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UMI
“A Merowr Amongys Hem”: An Examination of Female Piety in the Late Fourteenth- and Early Fifteenth-Century Norwich

By

Leigh Anne A. Pink

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research through the Department of History in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1997

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes female piety in the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-centuries (c.1370-1430) in England focusing on the area around Norwich. Norwich was one of the more prominent cities in England during the Middle Ages. It had a large population and well developed connections, both geographically and economically, with the continent and the Low Countries. Of particular interest, for the purpose of this study, was the piety of the laity in Norwich as expressed by the large number of hermits and anchorites in the area, as well as a community of religious lay women that resembled the Beguine movement on the Continent. In this area mystical writings, particularly by female authors appeared, and the Lollard movement, which accorded women spiritual authority, flourished. Norwich, in this period, functioned as a location in which many different religious movements appeared. In this sense, Norwich was not representative of the spiritual movements found in the rest of England. The extremes between the two social tensions, that of increased lay piety through mysticism and the fear generated by the Lollard heresy, can be examined through The Book of Margery Kempe and the Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31 (Norman P. Tanner, editor). The Book is the first autobiographical account written in English and tells the story of Margery Kempe (c. 1373-c. 1438), a laywoman who, after a spiritual visitation, devoted her life to God. The Book contains a wealth of material, both about its subject and about contemporary society. As a complementary source the Heresy Trials provide an account of pre-Reformation heresy accusations and the resulting trials. Supplementary to these writings is Julian of Norwich’s (1342- c. 14146) Revelations of Divine Love which provides readers with an account of her mystical revelations. This study examines the social, religious, intellectual and cultural milieu of Norwich in order to better understand its association with female piety. This paper examines the distinctive and complex nature of the city in order to determine why Norwich proved to be so receptive and instrumental in creating an atmosphere that accepted lay piety, particularly amongst women.
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- More commonly known, to me, as Mom and Dad.

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"A Merowr Amongys Hem": An Examination of Female Piety in Late Fourteenth- and Early Fifteenth-Century Norwich

“Janus-Faced”: Introduction

For take my word for it, there is no libel
On women that the clergy will not paint,
Except when writing of a woman-saint,
But never good of other women, though.
- The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,
The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer

Eileen Power, a pioneer in the study of medieval women’s history, once stated that

in both the ecclesiastical and aristocratic traffic of ideas the position of
women was perpetually shunted between pit and throne. In the views of
women, the Church paid little heed to the biblical injunction against halting
between two opinions. Janus-faced, it looked at woman out of every
sermon and treatise, yet never knew which face to turn on her.¹

This Janus-faced look at medieval women was strengthened by the fact that the majority of the
writings were produced by male authors. Medieval women rarely offered a written account of
their thoughts, feelings and activities. Consequently, what has been handed down to moderns
are male-authored texts. Works generated by women were often filtered through a male
amanaensis, creating modern debate over who was the true author of the text.² Since the early
studies by Eileen Power, the examination of the activities of medieval women has continued to
grow and develop.³ While Power initially contended that “It is clear the laity as a whole took
over with complacency the Church’s dogma of the subjection of women. historians have sought for evidence of women’s resistance to the status quo. The study of medieval women’s history continues to expand with new questions being considered. Most historians would, however, agree with Power’s claim that “a social position is never solely created by theoretical notions; it owes more to the inescapable pressures of daily life.” By placing the activities of medieval women in their milieu a more detailed account of their lives can emerge.

This type of study can be accomplished by focusing on regionalism and the construction of the individual’s “cultural web.” By narrowing the area of study to a select geographical district it is possible to examine the region more deeply or, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz would posit, more “thickly.” This concentration will assist the modern in understanding the heterogeneous nature of medieval society and will allow for the agency of individual choice in female activity. Norwich, in the later Middle Ages, provides the modern with an excellent opportunity to study the diversity of medieval women’s lives, particularly that of religious women. By examining women’s participation in both orthodox and heretical religious movements this thesis will demonstrate why such diversity of female piety flourished in the Norwich area.

Norwich was one of the more prominent cities in England during the Middle Ages, boasting a large population and connections, both geographically and economically, with the continent and the Low Countries. Of particular interest, for the purpose of this study, is the culture of lay piety in Norwich, as exemplified in the inordinate number of hermits and anchorites, as well as a community of religious lay women that resembled the Beguine
movement on the continent. In the Norwich area mystical writings, particularly by female authors, appeared. As well, the heretical Lollard movement, which accorded women greater spiritual authority, flourished. In this sense, Norwich was not representative of the spiritual movements found in the rest of England. Traditionally, historians have credited geography as the most significant factor in creating the rich religious climate of Norwich; however, this explanation may prove deceptively simple. It will be useful to examine the distinctive and complex nature of the city in order to determine why Norwich proved to be so receptive and instrumental in creating an atmosphere that accepted lay piety, particularly among women. In order to better understand the environment of the city and its association with female piety a study of the social, religious and cultural milieu of Norwich is particularly useful. One way to approach this is by an examination of continental and English movements of lay piety and how they were adapted and absorbed into the unique situation of Norwich.

Concurrent with the proliferation of mysticism was the rise in the Lollard heretical movement. This group, which allowed women greater religious freedom than the traditional orthodox outlets, found popular support in the Norwich area. An examination of this dissenting religious movement and its impact will clarify this group’s appeal and why they were able to establish support in the area. Obviously Norwich, in this period, functioned as a location in which many different religious movements appeared. As such, it needs further examination.

An examination of The Book of Margery Kempe and of the Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1248-31 illustrates the extremes between two social tensions, that of
increased lay piety through mysticism and the fear generated by the Lollard heresy. *The Book* is the first autobiography written in English and relates the life of Margery Kempe (c.1373-c.1438), a lay woman who, after a spiritual visitation, devoted her life to God. *The Book of Margery Kempe* contains a wealth of material, both about its author and about contemporary society. A complementary source are records of the Norwich heresy trials. These records illustrate how ecclesiastical authorities reacted towards the charges of heresy and the punishments that were imposed on the convicted heretics. In addition, the trials reveal information about the individuals accused and the Lollard movement in general. These texts can be supplemented with the work of Julian of Norwich. Little historical evidence remains about the life of Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1416) but her *Revelations of Divine Love* provides readers with an account of her mystical visions.

The religious climate of Norwich has been already been examined by the historian, Norman P. Tanner. Tanner's work, which spans the period 1370-1532, is a detailed account which, in his own words, "...is not principally concerned with the Church as an institution but rather with what Christianity meant to, and how it was practised by, the mass of Christians". Tanner's in-depth study draws mostly from surviving testamentary records which provide intriguing evidence for the existence of two communities of pious laywomen in the mid-fifteenth century. He notes that, although this is the only known account of such a community in England, the information provided is "...tantalizingly slight and barely extends beyond knowledge of their existence." Still, these groups provide further evidence of Norwich's unique connection to lay piety, female piety in particular. Tanner's work is
remarkable in its scope and is essential to any discussion of religious life in late medieval Norwich. Owing to the fact that Tanner's work discusses Norwich from the late fourteenth to early sixteenth century, however, it does not examine the nature of female piety as closely as it might. By focusing on a shorter period, c. 1370 - c. 1430, one which appears particularly conducive to women's religious activity, and a smaller number of individuals, it is hoped that a better understanding of Norwich's unique cultural climate will be gained. Further, by narrowing the focus to the topic of women this thesis will act as a supplement to Tanner's work, which encompasses the activities of the entire laity of Norwich.

The main focus of the research will centre on the life of Margery Kempe. Margery proved not only to be a problematic figure in her own time but continues to be a difficult figure for modern readers to assess. In her own lifetime Margery was labelled with such varied appellations as "heretic", "mother", "Lollard" and "holy woman". Even the terminology in her conversations with the Divine was diverse as Margery was variously cast in the roles of daughter, sister, wife and mother. So it is not surprising that historians are somewhat uncomfortable about how exactly to classify The Book of Margery Kempe. Consequently, historical writings on Margery appear almost to reflect the broad range of emotions evidenced by her own contemporaries, from the dismissive and suspicious to reluctant admiration tinged with scepticism. Because Margery is a difficult person for historians to categorize, she has alternately been labelled an ascetic, a social critic, a paramystic and, simply enough, mad. It is due to her ambiguity that Margery has become the source of such diverse studies and
interpretations, each one providing further insight on the medieval era. It is because she was, and is, such an interesting personality she has become a popular subject for historians.

Margery’s writing has been examined from the perspective of language and commerce by historians Sarah Beckwith, Deborah Ellis and Nona Fienberg. Their work and their continued emphasis on Margery’s mercantile interests reminds us that it is necessary to understand the prevailing economic climate in order to comprehend Margery Kempe. Wealth freed Margery from her husband and allowed her the freedom and resources to go on pilgrimages. Money presented both a problem and an escape for Margery. Consequently, it is the language of commerce that pervades the text and makes it imperative for the reader to understand the environment that shaped her prose.

Kempe has also been cast as a social critic by historians Lynn Staley Johnson and Nancy F. Partner. They believe that Kempe self-consciously crafted a text in which the main character, Margery, would distract readers from the true purpose of the work, social criticism. What should be considered is that contemporary mystics were active social critics, a fact that Johnson herself acknowledges. They were almost expected to provide a critique of society. While *The Book* should be read for evidence of dissent and criticism it should also be read for evidence of gender relations, economics, masculinity and social values, among a variety of issues. Margery’s *Book* contains so much information that it can be read in numerous ways and every reader will see something different within the text. It is doubtful that a consensus will ever be reached on the exact purpose of Margery’s writing. In this instance we are not
concerned so much with a consensus but with what the Book can tell us about Norwich and female piety.

In contrast to Margery as a social critic, Karma Lochrie and John Hirsh study Margery within a mystical and theological framework. Hirsh, in particular, concluded that, although she was not mad, she was a paramystic and, therefore, not quite a true mystic. Be that as it may, to confine Margery to merely a religious perspective, again, ultimately limits the opportunities that The Book provides to historians. Margery may have been writing "a schort tretys and a comfortabyl for synful wrecchys" but in that same treatise she offers historians with a wealth of information about contemporary urban society. To ignore the historical information of Margery's Book is to disregard the greater portion of her work. Margery's Book needs to be considered, as her own words suggest, as a "merowr" of her society. By understanding Margery Kempe we can extend our awareness of later medieval female piety.

Clarissa Atkinson provides the most encompassing analysis of the life and writings of Margery Kempe in her book Mystic and Pilgrim. Atkinson's examination provides an analysis of Margery Kempe while keeping her firmly grounded within the context of contemporary King's Lynn. Atkinson recognizes the importance of Margery's Book as "a witness, not a theological treatise" while realizing that "an author's stated intention is not to preclude all the other motivations, conscious and unconscious, that impelled her to write." The study seeks to demonstrates the necessity of maintaining the context in which Margery's Book was written. Atkinson's work is crucial to any study of Margery Kempe and her findings on Margery are useful for understanding the activities of other later medieval women.
Owing to the unique nature of both The Book and Margery herself, there may be an inclination to view Margery as one of the "exceptional" or "deviant" women of the medieval world. This perspective cannot be considered an appropriate classification of Margery in large part because there were other female mystics, including Julian of Norwich, who lived in close proximity to Margery. At first glance, Julian, who was actually Margery's predecessor, stands in sharp contrast to Margery. Julian's Revelations of Divine Love has long been viewed with open admiration by scholars of women's history, in part, because her work follows the more accepted form of medieval mystical writing whereby the author submerges her voice into that of the Divine.\textsuperscript{33} This differs greatly from The Book where Margery stands vividly in the forefront of her treatise, never allowing the reader to forget her presence. Some historians, such as Maureen Fries,\textsuperscript{34} believe that part of Margery's credibility problem is that she is often compared unfavourably to the rational and more pragmatic Julian. This may be due to many historians and theologians having used different criteria in their evaluation of mysticism. The term "mystic," as used in this study, denotes an individual who believed that she had received visions and/or messages from God.

