel preyer and holy desier” (*Orcherd*, 201, lines 22-5).⁴⁰ A paraph mark situated between the two columns of text on f.91v emphasizes that the soul must provide God Eternal with the only infinite thing she possesses: affection and the desire for the salvation of souls. “**Panne bycause I am God eendelee**s, I wole be serued of 3ou wip þing infynyte and eendelee. And 3e haue noon opir þing þat is eendelee, but oonli 3oure affeccoun and 3oure desier of soulis” (203,

³⁹ Margery’s book contains flourishes similar to these just after the closing line of almost every chapter. They are generally if not always in the same ink as the main body of the text. The Harley MS. also contains what appear to be “nota bene” marks, although these are relatively few in number in comparison to the floral designs and small, tripartite flourishes.

⁴⁰ The bolded text here indicates the text in the manuscript most clearly distinguished by the marginal flourish.

lines 8-11). Another paraph mark near the right-hand column of f.94v highlights the beginning of God's warning that souls who do not abandon their inordinate worldly attachments and repent while still on earth will receive eternal sorrow (209, lines 13-22). A paraph mark on f.96r marks the beginning of God's explanation of the spiritual fruits garnered at the last stage of imperfect tears (i.e., the third level) in the left-hand column of text (211, line 33). Another notes the sentiment that the soul will suffer spiritual anguish in following God's will, much as Christ endured extreme pain during His Passion (f.97rb, *Orcherd*, 214, lines 9-10).⁴¹ Perhaps the most striking paraph mark emphasizes God's injunction to Catherine that she should transcend herself and "opene þe ize of þin intellecte for to se me" (f.99va, *Orcherd*, 218, line 29).⁴²

There are also two flourishes near the end of the section on tears, the first in the outer margin of f.100r; stressing the purpose of hardships God permits the soul to endure during her earthly existence: "And I 3af neuere þat lawe þat my resonable creature schulde be ouercome þerby, but rapir it schulde **be encreessid in vertu, and be preuyd in þe soule by vertu. For vertu is neuere prouyd but by þe contrarie**" (220, lines 1-4). Note that God here uses the term "creature," an appellation Margery is most fond of using when relating to herself. The final flourish accentuates God's reminder, the one that closes the section on tears, that souls offend Him by blinding themselves with their own inordinate loves: "Sich oon goop forþ as a blynd man, not knowynge þe cause of synne, which is his owne propre sensible loue, and 3it he hatith it not, **ne he cnowith nat vicis ne þe yuel þat folewip vicis**" (221, lines 2-5).

⁴¹ The end of the sentence preceding the one marked by the paraph mark is underlined: "and rizt swete sone, þe which suffride peyne."

⁴² The paraph mark is next to the words "seyde þus: O rizt dere, o rizt," which begin God's order to Catherine. Other examples of paraph marks in the section on tears can be found as follows: f.98vb, *Orcherd*, 217, line 7, and f.99vb, *Orcherd*, 219, line 8.

FINAL THOUGHTS: THE PRINTED EXTRACTS OF *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

The observable elements of Catherine's thought in Margery's narrative have now been considered at length. Furthermore, the manuscripts have been evaluated in such a way as to elucidate the manner in which medieval readers and annotators may have noted these same elements within Margery's text. And finally, the possible historical circumstances that could have allowed Margery to encounter Catherine's work have been explored. To comment briefly on the printed extracts of Margery's story that were the sole source of information about her life for the better part of four hundred years seems then the best way to conclude this study. The extracts from Kempe's book, probably compiled soon after the original text was finished,⁴³ were first printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1501, accompanied by a colophon announcing that "Here begynneth a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon taught by our lorde Ihesu cryste, or taken out of the boke of Margerie kempe of lynn."⁴⁴ Twenty years later, Henry Pepwell produced another edition, edited and reissued in 1910 by Edmund G. Gardner under the title *The Cell of Self-Knowledge*, which placed the portions taken from Margery's book alongside a collection of other devotional extracts—including material drawn from the Middle English translation of Catherine of Siena's *vita* (104).⁴⁵ In the first of these printed editions, originally issued as a quarto pamphlet of only seven pages, twenty-eight brief passages culled from the first book of Margery's narrative in what might initially seem to be random order depict the holy woman in a light very different from that of her complete

⁴³ See Foster, "A *Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon: The Book of Margery Kempe* in its Early Print Contexts," 100.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Foster, 95.