While Margery is more often examined from a historical perspective, the works of Julian tend to be analyzed from a theological viewpoint. This is the result, perhaps, of the fact that very little information exists about Julian. Indeed, we do not even know if Julian was actually her name. Julian has received a great deal of attention from scholars who are interested in recovering women's "voices". Although biographical details are scarce, Julian is particularly celebrated for her development of the idea of "Jesus As Mother" and her
perception of the Fall. Her contributions as a mystical writer, her influences and her literary style have been a source of interest to authors such as Ritamary Bradley, Helen Phillips and Charles Cummings. Few, however, have attempted to provide a historical perspective on Julian.

One historical link arises from the assertions of orthodoxy Julian made for her visions. This has been a source of interest for Joan M. Nuth and, more recently, Nicholas Watson. Watson argues that Julian's claims of orthodoxy actually stem from England's home-grown heretical movement. Watson challenges the traditional dating of the texts and asserts that people should examine the work of Julian from a new perspective. He wants historians to realize "...that neither Julian nor her book was impervious to history" and by pushing the source and asking new questions of it we can possibly extract new information.

It must be recognized, however, that since Margery does provide the researcher with more information about contemporary medieval society, it is necessary to rely more on her writing than on the work of Julian. Margery's keen observations on human life will yield more insight than the self-effacement of Julian. Nonetheless, Watson's work on Julian should be kept in mind for, if the right questions are asked, perhaps the writing of Julian can provide us with more historical insight than can be discerned at first glance. It also highlights another characteristic that these two women share. They can both be easily dismissed but on different levels. Margery is suspended in the world between religion and literature and history, her hysteria detracts from her theological message and she is, therefore, dismissed. In contrast,
Julian's theological message stands fast while she is often excluded from historical examination.40

Maureen Fries offers an alternative to the theory that comparisons with Julian actually detract from Margery's credibility. She suggests that the solution to Margery's credibility is to examine her within the continental tradition of female mysticism. To Fries, Margery is more compatible with a mystic like Marie d'Oignies, one of Margery's acknowledged models, than with the recluse Julian.41 This comparative approach has been undertaken by historians like Julia Bolton Holloway42, Alexander Baratt43 and Nanda Hopenwasser44 and offers another perspective on the subject of Margery and her activities. Still, while it is true that Margery exhibits similar characteristics to that of the continental female mystics, it is also true that she and Julian share similarities. Julian's work should not be regarded as a measuring stick with which to examine Margery's literary calibre. The two works should be examined for what they are: complementary writings produced by female mystics, both of whom were products of Norwich society. This connection is furthered by the fact that both women not only knew of each other but also spent time together discussing spiritual matters, particularly the orthodoxy of Margery's tears. As well, both of these women may have experienced their visions while living in the world.45 Accordingly, since these women were products of the same milieu, it is productive to examine them together to see what the results will produce.

Gerda Lerner's understanding of the "clustering" of knowledge is helpful for assessing the manifestations of female piety in Norwich.46 This theory suggests that the example of Julian may have inspired Margery to enter into a religious life. This could be supported by an account
of their conversation as found in *The Book*. It is even possible that Margery initially patterned herself after Julian. The two women share many characteristics, such as their illness, their twenty years of meditation and their emphasis on the Passion. Margery remained so much a part of the secular world, however, that as she increased her knowledge of female mysticism, she adapted and absorbed new ideas which influenced her behaviour. Perhaps Margery's continental acquisitions were too much for the more conservative English climate. Her actions did not immediately inspire a further outpouring of female piety but, instead, suspicion of her own orthodoxy. Since her activities were met with misgiving, yet ultimately accepted, the climate in which she functioned needs to be examined. What this method allows for is the contemplation of Margery and Julian as part of the same environment, a mode of establishing the nature of the society that allowed for the development and encouragement of female “clustering”. Without the necessary social support these women would not have been able to realize their potential.

This comparative approach has been adopted by various historians, among them Lynn Staley Johnson⁴⁷ and Robert Stone.⁴⁸ When contrasted, it has usually been from a literary perspective and not as an attempt to explain why these two women opted for religious lives. Evidently, then, it remains to examine them as products of their milieu. To do so it is also necessary to consider Margery and Julian against the backdrop of unorthodox popular female piety, as witnessed by the development of the Lollard movement in East Anglia. This movement was also a product of the Norwich environment and the secular world that Margery and, at one point, Julian inhabited. Indeed, one of Margery's recurring problems was that she
was often mistaken for a Lollard. The Lollards also serve to remind us of the dynamism of the Middle Ages. They demonstrate that medieval society was neither static or homogeneous. The Lollards, along with Margery and Julian, provide evidence of a society fraught with contradictions.  

Further, the Lollard movement was founded by the laity and, as Gordon Leff has noted ironically, "in the Middle Ages the road to heresy was paved with piety...". Consequently, heresy was often an attempt to reform, not to destroy, the church. Traditionally, it has been argued that heresy, particularly for women, resulted from a feeling of exclusion from the main form of worship. Scholars in women's history initially proposed that women embraced the heterodox sects because the Christian Church condoned limited expressions of female faith. Historians such as John A.F. Thomson, Claire Cross and Shannon McSheffrey have examined the role of women in the Lollard movement. McSheffrey delves deeply into the subject matter and fleshes out the position of women in the Lollard communities. She argues that Lollardy was actually more attractive to men and that the women who joined the movement usually did so because they were related to male members. Far from inverting the established gender roles, the Lollards tended to maintain the status quo. McSheffrey's study is crucial to understanding women in Lollard communities and her work not only provides a more rounded look at women in Lollard communities but also reminds us of the importance of gender in women's history. It should be noted that, in theory, Lollardy offered women the opportunity to preach and in records of the heresy trials of Norwich, women do appear as strong recruiters for their faith.
Margery was often accused of being a Lollard. Her activities provide us with an idea of how Lollards were perceived in this period. More specifically, her example allows us to inspect the possible role of Lollard women and the threat they may have been perceived to pose. Margery serves to bridge the secular, as exemplified by the Lollards, and the religious, by Julian. She also brings together elements of the heterodox and the orthodox. Margery assists, as well, in connecting England with the continent, through her family, her religious practices and her pilgrimages. The paradox of her work results in the uneasy acceptance of the individual, not only by her own contemporaries but also by modern historians. Her work is rich in historical material and when combined with the heresy trials and Julian's *Revelations*, provides a source for information about women's religious activity in Norwich and the surrounding area.

In order to understand better the importance of these works a study of the social, religious and cultural milieu of Norwich will be particularly useful. A more complete comprehension of the culture allows us to understand the activities and writings of Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich and the Lollard women. This means recognizing the importance of the idea, as Clifford Geertz posits, that "culture is not a power ... it is a context, ... that is, thickly-described." 54 While realizing the importance of communal culture, moderns must also remain cognizant of individual choice in how these women expressed their preferred piety. Geertz's contention that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun" will help us to recognize that everyone creates his or her own cultural web, selecting and discarding elements as they appeal to them. 55 This approach allows us to confront medieval women directly, without the fear of being Janus-faced. Therefore, to provide a clearer
understanding of the works of these female authors, their writings must be placed within the broader framework of the secular life in Norwich. With a greater understanding of the area it will be possible to comprehend how Norwich created an atmosphere conducive to vibrant expressions of female piety.
CHAPTER ONE

"Let us say something about merchants’ wives": Regionalism and Religious Diversity

Y, Hawise Mone, the wyfe of Thomas Mone of Lodne of your diocesee, your subject, knowyng, felyng, and undirstandyng that before this tyme Y have be right hoomly and privie with many heretikes, knowyng (thaym) for heretikes

-Hawise Mone, Heresy Trials

Despite earlier images of a monolithic Christian Church in the Middle Ages, more recent historical studies have demonstrated that the Church was more varied than originally perceived. In fact, historians have successfully shown that the church was indeed rich in religious diversity. Norwich, with its surrounding area, provides an interesting case study for historians to examine the multi-faceted nature of later medieval religious life. As Norman P. Tanner has persuasively argued, the concept of regionalism should be taken into consideration when evaluating the contemporary religious climate. He has applied this framework to Norwich, which he believes “...acted as the capital of this (area’s) regional church.”1 This notion of regionalism assists in explaining the unique climate of Norwich, particularly its acceptance and encouragement of female piety. Tanner’s work clearly demonstrates that Norwich provided its population with a liberal religious life that may explain why the Lollard movement failed to attract a significant following in the city. In contrast, the area surrounding
Norwich proved to be susceptible to the heretical movement. Loddon appears to have been the main centre of Lollardy with other known conventicles, or schools, in Earsham, Ditichingham, Bergh Apton and Colchester. Thus, regional characteristics are largely responsible for shaping popular practices. This chapter seeks to examine the milieu of Norwich by studying contemporary international and national events as well as the local environment of the urban populace.

The events shaping both the national and international scene invariably affected the area of Norwich. Overall, the events that occurred benefitted the creation of an environment favourable to internal transformation. This period witnessed war, schism, plague, heresy and economic turmoil. The Black Death touched all aspects of society due to the magnitude of its devastation. Divisions within the Church created a milieu that was conducive to religious unrest and questioning. War provided England with a new sense of patriotism, but it also meant the loss of lives and economic expense. As well, the crown underwent a variety of changes and authorized the suppression of popular movements. Finally, England experienced the growth of its first real heretical challenge in the Lollard movement.

One phenomenon with far reaching consequences was the Black Death. The plague first appeared in 1347 and was followed by successive outbreaks in 1361, 1368 and 1375. The plague swept through Europe, reaching England in 1348 and continuing throughout 1349. After the last large scale outbreak in 1375, the plague recurled well into the seventeenth century but with less devastating effects. The plague had an important influence on all aspects of society. Population levels were dramatically reduced which, in turn, created a shift in
labour relations. The plague also had dramatic psychological consequences on medieval society. Fear of the plague was increased by the fact that no one knew what caused it and how it was being spread. Mortality rates varied from place to place and it is impossible to provide an accurate total of the number of lives lost in Europe to the disease, but it is estimated that one-third to one-half of the entire population succumbed.⁵

In England the death toll was high. It is estimated that the population decreased from approximately four million people to two million. As well, because of the plague's recurring nature, the population was unable to recover quickly from the disease. The unsanitary conditions of the more populated centres, such as Norwich, created environments that were particularly susceptible to the plague. This, in turn, led to people burying their dead in mass graves.⁴ Overall, it is estimated that the diocese of Norwich lost fifty percent of its population. People were convinced that the plague was a manifestation of the wrath of God and they turned to the church for explanations and relief. Kenneth Leech suggests that memory of the plague lingered in the writings of Julian of Norwich, some of her passages being evocative of plague suffering.⁵ Although England did not experience a Flagellant movement like that of continental Europe, it appears that the English were familiar with their activities. B.A. Windeatt speculates that perhaps this was one of the reasons for widespread distrust of Margery's white clothes.⁶ Further, Margery's Book reveals a continued fear of the plague. When she was instructed to visit the nuns at the Abbey of Denny, she hesitated when she learned that the area was beset with pestilence. She continued to travel only with the
Lord's reassurance that she would be kept safe. Unlike Margery, however, the rest of society could not hope for God's direct solace.

Also extending through this period was the Hundred Years' War, which erupted periodically from 1337 to 1453. The Hundred Years' War originated as a response to a variety of factors, among them Edward III's tenuous claim to the French throne, uncontested English control over Aquitaine and trade with the continent, particularly the Low Countries. During the first phase of the war the battles took place on French soil, with little fear of direct retaliation against the English people. Eventually, the tide began to turn and the French began to attack English land. This struggle is important to the history of England as it contributed to a growing sense of patriotism. People began to take pride in their own efforts and literary works, such as those of Chaucer and Langland. It was in this atmosphere that Margery produced her treatise, Julian recorded her revelations and the Lollards distributed texts in the vernacular. The activities of the Lollards, however, later caused authorities to restrict the use of the vernacular as they began to associate its use with heresy. The war appears to have been of little concern to Margery, except when unrest impeded her travels. At one point, Margery was forced to delay her pilgrimage and "...lay stille in Bristowe be the byddying of God for to abeyden schepyng six wokys, inasmech as ther wer non Englisch sheyps that myth seylen thedyr for thei wer arestyd and takyn up for the kyng." Other disputes, in which England was also engaged, were similarly described as inconveniences in her spiritual quest.

Within the international church, itself, events were unfolding that created an atmosphere of hostility among the laity. Foremost was the "Babylonian Captivity."
removal of the papacy to Avignon, under the auspices of Clement V (1305-14), disturbed the English, and rumours quickly surfaced that the French held the papacy to their own advantage.

The English were convinced that their monetary contributions to the church were being diverted to France and that officials appointed by the papacy were, in actuality, French spies.\textsuperscript{10} Resulting from the Babylonian Captivity, the Great Schism continued to disrupt the papacy for forty years. Confusion among the laity was further increased by the fact that two popes claimed to be legitimate, demanding ecclesiastical dues and declaring their opponents' supporters excommunicated. The Great Schism was eventually resolved by the Council of Constance (1414-1417). The three competing popes were deposed and Martin V was elected.

Oddly enough, Margery, who was in Rome during the Council, failed to mention the disarray of the papacy at this time. Her writing expresses more of a personal and local emphasis than the workings of international affairs that concerned other contemporary mystics. For instance, it was largely due to the influence of Catherine of Siena that the pope eventually returned to Rome.\textsuperscript{11}

It has been suggested that the Great Schism was also partly responsible for the continued growth of Lollardy in England.\textsuperscript{12} The movement grew out of the ideas of the Oxford reformer, John Wyclif (c.1330-1384), whose calls for reforms were initially met with little concern. In part, this was because of a pre-existing tradition of reformist ideas.\textsuperscript{13} It was not until Wyclif expressed his views on the eucharist, denying transubstantiation, that the authorities perceived his ideas to be dangerous.\textsuperscript{14} His attacks on the Church became increasingly virulent and Wyclif was eventually condemned by Pope Gregory XI in 1377 and
again, by an English Council, in 1382. Basic ideologies posited by Wyclif include the denial of transubstantiation, a critique of images, saints and pilgrimages as idolatry and a denial of the church hierarchy as essential to salvation.\textsuperscript{15} Wyclif focused on the Bible as the central source of authority\textsuperscript{16} and encouraged people to follow a life in the imitation of Christ.\textsuperscript{17} Due to the patronage of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, Wyclif was able to avoid a martyr’s death; instead he died in peace in a country parish in 1384. By the late fourteenth century Wyclif’s theories had been eschewed by Oxford intellectuals but his ideas had already spread to the laity.

The dissemination of Wyclif’s ideas has been a subject of great interest to historians. As J.A.F. Thomson has pointed out, originally the Lollard movement “possessed both an academic wing and a popular one, although with the passage of time the intellectual content of Lollardy dwindled, and the movement became essentially a working-class tradition of dissent.”\textsuperscript{18} These separate branches did not express one cohesive program of reform, but consisted of varied opinions and beliefs.\textsuperscript{19} The community in East Anglia reflected the artisan strain of the movement. Thomas Mone, a successful shoemaker, was the most prosperous member of the community. The idea of assorted beliefs is reflected by Margery Baxter, one of the women prosecuted for her involvement with the East Anglian Lollard community.\textsuperscript{20} Baxter has been noted for her enthusiasm and commitment to the movement, but also for her immature understanding of the Lollard doctrines.\textsuperscript{21} For instance, Baxter objected to fasting on the grounds “that it is better for anyone on a fast day to eat meat leftover from Thursday than to go to the market and put oneself into debt by buying fish.”\textsuperscript{22} As well, although Baxter
rejected orthodox saints, she prayed to her Lollard predecessors believing that they could provide divine intervention for her.\textsuperscript{23}

The eclectic nature of the movement can also been seen in the accusations against Margery Kempe. Despite the fact that Margery vowed her faith to the Catholic Church and took part in orthodox religious practice, such as pilgrimages and veneration of the saints, her social and ecclesiastical criticisms created suspicion in the laity and the church. Margery’s critique of clerical abuses and social practices, for instance her denunciations of clerical wealth and her admonitions against swearing, made her piety suspect. In a similar vein Hawise Mone, a convicted Lollard, had declared “it is not leful to swere in ony caas.”\textsuperscript{24} The similarity of the two women’s belief is clear and helps to account for the dubious reception that Margery’s declarations received. There was a fine line between orthodox and unorthodox beliefs.

Lollardy was also linked to England’s internal political problems. Apart from a rapid succession of rulers,\textsuperscript{25} there was a corresponding grassroots movement to express popular discontent. The Peasants’ Revolt (1381) was largely the result of an attempt to increase the poll-tax. The Revolt was more than a manifestation of political unrest as it also mirrored the social, religious and economic discontent of the day. The rioters, led by John Ball, a preacher, and Wat Tyler, called for pardons, the abolition of game laws, an end to slavery, the freedom of commerce and the re-distribution of Church land. Although the reasons for the Revolt were broad, with time, the unrest became associated with the Lollard movement.
Notwithstanding the group's detachment from the first rebellion, they were active in the rebellion of the Lollard Sir John Oldcastle, lord of Cobham. Oldcastle had been a favourite of Henry V, but lost support when he became a proponent of Lollard beliefs. Henry was unable to persuade Oldcastle to recant and he was sentenced to death. Prior to his execution he escaped from the Tower and attempted to muster an uprising against the king. Oldcastle escaped and eluded capture until 1417, when the authorities captured him in Herefordshire. This incident helped to promote the belief that the Lollard movement and its followers were intent on seditious conspiracies. It also created an atmosphere of suspicion toward people who supported church reform or who expressed anti-clerical sentiments. Margery's many encounters, with both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, over her orthodoxy demonstrate this uncertainty. The Oldcastle incident lingered in people's minds. For example, on one occasion Margery was accused of being "Combomis dowyr." 26

Significantly, in the same year that Oldcastle was re-captured and executed, Margery underwent a religious examination in York. It is likely that the York incident took place in autumn of 1417, 27 which must have been close to Cobham's recapture, given that he was executed in December of that same year. Although Oldcastle's revolt helped to change the perception of the Lollard movement, few people from East Anglia actually participated in the revolt. 28 This may be one reason, Norman Tanner has theorized, that Lollards actually co-existed peacefully with orthodox Christians, suggesting that it was pressure from above that brought the heretics to trial. 29
Thomson has written that the Lollard heresy “should be seen as a manifestation of religious enthusiasm.” Other scholars have noted the eclecticism of the movement and the willingness of its proponents to draw from orthodox materials. Consequently, it is essential to examine the orthodox options available in contemporary society, particularly those activities and institutions that were developed and embraced by the laity, such as craft guilds, confraternities, pilgrimages and chantries. These contributed to the multi-faceted make-up of Norwich’s religious consciousness and helped to foster the unique climate of the area. It is also necessary to examine the urban environment which produced these women as this setting helped to introduce new forms of lay piety. Margery Kempe is known to have come from a prosperous merchant family in King’s Lynn, while the Lollard women were associated with the artisan class of smaller communities. With the possible exception of Julian, the experiences of these women were shaped by the changing commercial conditions of the later medieval period.

Norwich, at this time, was one of the leading cities in England. The city was a thriving commercial base with connections through trade with the Low Countries. The growth of this urban centre led to the creation of craft guilds and pious confraternities. It is estimated that in the fifteenth century England possessed approximately 30,000 guilds. The development of these organizations represented both a challenge to the old church order and a reinforcement of traditional orthodox values. In 1389 Norwich contained nineteen guilds and confraternities, while at the same time there were fifty-one of these organizations in Lynn. The motivation behind founding these groups was primarily religious, with the activities on the
guild’s patron saint’s day taking on primary importance. Heather Swanson theorizes that the craft guilds were, more or less, “political and administrative, and were deliberately created” for this purpose. These guilds, similar to the confraternities, served to foster a sense of solidarity among their members. The craft guilds, however, ignored a significant portion of the working population as the majority of guilds did not incorporate women as members. Accordingly, as Maryanne Kowaleski and Judith Bennett contend, “the treatment of women in medieval gilds is a complex and varied story.” Women’s participation in guild sponsored charities or religious events would have been the result of their father’s or spouse’s membership. Therefore, although the craft guilds fostered the participation of laymen in their activities, their general neglect of women would not have facilitated the growth of female piety by this means. The activities of the guilds may have indirectly inspired women as they actively encouraged the male participation. Furthermore, the existence of the guilds would serve as evidence of increased levels of lay piety in general and a growing involvement of the laity in organizations designed by themselves.

The pious confraternities, in contrast to the guilds, were not connected to the crafts or the trades but, in the case of Norwich, were associated with religious houses or parishes. In 1389 Norwich claimed at least thirteen pious confraternities. Members might not only belong to more than one group within the city, but also to confraternities in other English towns. The confraternities, unlike the guilds, did not discriminate on the grounds of gender. Nor did they refuse membership to the clergy, although the majority of the organizations did deny the clergy access to official positions. Their more liberal membership policy was also
reflected in the broad social base of their members. Although some guilds did try to regulate enrollment, these organizations reflected a wide range of social classes. This is not to say that the fraternities fostered an atmosphere of complete equality since a hierarchy existed within the organization that reflected the secular social status of the members. The objectives of the fraternities included celebrating their patron saint’s day, charitable works and praying for deceased members. As well, these organizations could serve as important arbiters on social matters, for example, prescribing the public behaviour of their members. This concern with their public image was also reflected in the dress code observed in their processions. This control of deportment was particularly important at the communal feast where the members would share a meal and, of course, drink.