⁴⁵ Edmund G. Gardner, *The Cell of Self-Knowledge* (New York: Cooper Square, 1966). Gardner's title is derived from Catherine's declaration that the only cell in her life would be the cell of self-knowledge. See Foster, 104.

text.⁴⁶ The extractor—perhaps Robert Spryngolde, Margery’s parish priest and confessor⁴⁷—has, in fact, painstakingly assembled the various extracts in such a way as to establish an exchange between Margery and God, in which Christ instructs her on the issue of attaining spiritual perfection and in which exchange Margery’s voice is greatly diminished by comparison to her original narrative. These extracts are not presented in the order that they appear in the Salthows manuscript (Foster, 96-7). Sue Ellen Holbrook has identified among the twenty-eight passages five groups or clusters, each containing a particular focus or theme (28-9).⁴⁸ The first of these (passages one to ten) stresses Margery’s need to think always about Christ and to submit herself entirely to Him. The next cluster (passages eleven to fifteen) verify that “weeping is a sign of [Margery’s] intensified love and knowledge of Christ” (Foster, 97). Group three (passages sixteen through nineteen) underscore the importance of intention over action, a prominent sentiment in Catherine’s thought (as well as, admittedly, the thought of other religious thinkers such as Augustine). The penultimate cluster (passages twenty and twenty-one) treat of God’s absolute pardon for all of Margery’s sins and the final cluster (passages twenty-two to twenty-eight) accentuates the need to suffer patiently for God’s love, another of Catherine’s most significant contentions. According to Foster, de Worde’s edition is

in essence, a brief, practical guide to the process of spiritual perfection, whereby Christ instructs Margery on approved orthodox modes of devotion. And, it must

⁴⁶ Foster points out that this rendition of Margery’s book is only about 1/18 the size of Additional MS. 61823. See Foster, 96. See also Sue Ellen Holbrook, “Margery Kempe and Wynkyn de Worde,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S., Brewer, 1987), 27-8.

⁴⁷ See Holbrook, “Margery Kempe and Wynkyn de Worde,” 38-40 and Foster, 100. C. Annette Grisé has also compared the printed extracts of Margery’s book to the work of continental holy women in “Holy Women in Print: Continental Female Mystics and the English Mystical Tradition,” in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VII*, 83-95.

⁴⁸ Foster revisits these five groupings on 97. See Foster, “*A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon: The Book of Margery Kempe* in its Early Print Contexts.”

be noted, the approved modes of devotion, while drawing on the mystical tradition, are singularly private modes: prayer, contemplation, weeping tears of compunction, and the patient suffering of tribulation. (99)

Foster remarks that de Worde's edition was intended for distribution to a wide audience, possibly indicating a widespread knowledge of Margery's text and perhaps even a high degree of popularity (100-1). Given that only one full manuscript of the book survives and the strong possibility that the text was well known in its day, the extracts represent an attempt to recast the troublesome Margery in a light less disturbing than that of her original narrative. Was there a deliberate attempt to suppress the full-length version of Margery's book? Such an assertion is probably too far fetched, but it may be that the extracts served, if knowledge of the existence of Margery's story had become well-known enough, to address the lay community's prevalent interest in Margery by presenting a less problematic version of her. Foster and Holbrook have clearly indicated that the extracted versions of her text completely ignore Margery's violent outbursts at the same time that they privilege the voice of God and push Margery's to the periphery.⁴⁹ Perhaps then, the extracts serve a purpose not unlike the red ink annotator's various remarks, sketches, and "notae;" that is, to temper the text and guide the reader's encounter with it. In fact, Holbrook has observed that the interests of the red ink annotator and the person responsible for assembling the extracts had somewhat similar, although not identical, goals:

The annotations [the annotator] makes for passages corresponding to the extracts are characteristic of those he makes throughout the Salthouse manuscript. In short, had he been selecting extracts, he might have produced a version of the *BMK* dramatizing the enthusiastic devotion of a particular woman.