In his study of the fraternity feast, Gervase Rosser examines the religious implications of the communal meal. To Rosser “the guild feast, whether or not partaken at the Church, would to its participants have borne analogies to the sharing of holy bread.” Enhancing this feeling was the sharing of wine from a communal cup and the charitable emphasis of the meal. Rosser, however, also highlights the economic and social elements of the meal when he acknowledges the role that the feast played in extending political and economic contacts. As well, the meal presented an opportunity for single women to meet prospective husbands. Finally, the groups emphasized the language and rituals of family as a way of increasing a sense of belonging, and forging a kin-network, among the members. Although the fraternities in some ways represented a challenge to the church, they also served to support the institution. In some cases the guilds were fundamental to the church’s welfare.
addition, lay members of the group depended on the clergy to perform services and sometimes they needed to borrow religious buildings.\(^{52}\)

Sometimes a guild could achieve an unusual level of power and prestige. This was exemplified in both Norwich and Lynn. For instance, St George’s confraternity (c. 1385), in Norwich, rose into a position of prominence and ultimately merged with the city government in the middle of the fifteenth century.\(^{53}\) The Holy Trinity Guild of Lynn also managed to maintain a position of power, in spite of an overall decline in the importance of the guilds in the fourteenth-century.\(^{54}\) The guild managed to continue to elect the borough officers and, if the mayor of Lynn died, the master of the guild assumed the mayor’s place.\(^{55}\) Lynn Staley has noted the elite composition of this particular guild and its far-reaching power.\(^{56}\) John Burnham, Margery’s father, had served as alderman and was a member of the Trinity Guild. McRee speculates that the reason for the success of guilds was the fact that “they mirrored the values of urban political life.”\(^{57}\) Furthermore, these organizations may have offered some laywomen their first opportunity to experience religious activity outside of the traditional confines of the household and church.

Margery, herself, sought admittance, and was accepted, to the Holy Trinity Guild in 1438/9. Lynn Staley speculates that Margery’s admission helps to strengthen the view of Kempe as author, “Margery” as a fictitious character, providing a social critique of society. Staley bases her claim on the fact that Margery did not gain admission to the Trinity Guild until 1438, well after she was supposed to have given up her wealth and secular ambitions. Staley contends that Margery’s admission, after the construction of *The Book*, supports her
argument that Margery was in actuality an author, not a religious writer. Margery's admission into the elite confraternity of Lynn does not necessarily eliminate her from the ranks of spiritual authorities. The Trinity Guild was a religious fraternity and, therefore, emphasized charitable activities.

It is possible that Margery sought membership based on some sort of emotional need. Barbara Hannawalt posits that the guilds provided "psychological comfort" to the elderly who were without close family. Margery, by her own admission in Book, was in the later stages of her life. She would have been in her sixties when she was admitted to the guild and, theoretically, did not need to worry about her own salvation. There is, however, the possibility that Margery may have wished for the comfort of knowing that her burial would be properly managed.

Another reason why Margery may have sought entrance to the guild can be traced back to her relationship with her father. Her respect for her father, often at the expense of her husband, has been well-noted by historians. As her father had been a member of this guild, it is likely that Margery could have sought admission as a way of continuing her identification with her father. As Margery noted with pride, her father had been the "sumtyme meyr of the town N and sythyn he was alderman of the hey Gylde of the Trinycy in N." Furthermore, Margery's earlier ambitions to advance her social standing within the community may not have been completely renounced, and the guild was her final way of demonstrating her prestigious position in Lynn, albeit through a lay religious organization. It is also feasible that through her father's or her husband's involvement with the guild, Margery may have first experienced
the freedom of secular inspired religious activity. A number of interpretations can be read into Margery’s acceptance into the Trinity Guild, much as with respect to her *Book* itself.

Another increasingly popular lay practice, available to both medieval men and women, was the pilgrimage. The practice of pilgrimage was a source of derision to the Lollards and a source of solace, as well as a way of life, to Margery. The ultimate pilgrimage was to the Holy Land, but a number of other shrines, cathedrals and churches were also popular sites, both in England and abroad. East Anglia housed a number of pilgrimage sites, with the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham being the most important. Other religious destinations included the crosses at Newton, Reydon and Terrington, St. John’s Chapel in Terrington, All Saints and St. Margaret in Lynn, St. Felix of Babingley, St. Nicholas of Tibenham, the image of Sts. Peter and Paul at Sustede, and St. Leonard of Norwich. In Norwich pilgrims also went to the cathedral to make offerings at the High altar and the shrines of John Salmon, bishop of Norwich (1299-1325) and Walter Suffield, bishop of Norwich (1244-1257). Norwich also held religious importance to Margery as she sought support from the Vicar of St. Stephen’s. After his initial scepticism, the Vicar became an ardent supporter and then confessor to Margery. The Vicar of St. Stephen’s was Richard of Carstair “whom God hath exaltyd and thorw mervelyows werkys schewyd and prevydy for holy.” There is evidence that after his death his grave became a place of pilgrimage. At one point, Margery traveled to Norwich in order “to thank him for the recovery of (a) priest” shortly after Carstair’s death, suggesting that she attributed a miracle to him. Ideally, the pilgrimage was used to seek penance, to give thanks or to find a miraculous cure.
The pilgrimage also became, in practice, an effective means for the transmission of religious ideas between England and continental Europe. European pilgrims travelling from the continent to sites in East Anglia would have brought information on religious practices with them while at the same time observing and adapting English customs. Furthermore, English pilgrims abroad would have been exposed to continental traditions and ideas. For instance, during Margery’s travels in Rome she sought and received information on St. Bridget, one of the pious women she actively sought to emulate. The pilgrimage would have been a method of gathering new information and ideas while allowing for individual interpretation and adaptation.

The Lollard rejection of pilgrimage as a form of idolatry stands in stark contrast to Margery’s devotion to it. The Lollards denounced pilgrimages partly because they rejected the idea of the direct intervention of the saints. It is interesting that Margery, the consummate pilgrim, was often accused of Lollardy in spite of this. The Lollards mocked pilgrims and their sites of worship. Hawise Mone stated “that no pilgrimage oweth to be done be made, for all pilgrimage goyng servyth of nothing but oonly to yeve prestes good that be to riche and to make gay tapsters and proude ostelers.” Among the Lollards, Our Lady of Walsingham, the most popular pilgrim destination, was quickly mutated to Our Lady of “Falsyngham.” McSheffrey contends that this denial of the pilgrimage may have actually closed a religious option that had previously been open to women, since this form of independent religious action was now rejected.
Another example of lay piety in which women could become actively involved was the founding of chantries. The chantries were also a product of the accumulation of wealth by the middle class. Tanner has noted the relative freedom of the chantries in that they offered the "founders considerable control over the services to be performed and the clergy performing them." His research reveals that craft guilds and fraternities were among primary chantry founders. This demonstrates a further interest of the laity in control over spiritual matters and, again, it is likely that the involvement of the pious confraternities in chantry building provided women with a new outlet for expressions of lay piety.

Another result of increasing urbanization was the number of male and female recluses who began to establish themselves within or near urban centres. The position of anchoress appealed to all classes of women whether they were educated or uneducated. This was the path chosen by Julian of Norwich, a path that was considered more appropriate for a religious woman than the one chosen by Margery Kempe. Since very little evidence remains about Julian, her life is subject to much historical speculation. One issue that continues to be debated is whether or not Julian was a nun or a pious laywoman at the time of her revelations. There is the possibility that Julian may have been a nun because the church that supported her anchorhold, St. Julian's, was associated with the Benedictine community at Carrow. Recently, however, it has also been suggested that because "Julian makes no mention of virginity (she) may even have been not a virgin but a widow or wife at the time of the vision." In addition, her social status is also uncertain but it is likely that Julian was a member of the gentry class, which may account for her conservative nature.
Regardless of their background, whoever chose to become a recluse was first subjected to examination and, if approved, was enclosed with religious ceremony. The rites included blessing the cell and celebrating the Mass of the Dead because the inhabitant was henceforth considered “dead unto the world and alive unto God.” The anchorhold itself was often composed of several rooms, and the anchoress usually had one to two servants to aid her. Julian of Norwich is known to have had two servants, named Sara and Alice. This serves to remind us, as Jean Leclercq has written, that “the cell was the symbol of voluntary imprisonment, but it was not a prison.” Recluses spent the majority of their time in prayer and meditation, as witnessed in the writings of Julian, but the women might also spend time on embroidery, needlework and, more important, they acted as teachers and spiritual advisors. The latter role is noted in The Book of Margery Kempe, when Margery sought out Julian for advice on the subject of her tears. Norman Tanner further speculates that Julian may have actually tutored other hermits and anchorites in Norwich as there is evidence for the existence of contact between the recluses. Moreover, Julian’s reputation may have encouraged others to emulate her.

The craft guilds, pious confraternities, chantries, pilgrimages and, to an extent, enclosure were all fostered by urban development. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of the women active in popular piety came from an artisan or merchant background, occupations that would have been affected by the increasing urbanization. Margery’s Book reveals a woman firmly grounded in her urban setting; she rarely mentioned individuals who were not contained within the town framework. Accordingly, in our undertaking to “say
something about merchants’ wives” it is necessary to understand the milieu in which these women lived. For example, David Aers has noted, and as is clearly evident in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, one of the ways in which the ruling urban class sought to differentiate themselves from the lower strata was through conspicuous display. Margery was initially so concerned with her perceived loss of rank in marrying John Kempe, a successful merchant, but not quite as prosperous as her father, that she went to great lengths to insure that her style of dress continued to reflect her birth family’s status. Margery “weryd gold pypys on hir hevyd and hir hodys wyth typetys were daggyd” in order to remind everyone of “the worschyp of hir kynred.” Margery’s *Book* can tell the modern reader a great deal about medieval values, particularly the role that women played in that value system.

Unlike Margery, who chose to operate her business enterprises over the objections of her husband, most urban women were expected to assist with either their father’s or husband’s craft. Given the social background of the Lollard women, it can be speculated that most contributed to the family economy in some way. Women could serve as apprentices. Consequently, women were involved in a diversity of trades, but appear to have been most commonly active in brewing, as was Margery, and spinning. Margery’s business attempts reflect an option that was open to urban women in the later Middle Ages, the ability to maintain a separate economic identity from their husband as a *femme sole*. Margery was initially so successful that she was able to employ others in her business. At least one of her employees was a man. In some instances the urban surroundings could provide women with
more opportunities such as the right to control money, hold property and bequeath possessions in a will.  

David Aers, however, posits that the activities of elite urban class woman could be curtailed by prevailing ideology.  He notes that it was not essential for the wives of merchants, as it was for women of the lower orders, to work. This, in turn, created women who were economically dependent on their husbands.  Margery’s insistence on her economic independence allowed her the opportunity to take part in the market economy as an individual. This liberation from her husband may have also been responsible for her desire for further freedom from him. In this capacity Margery was able to act on her own behalf; she, not her husband, was “was on of the grettest brewers in the town of N a three yer or four.”  This may have been one of Margery’s first opportunities to establish a name and a separate identity for herself. Furthermore, her business attempts can also be viewed as a rebellion against her father. Clarissa Atkinson theorizes that part “of her intense anxiety about worldly activity reflected a suspicion that these were not appropriate activities for her father’s daughter.”  It is likely that Margery’s business attempts were a way of distancing herself from her father’s control.

The market economy also created an emphasis on the individual, particularly individual accumulation of resources and status. This notion of the individual can also be seen in the religious choices of each of these women. For instance, the status of anchoress accentuated a solitary life, whereby the individual devoted herself to a life of contemplation. In the case of mysticism, as exemplified by both Margery and Julian, the individual experienced a personal
relationship with, and knowledge of, God, a knowledge that they both described as "homely."

The Lollards likewise emphasized the individual in their beliefs, advocating that everyone have a personal knowledge of the Scriptures, calling church officials "deseyver(s) of the puple." Given the focus on the individual in commerce, it is not surprising that the same emphasis would also appeal in religion.

Society expected that a woman would enter either the married or religious state. Women like Margery proved to be an exception to the rule. In spite of Margery’s snobbery about her husband’s perceived lower status, Margery would not have been forced into a marriage with him. P.J.P. Goldberg writes that “in finding and choosing marriage partners women outside the landed classes do seem to have enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom.” Still, as Deborah Ellis writes, Margery’s marriage to John “would in all likelihood never have occurred had it not been in the two families’s best interests.” Despite the complexities of medieval marriages, Margery’s relationship with her husband provides us with insight into contemporary marital relations and, despite the apparent callousness of John’s later sexual behaviour, the two appear initially to have had a loving union. Their relationship also provides us with the knowledge that women had recourse, with their husband’s permission, to a life of vowed marital chastity. Margery, after negotiating her way out of her sexual obligations, and John appeared before the Bishop of Lincoln, Philip Repingdon, to seek his permission for their lifestyle and to invest Margery with a mantle and ring. Obviously, then, these were recognized as symbols of people who had vowed chastity. Dyan Elliott offers an interesting look at Margery’s increased repulsion for her marriage bed, noting that
Margery’s disgust was aimed at the idea of the conjugal debt not intercourse itself. Elliott contends that this might “imply an unconscious awareness of the relation between the debt and the husband’s authority.”\textsuperscript{105} John’s acceptance of Margery’s desire for marital celibacy should not, however, be seen as a complete loss of his authority over Margery. Elliott notes that although John agreed to chastity, he managed to guarantee certain concessions, such as a change in Margery’s eating habits.\textsuperscript{106} Although Margery and John had undertaken a chaste marriage, that undertaking did not signify that she had removed herself completely from his authority or her position as John’s wife. This is evident in community reaction to John’s fall down the stairs: Margery was expected to return to his side and care for him. In doing this she resumed her traditional role as wife and a helpmate.\textsuperscript{107}

The examination of marital relations can be further developed in the study of the Lollard communities. McSheffrey has pointed out that the women connected to the group were often related to male members. This suggests that husbands influenced the religious practices of their households. In addition, part of the Lollard belief, as presented by Margery Baxter, was that “mutual agreement of love between man and woman sufficed for the sacrament of marriage.”\textsuperscript{108} This belief was also behind Hawise Mone’s testimony that marriage required “oonly consent of love betuxe man and woman.”\textsuperscript{109} Their depositions do not conflict with the standard canon law of consent, but strengthen the indication that marital affection was often the grounds for marriage among the urban class.

The urban environment itself would have had an influence on these medieval marriages. For instance, as the increasing emphasis on capital accumulation became a source
of concern for contemporary society, Deborah Ellis believes that wives bore the brunt of responsibility in guaranteeing salvation. Commerce, Deborah Ellis notes, was "a morally problematic issue in medieval thought." Responsibility settled on the wife to insure her own spiritual welfare, in addition to the maintenance of her husband's soul. People who lived the in urban environment sought to accumulate wealth but were also subjected to the conflicting message from the clergy about salvation. This can be seen in The Book when Margery was consulted by a widow about the state of her husband's soul. Margery responded that her husband was still in purgatory and it was up to his wife to spend the money to save him. This passage also demonstrates the intertwining nature of commerce and the church.

Sharon Farmer also considers the language of women and commerce and found that women were encouraged by clerics to act as "pious wives" in order to balance concerns over the accumulation of wealth. Farmer argues that

the emerging money economy, which created moral dilemmas ... affected discussions of marriage in two ways: it disposed clerical authors ... to emphasize, in their discussions of sinful husbands, sins that were related to greed for money; and it enabled these authors to suggest that the independent economic actions of the wives were spiritually efficacious.

This, in turn, created a more positive view of women's speech, allowing for the acceptance of the ideas that women's voices could be used to serve useful spiritual ends. The wife was to serve as a mediator between the spiritual and material world. The onus of a husband's salvation lay in the hands of his wife. Women in an urban commercial setting would have heard sermons urging them to take responsibility for their husbands' spiritual welfare.
Margery’s *Book* reveals the permeation of market thought into the language of later medieval society. Society’s uncertainty about the individual accumulation of wealth is evident both in Margery’s desire to emulate a life of apostolic poverty, as well as in the concerns of people trying to rise above their stations. Margery’s downfall was partly attributed to her desire to rise above her marriage. Wealth, however, had its advantages. Margery was able to use her capital to buy her way out of the conjugal debt. By settling John’s debts she was able to win his consent to a chaste marriage. It is also possible that the wealth of Margery’s natal family may have given her leverage when dealing with John. Atkinson contends that when “a wife’s family was richer and more prominent that her husband’s, a woman might have real social and economic authority outside the family as well as within.”\(^{117}\) It was this background of privilege that gave Margery the confidence to chose her life of piety.\(^{118}\) This same wealth provided Margery with the opportunity to afford her pilgrimages, pilgrimages which ultimately shaped many of her religious practices.

Dorothy Owen’s examination of Lynn demonstrates the growing power of a wealthier laity in ecclesiastical operations.\(^{119}\) Owen found that “as the wealth of individual citizens grew” there was simultaneous church development, such as “refurbishing or rebuilding chapels inside and outside the church.”\(^{120}\) While this type of activity could benefit the church, it could also create problems between the clergy and the laity who were paying the bills. Tension resulted when the clergy acted independently of the laity in cases of remodelling, particularly of the nave.\(^{121}\) The uneasy alliance of religion and commerce permeated Margery’s *Book* and the urban environment in which she lived. Nonetheless, Norman Tanner’s study demonstrates
that the parish church remained at the heart of the community as “more testators gave to the parish church than to anything else.” Despite minor grievances, however, the church remained a unifying force in the diocese.

The urban milieu would also have affected the intellectual progress of women. The urban setting itself appears to have been conducive to the education of women, however, with the possible exception of Julian, the women under consideration here were illiterate. Still, there is debate on whether or not Margery was illiterate or rather claimed to be illiterate in order to avoid accusations of heterodoxy. Tanner suggests that those who were charged with heresy may have attempted to cover up their reading capabilities. Their education, or lack of it, raises the question of how ideas were spread and what kind of effect they had on women. Margery mentions a variety of literary influences on her life, both English and continental. In the example of Margery we see the importance of the oral transmission of texts. Margery acknowledged that it was “thorw heryng of holy boys and thorw heryng holy sermownys, (that) sche ever encresyd in contemplacyon and holy meditacyon.” Memorization played an important part in Margery’s religious understanding. Additionally, Margery’s memory of events was essential when she dictated the story of her life to the scribe.

The importance of memory is also reflected in the Lollard communities, where McSheffrey has noted the prominence of women in the memorization process. McSheffrey writes that “women were conspicuous among those in the sect who had memorized passages of scripture or prayer.” The power of words is also apparent in Margery Baxter’s exhortation
that her neighbour listen to her husband read aloud. Therefore, although the women were illiterate, there were people willing to read the material aloud to them. Margery found many sympathetic members of the clergy, while the Lollard women relied on the male members of the group. In a society where most people were illiterate, the power of oral recitation should not be overlooked.

To understand these women better is to understand the layers that imbued their local environment. International and national events created a situation of unrest and instability in England. The Black Death, the Hundred Years’ War and the Great Schism appear to have had only minor direct effects on the lives of these particular East Anglian women. The growth of an urban population and a market-based economy created an environment that was conducive to change. As the merchant class accumulated more wealth they sought ways to display their economic gain; this was often exemplified in the religious sphere. Craft guilds, pious confraternities, chantries and pilgrimages all suggest an increased growth of lay piety. Anchoresses became more conspicuous as they established themselves in the cities, often proving of vital importance to the city. The growth of the Lollard movement was also indicative of an urban atmosphere that encouraged individual control. In this period the merchant class allowed women the opportunity to own and operate their own businesses. Still, women were constrained by the prevailing patriarchal ideology. The burgeoning emphasis on the individual can also be reflected in the activities of these women. Although the majority of women in this survey were illiterate, they were not unaware of a larger literary tradition.
The women may have existed in a predominantly oral culture, but it was a culture that included and encouraged the recitation of the writings of both male and female authors.

Both Lynn and Norwich could boast of flourishing trade with the continent, particularly the Low Countries. Margery Kempe's son married a woman from "Dewchelonde", suggesting that continental family connections were common among merchant traders. The writings of continental female mystics were available in English translations by the late fourteenth century. Margery, and possibly Julian of Norwich, were aware of the continental tradition of female mystics and Margery, at least, consciously sought to imitate them. Even heretical impulses were not confined to England, as Wyclif's ideas were later taken abroad. Lollardy, however, remained a specifically English heresy. Norwich was ideally situated to be cross-fertilized by continental ideas and practices, which were then adapted and absorbed into the culture of Norwich.
CHAPTER TWO

"A Shining Light of God": The
International Religious Milieu

The Blessed Virgin once spoke to her thus in a vision: "You" she said, "should be like a mirror, clear and clean, and like a sharp thorn - a mirror through honest and godly behaviour and through good example."

_The Life of Blessed Birgitta_

She is truly a shining light of God, a mirror without blemish of God's majesty, and an image of his goodness.

_The Book of Blessed Angela_

Gail McMurray Gibson, in a study of late medieval East Anglian religious culture, found that East Anglian society tended to be, despite its international connections, somewhat insular and conservative in character.¹ She notes, however, that

at the same time that East Anglia was renowned for the strength and conservatism of its monastic and lay piety, its towns, especially those coastal towns whose prosperity, trade and commercial links with Flanders and the Low Countries made them hospitable to religious change, were widely known as breeding grounds for nonconformist religious change.²

East Anglia, Gibson contends, was a paradox in that it favoured conservatism at the same time that it accepted and absorbed new religious movements.³ This tension allowed for the development of new forms of female piety, such as the Beguine-like community of women, yet, at the same time, it also insured that these movements would not upset the status quo. Norwich society, at this time, was also a paradox in that the city itself remained a stronghold
against Lollardy while the movement flourished in surrounding areas. Gibson posits that despite the heresy trials it was continental influence that actually encouraged the spread of Lollardy in East Anglia. This ebb and flow, however, of religious impulses to and from the continent, which allowed for the growth of female piety, is most clearly evident in the activities of Margery Kempe.

Consequently, by contrasting the revelations of Margery Kempe, as well as those of Julian of Norwich, with the writings of the continental female mystics a more fully developed picture of the religious atmosphere of the Norwich area will emerge. This comparative approach allows the modern reader to understand how the later medieval English mystics internalized the works of the continent and how Margery and Julian diverged from these continental mystical experiences. It is particularly useful to consider their work within the larger tradition of female mysticism because, as Richard Kieckhefer contends, when “seen as isolated personalities, these figures may indeed appear simply mad,” particularly to the modern reader. This helps to eliminate the temptation to take Margery and Julian out of their religious and historical contexts and to ascribe to them, especially in the case of Margery, the label of madwoman or hysteric. Their connection with the continent also allows them to be placed within a tradition of continuity of female religious activity. The European female mystics under consideration come predominantly from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and include women whom Margery acknowledged as models for emulation, such as St. Bridget and Marie d’Oignies.
Those who chose a life of mysticism chose a life of denial. Margery and Julian reflect this transcontinental movement of renunciation. In this respect Margery's experience may reflect more similarities with that of continental religious women. This is largely due to the fact that Julian's work was not meant to be biographical. Consequently, her work does not contain information about Julian and the hardships that she endured in making her decision to be enclosed, or about her subsequent life as an anchoress. In comparison, we know that Margery was constantly struggling with vainglory and the temptations of the flesh. Many of the continental mystics shared Margery's desire to renounce worldly life and also fought temptations, often through extreme forms of asceticism. What has been written about their lives tends to focus on the suffering they endured. Therefore, by examining the writings and the lives of the continental and English mystics with these criteria in mind, it will be possible for us to gain a better understanding of their actions. It will also establish that an intercontinental religious milieu existed that allowed for and fostered various forms of female piety. Further, by investigating the contemporary religious milieu of the continent, the activities and beliefs of the Lollards can also be evaluated. The Lollard movement had been preceded by other heresies on the continent. Chief among these had been the Albigensian heresy.