⁴⁹ See Holbrook, "Margery Kempe and Wynkyn de Worde," 29, and Foster, "*A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon: The Book of Margery Kempe* in its Early Print Contexts," 97.

Instead, moving assiduously back and forth in the full *BMK*, someone extricated and pieced together lines of guidance applicable in general to the contemplative life of unenclosed women, slanted towards encouraging them in a mystical process of perfection, but insisting on a private mode. (38)

The annotations in the full-length book attempt to explain and justify Margery's behavior and at the same time present her as an exemplary model of devotion. The printed extracts serve the same purpose but do so by deliberately excising those elements of Margery's religious fervor that would have been most likely to prove disruptive or problematic to the religious community at large.

Interestingly, when Pepwell issued his compilation of extracts in 1521, Margery's were placed immediately adjacent to the material taken from Catherine's *vita*.⁵⁰ What is more, he attached to Margery the title of anchoress, effectively placing her within the restrictive physical boundaries of the anchorhold—just as some of her hostile contemporaries had desired (Foster, 107).⁵¹ Foster sees the placement of the two texts together as a means of mutual reinforcement, as a way of demonstrating the similarities between them, and to point out their exemplary nature:

While all of the selections are meant as guides to inward devotion, Margery and Catherine also serve as exemplars, very concrete examples of women engaging in certain types of devotional practices and ways of religious living. This is not to say that they did not also speak to a male readership; however, one can imagine that women might have identified with these figures in a far more personal way, using them as very specific models for their own devotional practices. . . .

In being placed side by side in the collection, the Margery Kempe and Catherine of Siena pieces play off each other in a highly effective manner, each reinforcing the spiritual lessons and model of female piety presented in the other. (106-7)

⁵⁰ Pepwell essentially reissued de Worde's collection of extracts in a new context.

⁵¹ See also Gardner, *Cell of Self-Knowledge*, 49. Recall the monk in chap. 13 who declares his wish that Margery were "closyd in an hows of ston" (*BMK*, 27, lines 31-32).

Based on the comparison that has made up the bulk of this study, I would argue that when the full-length texts of both authors are placed alongside one another, the same interrelationship that Foster asserts is revealed. The importance of long, patient suffering and of an intense focus on God's will emerge from the extracts of Catherine's *vita*, the extracts of Margery's book, and from the full texts of their works as well:

In being placed side by side these works not only engage in a process of reinforcement, in which each reflects the values espoused in the other, but also in a process of affirmation whereby through the example of Margery Kempe, any similar doubts that the reader may have about the prescribed modes of devotion which they contain are quelled. (Foster, 109-110)

Whether we consider the original texts themselves, the marks left by later medieval readers upon them, or the extracts printed a short while after each work was completed, the influence of Catherine's system of tears seems apparent in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Margery's tears serve as her authorizing element; they often bring her into sometimes tense contact with the people of her community while at the same time setting her apart from them, all the while signaling an interior progression that coincides with the deliberate process of spiritual growth outlined in the *Orcherd*. In effect, it might be said that Margery's text lives for us only because she had the patience to reach the highest levels of Catherine's tearful scale, where her intense devotion was changed and channeled successfully into the writing of the *Book* (whether we maintain that such composition was exclusively the work of her own mind and pen or that it was an effort that required her to employ the skill of some priestly male scribes). The "tears of fire" serve as Margery's respite from restrictive physical eccentricities so as to focus her energy on composition, on *recording* the message and understanding she has attained

through her journey. Indeed, without Margery having reached this highest level of tearful perfection, we might not today have the exquisite record of her ascent as a whole.

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