The Albigensian heresy dealt with a number of similar issues to those of the Lollard movement, including a denial of tithes and transubstantiation. Lollardy, like the Albigensian heresy, was a home-based religion. This contrasted with orthodox Roman Catholicism in that heretical activity centred around the home, whereas Catholicism was based in the local
church. This location allowed for the conversion of an entire household instead of trying to convert recruits individually. This also guaranteed that an entire family would be of the same faith, although there were always exceptions. Marriage also guaranteed the continuation of the heresy as partners married in the faith and attempted to pass it to their children. These kinds of factors could be transcontinental similarities; however, what is most striking about the movements is not their similarities but their one fundamental difference. Whereas the Cathars held the *parfaits*, who had knowledge of Latin, in higher regard than one they considered “unlettered”, that is without a Latin education, the Lollards placed a greater emphasis on the vernacular. The dissemination of Lollard ideas was through the use of vernacular texts. Orthodox ideas were also spread through the use of the vernacular in the late fourteenth century, which witnessed the translation of the writings of popular continental female mystics into English.

This raises the question of how religious activities and ideas from the continent were introduced to England. Trade was one of the ways in which the proliferation of pious activity on the continent was transmitted to England. These same trade routes could also be used to export ideas and movements from England to the continent. Trade was also important in establishing heretical links. For instance, Thomas Mone, a shoemaker and the wealthiest known Lollard in the East Anglian community, appears to have influenced a number of men who had worked for him. Trade also allowed men, moreso than the women, the opportunity to visit others of the Lollard faith. Additionally, trade routes could be used to extend family
ties. For example, it was most likely through his trading in Prussia that Margery Kempe’s son came into contact with his future wife.

Interrelated with trade was the effect of economics, which allowed for both the diffusion of new ideas and the leisure to examine these notions. As the laity accumulated wealth they could afford to spend more on luxury items, such as devotional texts. In addition, the increasing emphasis on the vernacular and the growth of lay literacy were other ways by which ideas were transmitted. Apparently, unable to read herself, Margery had religious materials read aloud to her by sympathetic clerics. The international composition of the clergy would have allowed for a greater diffusion of religious ideas. Nonetheless, in order for continental ideas to have taken root in England, there must have been some sort of common ground between the thoughts and activities of the different religious movements so that the English were able to identify with their continental counterparts. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the milieu of European religious women in order to understand how their activities were able to appeal to pious women in England, specifically in the Norwich area.

It has been demonstrated that the contemporary international events contributed to the general atmosphere and beliefs in the works of Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and the activities of the Lollards. There remains, however, little evidence of their direct influence. In contrast, continental mystics were more affected by international events. Despite the relative indifference of Margery and Julian of Norwich to the Great Schism, some of the continental mystics were consumed with ending the division. Andre Vauchez has speculated that it was actually "the Great Schism that made possible the efflorescence of visionary prophesying and
its emergence to public view.”

Both Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden had visions regarding the return of the papal seat to Rome. Later, also, Catherine received visions to aid in healing the schism. In addition, these pious women often had visions that were to the benefit of secular rulers, demonstrating the continuing connection of the women to the secular world. Both the Black Death and Hundred Years’ War evoked greater concern among European religious women. This could, perhaps, be due to the fact that the continental mystics were, in many respects, predecessors of the women in Norwich and more closely affected by the upheavals. It was the Hundred Years’ War that stimulated the religious activity of the most famous of the later medieval mystics, Joan of Arc. Despite these differences, continental religious women did share certain characteristics with their English counterparts, particularly those who had developed in the international religious atmosphere.

Historian Caroline Walker Bynum has done extensive research on the subject of medieval mysticism and her work, particularly examining the ascetic practices of religious women, has earned critical acclaim. Her research is crucial for understanding the practices of medieval women’s mysticism, especially when discussing shared international mystical attributes. Additionally, her work considers these impulses set against heretical manifestations of piety, providing an important backdrop for this survey. One of the most striking attributes of the European mystics of this period was their extreme asceticism. This asceticism took on various forms including the mortification of the flesh, sleep deprivation and rigorous fasting. Fasting and food, as Bynum contends, were particularly important to female piety. Since women were less likely to have wealth that they could renounce, religious women sought to
use food as one way in which they could have control over themselves and others. In point of fact, one of the first actions taken by Margery Kempe after her conversion was to begin bodily penance by wearing a hairshirt as well as taking control of her eating habits. In a conversation God commanded Margery to “forsake that thow lovyst best in this world, and that is etyn of flesch.” Initially, Margery “myght wel dure to fastyn, it grevyd hir not.” Indeed, Margery never became as extreme in her dietary habits as did some of the continental mystics. For instance, Jacques de Vitry described the effects of Marie d’Oignies’ fasting. At death, her body, “was found to be so small and shriveled by her illness and fasting that her spine touched her belly and the bones of her back seemed to lie under the skin of her stomach as if under a thin linen cloth.” This was not a surprise, given that Marie’s fasting included the renunciation of meat and wine, the occasional eating of fish, but only the “smallest ones.” Her choice of bread was so hard that “even dogs could barely chew” it and it left her mouth “bloody with gashes and wounds.” Another example of extreme fasting is Catherine of Siena, who gained fame, and courted danger, when she reached the point that she needed no sustenance other than the eucharist.

Margery’s writing, in contrast, was less concerned with the denial of food in an effort to tame the unruly flesh. In fact, Lynn Staley Johnson points out that:

The Book of Margery Kempe is surprisingly free of what can seem a morbid fascination with physicality. Margery does not reject food or become ill when she smells or sees it; nor does she become wrath like from fasting. In fact, Kempe’s handling of the subject of food or corporeality contrasts sharply to that found in the lives of holy women ... In fact, in the annals of the holy, Margery’s is a rather tame story ... She does not tie her body into knots, cut off pieces of her own flesh, drink pus, or develop the signs of the stigmata.
Johnson cites Margery’s lack of body obsession as evidence that Margery’s food experience ultimately deals with a rejection of community values and, consequently, was merely a part of her community criticism, rather than a true form of religious asceticism. Johnson contends that since Margery did not alter her dietary habits excessively, her change in food consumption was merely a way to distance herself from the community. What Johnson fails to mention is that Julian of Norwich also differed from other religious women in this matter.

Julian’s account does not offer any proof to moderns that she may have been given to extreme asceticism. Apart from a desire to experience the suffering and pain of Christ’s Passion, Julian’s writing does not foster or relate any other extreme behaviour. If anything, Julian’s advice to Margery, recorded in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, reveals an apparently cautious woman who counseled moderation. This discrepancy between English and European ascetic practices can be attributed to the more conservative nature of English mysticism. Indeed, when contrasted with the more extreme examples of religious asceticism that were apparent on the continent, both Margery and Julian can be classified as moderate. Surprisingly, in most instances on the issue of penance Margery preached moderation. At one point God told Margery that, for beginners, “discrete penawns, namly that her gostly fadyr gevyth her er injoynth hem for to do” was best. Most likely this emphasis on moderation can be attributed to the fact that Margery was able to overcome her husband’s objections to a life of chastity and, subsequently, she enjoyed a fair amount of freedom in choosing her devotional practices.
Nevertheless, Margery’s eating habits were still regarded as suspect by the majority of her contemporaries. Margery was able to use her fasting practices as leverage in her negotiations with her husband for a life of chastity. As a part of their agreement, God granted Margery the right to “ete and drynk as thyyn husbond dooth” claiming that “this was the cause that I bad the fastyn.” Bynum contends that John Kempe was “obviously ashamed of her queer penitential clothes and food practices” and wanted her to “return to normal cooking and eating in front of the neighbours.” In spite of John’s sometimes reluctant willingness to support Margery’s activities, her public fasting could have been a personal embarrassment to him, particularly since eating was a communal activity. Therefore, as Bynum and others suggest, her rejection of the communal meal could be easily interpreted by the community as a rejection of John himself. Although it does not dominate her writing, fasting did constitute an important part of Margery’s reputation as a religious woman. She discussed the question of fasting with God and she changed her dietary habits according to God’s will. Additionally, Margery’s discussion of her fasting helps to dismiss further charges of unorthodoxy. The Lollards were known to believe that “no man is bounde to faste ... but suche days and tymes it is leefull the puple to ete flessh and all.” Therefore, while her practices were unconventional, they were not as extreme as those of some of the women on the continent. The spirit of her activities reflects the religious nature of the fast.

The fasting of the continental women was part of their devotion to the eucharist. The cult of the Eucharist developed in the later thirteenth century, with the institution of the feast of the Corpus Christi in 1264. The cult did not generate much international support until the
beginning of the fourteenth century. For some religious women, such as Catherine of Siena, the eucharist, as the real body of Christ, came to be the only nourishment that they desired and, eventually, needed. Female mystics of this period demonstrated a remarkable sensitivity to the eucharist and this is considered to be one of the key elements of thirteenth-century female piety. Religious women of the continent were graced with the prophetic ability to tell unconsecrated from consecrated wafers. In other instances, should a holy woman be denied the eucharist by the clergy, God would intercede and provide her with the eucharist. This kind of intercession allowed women to circumvent their male superiors and provided them with some measure of control.

It is interesting to note that, while it was important to Margery, the eucharist did not play as central a role in her religious practices as it did for many of the continental mystics. Furthermore, it does not even appear as a theme in the writing of Julian. The absence of emphasis on the eucharist is noteworthy in light of the Lollards' denial of transubstantiation. For instance, Hawise Mone declared “that no prest hath paor to make Critis veri body at messe in forme of bred, but that afair the sacramental wordis said at messe of the prest ther remayneth oonly material bred.” Her associate, Margery Baxter, was even more specific in her denial of the eucharist, claiming:

if any such sacrament is God and the true body of Christ, the gods are infinite, because a thousand priests and more every day make and then eat a thousand such gods and when they are eaten, they are passed through their posteriors into fetid stinking privies where you could find enough of such gods if you wanted to search carefully for them.
The Lollard denial of transubstantiation did not occur within a vacuum. Questions surrounding the validity of miracle had already formed a part of the ecclesiastical intellectual milieu. Lollard denunciation originally stemmed from charges of idolatry, as Wyclif perceived the bread to be nothing more than an image. Margery’s Book does contain references to her conformity on the subject of the eucharist. For instance, when God willed her to give up meat He told her “instede of that flesch thow schalt etyn my flesch and my blod, that is the very body of Crist in the sacrament of the awter. Thys is my wyl, dowtyr, that thow receve my body every Sunday.” Still, England’s Lollard movement was flourishing in and around areas in which Julian and Margery lived yet they seem to downplay the element that was a source of discontent to the Lollards.

This raises the question of why they did not stress the eucharist in the way that the continental mystics did. Miri Rubin notes that “aids that were useful to most people served mystics only at the beginning of their journey.” This suggests that Margery and Julian, writing twenty years after their first mystical experience, may have outgrown the need for a reliance on the eucharist as integral to their practices. Margery’s Book reveals that certain tenents of Lollardy were well-known by the laity, such as their refutation of swearing and the notion of female preachers. It is possible that the Lollard denial of transubstantiation was unknown, however, when she was detained in Leicester, Margery defended her orthodoxy stating “I beleve that it is his very flesch and hys blood and no material bred.” Clarissa Atkinson suggests that “it seems likely that this answer was phrased very carefully by her scribe.” Regardless of the source, Margery would have been familiar with common Lollard
beliefs since she was often forced to defend herself against these very accusations. It is more likely that on their part, Margery and Julian did not attempt a discussion on the eucharist in order to avoid suspicion of heresy.\textsuperscript{46} Still, an elevation of the eucharist by the mystics could have been used in the fight against the Lollards. To this end, many historians contend that one of the reasons that female mysticism was encouraged by the clergy on the continent was because it could be used as an effective tool to combat heresy.\textsuperscript{47} It can only be speculated why Margery and Julian were not used by the Norwich clergy in the same way that the continental mystics were.

Dhira B. Mahoney writes that although “Kempe does not undergo dramatic bodily penances … she deliberately suffers the scorn of her contemporaries as a kind of purgatorial persecution.”\textsuperscript{48} This was a model followed by continental female mystics as well. The disdain most often expressed by society was a result of Margery’s tears and cries.\textsuperscript{49} These sobs were often used by continental religious women, such as Marie d’Oignies and Angela of Foligno, to express their mystical union and sentiment. The subject of female mystics and their reliance on incoherent cries has been a source of interest to feminist historians. Many, like Mahoney, contend that “her tears are beyond language; her sobs a substitute for words she cannot find. But they are also, at the same time, themselves language.”\textsuperscript{50} The tears, for women, designate them as God’s chosen and, subsequently become a sign of their power.\textsuperscript{51} Mahoney also points out that although Margery’s community may have doubted her abilities when the guildhall was on fire, they recognized the power of her tears.\textsuperscript{52} Danielle Regnier-Bohler considers the sobs and cries of female mystics a means through which women sought to find their own form of
verbal expression. An expression, Regnier-Bohler contends, which was founded in a reliance on the body.\textsuperscript{53} The body could be made to endure the rigors of fasting, but there were other ways to manifest forms of suffering. Emotional suffering was also undertaken by the mystics, receiving abuse from others and humbling themselves to perform charities for others. Physical discomfort could also be found in illness, such as those experienced by Julian of Norwich and Marie d'Oignies, and in the practice of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage, itself, was not unknown to produce tears.\textsuperscript{54}

Pilgrimage was a significant element of the later medieval religious milieu. It provided individuals with a method to assert their orthodoxy and it allowed for the dissemination of ideas. The practice of pilgrimage was not without its critics and could even be, as in Chaucer's \textit{Canterbury Tales}, an object of satire.\textsuperscript{55} Margery's devotion to pilgrimages has been well-noted, but she was not alone in her enthusiasm. Dorothy of Mantau was another religious woman who traveled often and, like Margery, she experienced many obstacles and hardships.\textsuperscript{56}

One of Margery's noted models, St. Bridget, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a trip that Margery herself made as well. Julia Bolton Holloway notes that Margery's pilgrimage destinations often coincided with places travelled to by St. Bridget, suggesting that Margery's trips may have been undertaken in a conscious emulation of other female mystics.\textsuperscript{57} This can be strengthened by the fact that Margery visited Aachen, also visited by St. Bridget and Dorothy of Mantau.\textsuperscript{58} In Danzig Margery may have been introduced to the activities of Dorothy of Mantau.\textsuperscript{59} Pilgrimage could also induce an extreme reaction to the displayed relics. Angela of Foligno's pilgrimage to the church of St. Francis resulted in the production
of her screams. The attraction of women to pilgrimage reflects the changing conditions of the period, which allowed for a greater diversity in the composition of pilgrims. The growth in the number of female pilgrims generated considerable disapproval.\textsuperscript{50} Atkinson writes that pilgrimage was essential to Margery and its place in her life was “complex, but represents at the simplest her reaching for an opportunity to participate in Christ’s life and death.”\textsuperscript{61} Through her pilgrimages Margery was also able to witness and learn about other religious women abroad.

Pilgrimage provided the opportunity for the spread of ideas and knowledge. There is speculation that during her last pilgrimage to Germany Margery may have gained an awareness of the cult of Dorothy of Mantau.\textsuperscript{62} Also in The Book we can see evidence of Margery seeking a more intimate knowledge of St. Bridget while she was in Rome. This lends credence to the likelihood that people who were willing to learn more about religious individuals could do so from sympathetic persons, both lay and religious. The relics viewed by Margery during her pilgrimages were often incorporated into her mystical visions. For instance, in Assisi Margery saw the relic of Mary’s veil, which she incorporated into a vision of Christ’s swaddling clothes.\textsuperscript{63} Furthermore, Margery was not inhibited by male authority figures, while abroad, which allowed her the time and opportunity to create her own response to the images.

Despite its broad appeal, perhaps because of it, the pilgrimage became an object of criticism and controversy. Critics maintained that the practice was an excuse for people to escape their obligations and travel. If Margery Kempe’s companions were any indication of the norm then Chaucer’s jovial pilgrims may not have been an artistic innovation.\textsuperscript{64} In contrast
to Margery, her fellow pilgrims appear to have sought a pleasurable time. James P. Helfer discusses the tension that existed in the process of the pilgrimage. He contends that the “medieval pilgrimage was between the sacred and secular.” This tension is evidenced in The Book between the actions of Margery and her companions. Perhaps this is why Margery demonstrated such an affinity for pilgrimages, as her own life exhibited the tension between the sacred and secular.

Pilgrimage devotion could also stand as a testimony to an individual’s orthodoxy since the practice was denounced by the Lollards. Lollard belief contended that “if pes makers of ymagis pat stiren men to offerat hem seyen pat it is bettere to pe puple for to offer her godis to yes ymagis pen to visit and help here pore neeboris wip hor almes, pei ben expressstly agen Crist.” Consequently, when charged with Lollardy Margery’s accusers claimed that she had not gone on pilgrimage and had pretended to do so only to deceive the community. Her numerous pilgrimages, which were to signal her orthodoxy, also shaped her religious practices. By travelling, often with nominal, or entirely without, male supervision Margery was able to choose her destinations, shape her own reactions to images and seek out the information that she desired. Pilgrimages were an important component in the shaping of Margery Kempe’s cultural web. Certain similarities that she shared with the continental mystics may have been produced after she was able to travel and learn more directly about their activities.

Accentuation on confession was another trait exhibited by both Margery and the continental mystics. Orthodox religious women such as Dorothy of Mantau began their
fascination with confession at an early age, while Catherine of Siena eventually began to confess on a daily basis.\(^{67}\) In many instances these holy women were able to form supportive relationships with their confessors, as it was usually the confessor who acted as male scribe or wrote their *vitae*.\(^{68}\) When one is reading *The Book* it soon becomes apparent that confession was a central component in Margery’s life. Margery’s compulsion for confession grew with her new sense of religious vocation. When Margery was suffering a postpartum madness her confessor was a “lytyl to hastye” leaving Margery’s confession incomplete.\(^{69}\) This haste appears to have generated a resentment in Margery who refused to finish her confession to him “for nowt he myght do.”\(^{70}\) Hope Weissman speculates that Margery “never fully resolved the trauma of the confessional” and this was actually the reason for her “violent, compulsive weeping.”\(^{71}\) In spite of the anxiety expressed by Margery over her unnamed sin, it soon becomes apparent that what Margery hoped to achieve was a way in which she could control the experience of confession. Margery’s unknown sin weighed heavily on her mind until she was able to bypass her earthly confessor and confess directly to Jesus, never publicly revealing the sin. This approach carried heretical implications, particularly when considered in light of Lollard belief.

In an earlier passage Margery claimed that the devil tempted her to think that she did not need to confess. Margery stated that “the devel, (was) cvyrmor seyng to hyr whyl she was in good heele hir nedyd no confessyon but don penawns be hirsель aloone, and all schuld be forgovyn, for God is mercyful inow.”\(^{72}\) This thought closely reflects the words of Hawise Mone who believed that “confession shuld be maad oonly to God and to noon erthely preset,
for no prest hath poar to assoile hymself ne noon other persone of synne confessed to hym. thogh he be the popis peny dawnser.”

Margery Baxter supported Mone, claiming that since “she had never sinned against a priest (she) therefore never wished to confess to a priest.” Their opinions may have been a result of an existing system that, as suggested by Jacqueline Murray, held a “harsh and critical attitude towards female penitents.” An indifferent clerical attitude could assist in explaining Margery’s search to find sympathetic confessors.

All pious devotions, usually described with intensely passionate imagery, stemmed from the desire to imitate Christ. This imitation was integral to the visionary experiences of female mystics of this period. Ultimately, this imitation would lead the mystic, through meditation and prayers, to experience a vision or to receive intimate knowledge of the Passion of Christ. In the vitae of the continental mystics the majority of the women who held such religious inclinations did so from a young age. Most knew from childhood that they wished to devote their life to the higher contemplation of God. Caroline Walker Bynum has noted that most religious women experienced the desire to lead a religious life either from early childhood or, in some cases, after the death of their husbands. Margery’s call to a life of piety did not occur until she was in her twenties. Margery contrasts with the other mystics in that she appears to follow the pattern of the medieval male religious models by experiencing a sudden conversion to religious life in her later years.

In contrast to Margery, Julian appears to have followed the more traditional path of religious women. As already mentioned, her status at the time of her visions remains unknown to modern historians. There is the possibility that Julian may have been a nun and,
therefore, predisposed to such a deeply personal religious experience. If Julian had been married, as some historians suggest, then she was enclosed with the consent of her husband or after his death. This means that if Julian were not a virgin, she would have been included in the category of chaste widow.

The issue of chastity was of primary concern to Margery and the continental female mystics alike. Women, such as Margery and Dorothy of Mantau, practiced the more extreme austerities when forced to fulfill the conjugal debt. Some women, like Angela of Foligno, had to wait until the death of their spouse before being granted their desire for chastity. When finally freed from the debt, women were granted greater flexibility and freedom in their lifestyles. This kind of liberation is evident in Margery’s solo pilgrimages. If Kenneth Leech is correct and Julian was a young widow, then her enclosure may have been an attempt to keep a vow of chastity. For those women who struggled against the norm, Dyan Elliott contends that “they were no longer suited to a conventional-convventual religious life.” They sought to remain active in the secular world and their piety took on new forms of expression when they did so.

Notwithstanding the varied roads to holiness, what is striking about all of these religious women is their devotion to Christ. Female mystics ultimately tended to identify more with Christ than with the Virgin Mary. Although their works display a great reverence for Mary, indeed Margery referred to herself as a handmaiden to Mary, their ultimate identification was with the suffering of Christ. In fact, it was male mystics who appear to have more visions of Mary than female mystics. Still, as Bynum reveals, it should be
acknowledged that "there are no pious practices or devotional themes that are exclusively female or exclusively male" although mystical visions were more integral to women's experiences.\textsuperscript{85}

Although the church was often suspicious of female mystics, few women, except for Marguerite Porete, were actually aggressively prosecuted.\textsuperscript{86} Margery Kempe was often accused of heresy and taken before both secular and ecclesiastical courts to insure her continued orthodoxy. Catherine of Siena was examined before the General Chapter of her order in Florence in 1374 to guarantee her adherence.\textsuperscript{87} St. Bridget was also subjected to accusations from hostile clergy.\textsuperscript{88} Both Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden had been accused of being fanatics, which helps to demonstrate that contemporary popular reaction to Margery was normal, not that Margery was hysterical.\textsuperscript{89} Women who assumed a public religious role had to be careful that they were not accused of usurping male roles. Most women, however, appear to have had their visions in support of prominent men, both clerical and secular. As Bynum's research has revealed, the populace was, in general, quite suspicious of prophetic individuals.\textsuperscript{90} Consequently, religious women were often forced out of necessity to seek the sponsorship of established male figures.

This evokes the question of whether or not Margery was seeking to align herself with an entrenched, authoritative man, to provide him with support and, in return, receive any necessary assistance. This could explain a number of Margery's travels to well-known men of the ecclesiastical sphere. When Margery demonstrated what was perceived as anti-clerical sentiment in the courts of the archbishops, she may possibly have been attempting to portray
herself in the role of a spiritual and reformist guide. Margery may have had hopes of establishing a relationship similar to the one experienced by Jacques de Vitry and Marie d'Oignies or Catherine of Siena and Raymond of Capua. Or, there is also the possibility that Margery was hoping to acquire a court of male admirers and pupils such as those that gathered around Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden. If this was indeed her goal, she failed to gather a strong following, either religious or secular.

Margery may have written of her own well-known reputation and of those who supported her reputation as a visionary woman. There is no remaining evidence, however, of any attempt to mark her as an extraordinary religious woman after her death. Kieckhefer also considers the matter of Margery's lack of a posthumous cult and cites several possible explanations. He questions her personality and suggests the possibility that she lacked the charismatic nature of a true saint. He speculates on the remaining years of her life, which are unknown to moderns, and the possibility that she may have been unable to maintain her earlier level of religious devotion, or perhaps lived in an increasingly hostile environment. Kieckhefer further suggests that Margery failed to experience posthumous popularity because she did not accept the traditional confines of female piety by refusing enclosure and preferring to stay in the world. If the latter was a weakness in the life of Margery, it does not explain the life of Julian of Norwich. Julian was also a well-known and venerated mystic, and in contrast to Margery, she followed the accepted path of female religious vocation. She did not diverge from popular notions of female sanctity, yet there is no evidence of a posthumous
tribute to Julian either. Perhaps the lack of tribute does not lie in the lives of these women but in the nature of contemporary English society.

That the English ciime also failed to produce significant support for female lay piety outside of the traditional confines of religious institutions can be seen in the lack of religious communities for laywomen. Unlike the English situation, the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries had witnessed the development of a new phase in female piety on the continent, in the form of the Beguines. Predominantly an urban movement, the Beguines were a phenomenon that, as Elizabeth Petroff contends, are “still not entirely understood” by historians. The growth of cities, and the decrease in the male population from war and plague are considered to be contributing factors to the foundation of the Beguines.95 Bynum, however, cautions moderns against viewing these religious women as simply “surplus women” because “the lives of individual women show how many cases where beguine or tertiary status was chosen in preference to monastic by noble women.”96 These women established communities which excluded men and adhered to the ideal of poverty that was part of the popular religious climate.97 Marie d’Oignies is often credited with being the founder of the Beguines, but it really cannot be called a formal organization as the “communities were only informally connected with each other.”98 In addition, the Beguines did not desire any formal institutionalization in that when they first began to develop they “sought no authority from the hierarchy.”99 Although Marie may not have been the founder she was representative of the mystical element of the Beguines that favoured eucharist devotion and an emphasis on imitating the life of Christ.
Contemporary society did not permit the women to follow the example of the Franciscans and beg for a living, but they were allowed to work for their keep. Women in these communities turned to a variety of professions such as nursing and participation in the textile industry. The Beguines, since they were a part of the urban phenomena, came under the jurisdiction of the town and often provided the community with necessary skills, such as health care. Laymen, known as the Beghards, also participated in this movement; however, the majority of its members were women. Traditionally, the study of the Beguine movement has been limited to the continent, as historians were unable to locate any evidence indicating the existence of a Beguine movement in England.

Intriguingly enough, Norman Tanner has found evidence in wills that proves that Norwich possessed two communities resembling Beguinages in the mid-fifteenth century. Unfortunately, apart from the wills no other known evidence survives to enlighten the modern researcher as to the exact nature of the communities. One possible explanation is that these groups grew out of female affiliation with the guilds. In his study of women in York in the later Middle Ages, P.J.P. Goldberg found that although “women appear regularly to have associated together as a social group” they rarely did so “on a formal basis.” He supports his argument by pointing out the lack of formal organization in the guilds. Goldberg, however, finds evidence for the “existence of groups of ‘wives’ at various towns” which he notes “is ambiguous and the bequest could refer to an association of widows.” It is conceivable that the group in Norwich could have been a clustering of widows who sought to
relieve financial burdens through communitarian efforts. Their piety could have been through an effort to maintain a reputation as chaste, respectable widows.

It is also possible that Margery Kempe was trying to establish a community of pious laywomen, validating her own life by using references to Marie d'Oignies. Margery would have also gained a greater knowledge of the movement while on her continental pilgrimages. Furthermore, Margery's daughter-in-law was from the area in which the movement was flourishing. She may have provided Margery with more information on the Beguines. Thus, Margery may have hoped to initiate a community in which like-minded women could gather together to provide support for one another and to meditate on God. In her Book Margery addressed contemporary women about the nature of God. There is also a well-known passage which describes the mayor of Leicester's fears that Margery might lead wives astray. Since Margery wrote her life before the formation of the Beguinage-style communities there is the distinct possibility that these women may have been inspired by her activities but opted for a more accepted form of piety.

This connection between Margery and the Beguines is also suggested by their distinctive dress. Prior to her conversion, Margery had desired to gain public attention with her expensive and fashionable clothes. After her conversion, however, she attracted attention with her desire to wear white clothing. A precedent for wearing "a white woolen tunic and a cloak of the same simple colour without the addition of any fur or any puffery" had been set by Marie d'Oignies. Margery's insistence on the subject of dress may have been prompted by the activities of the Beguines. If Margery had wished to founded a community of pious
laywomen, in the tradition of the continental Beguines, she would have modelled the English movement on their example. Part of this model would have included the adoption of distinctive dress to denote the special nature of the community.

The communities of pious laywomen in Norwich do not appear to have had the broad appeal of the Beguines on the continent. This can, perhaps, be attributed to the late introduction of the communities into England. Interestingly enough, at a time when the continental Beguines were facing pressure to be enclosed, the majority of bequests to the Norwich communities came from clerics. Tanner found evidence of only seventeen bequests to the communities, with very little female support. Tanner speculates that this overall “lack of financial support was a cause of their disappearance.” Despite the eventual demise of these communities of pious women, their brief presence in Norwich adds to the rich religious layers in the area. Their existence is testimony to the religious paradox presented by Norwich.

The movement demonstrates that continental ideas were being adapted to Norwich society, however, the more traditional culture did not encourage the continued growth of the movement.

It is in this paradoxical Norwich milieu that Margery, Julian and the Lollard women must be analyzed. Although they shared characteristics with religious women on the continent, their home environment created differences in their expressions of piety. For instance, Margery and Julian do not exhibit the same reliance on the eucharist as did the continental mystics. Nor do the English mystics display the same tendencies for extreme bodily penance as practised by continental mystics like Marie d’Oignies and Dorothy of
Mantau. The emphasis on the Imitation of Christ and the necessity of clerical support was fundamental to women in England and the continent, suggesting a transcendence of boundaries for various practices. The dissemination of cross-contontental ideas was made possible through contemporary economics. Trade routes allowed for the spread of orthodox and heterodox ideas, as merchant traded ideas along with goods. Trade also provided the opportunity to establish familial relationships in other countries. This type of activity would have broadened cultural horizons as new family members brought with them new knowledge and different traditions. Most importantly, for women like Margery, new ideas and information could also be gathered in the process of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage provided the means for a cross-cultural exchange of ideas, both on the continent and in England. In his study of the wills of Norwich, Tanner found that the majority of devotional texts owned by the laity, were owned by women. Through an examination of the cultural milieu of Norwich another layer in the complex web of female piety will be unravelled.
CHAPTER THREE

"This work will not remain useless and forgotten": Intellectual and Cultural Milieu

As who should take a mirror polished bright
And set it in the common market-place, ...
Old January allowed his choice to play
Mirroring all the girls that lived nearby,...
- The Merchant's Tale, Canterbury Tales

The rise of literacy and the urban class created a situation in which the laity increasingly demanded access to works of devotion. As W.A. Pantin writes "the devout and literate layman was one of the most important phenomena of this period; he represented an opportunity as well as a problem for the Church."1 This notion of opportunity and problem can be witnessed in the activities of Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich and the Lollard women. Religion permeated every aspect of medieval life. Consequently, it is not surprising that secular and religious ideals often mirrored one another. Religious ideals such as patience, humility and poverty can often be found in the secular literature of this period. Accepted behavioural norms were expressed in secular literature, courtesy books, devotional prose, mystical treatises and even the arts. These works convey the impression that the clergy, after
providing a solid religious base, continued to influence and guide the laity. The active participation of the clergy has largely been ignored in the discussion of religious women in East Anglia. As part of the many influences that shaped the lives of these women, the intellectual and cultural climate is one of the many factors that influenced the shape of their lives. By examining these cultural and intellectual strands we will establish one part of the cultural web in which these women were enmeshed.

The ideas expressed in the writings of Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich and in the trials of the Lollards reflect the values of the larger population. Their work was not created in a vacuum; their beliefs resonate with the values of their communities. What is different about these women is the way in which they interpreted and articulated these same ideas. They provide examples of commonplace religious devotion taken to more extreme and, in some cases, heretical levels. The idea is not to take these women as oddities but to realize that their religious practices were encouraged by the laity as well as the clergy. They were different because they chose to take their devotion and reformist ideals to new heights. Accordingly, it is necessary to understand the intellectual and cultural ideals that surrounded these women and how these ideals influenced and encouraged their religious affiliations and devotional practices.

What must also be remembered, when discussing literature, is the idea of the individual and, as Anne Clark Bartlett observes, "the complex dynamism of the reading process." This "process of negotiation" would be furthered increased by the fact that most of the women in this survey were illiterate, despite evidence of increasing literacy among women in the urban
environment. To encompass educated women and women without a formal education or with only a rudimentary education, Bartlett cites three types of readers: "the cultivated reader", initially the domain of noble audiences ... 'pragmatic literacy', (which) first belonged to the emerging urban and trading working classes and ... (finally) 'professional literacy' (which) enabled readers to function as scribes, legal experts and administrators." Interestingly enough, Bartlett found that medieval "women variously - and often simultaneously - exercised all three types of reading according to their vocations or social circumstances." This realization of individual diversity carries wider implications than merely in the study of literary subjectivity, as the work of David Aers suggest. Aers posits that there is a "groundlessness (in) assuming a consensus of belief and perception in the audiences of medieval plays, writings, religious rituals and iconography." This argument is supported by Theresa Coletti, who notes that paintings could hold "multiple significations ... for different people within the Christian community." Establishing the varied nature of individual interaction with works of religion, textual, visual or oral helps to further demonstrate the individuality of experience in women's lives and to illustrate how these women were able to find such varied outlets for their piety.

The late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries witnessed an atmosphere of increasing literary restrictions. Nicholas Watson argues that these limitations, aimed primarily at religious material under the threat of the spread of Lollardy, also hindered the development of secular writing. Watson contends that Arundel's Constitutions, issued in 1409, were devised to diminish the threat of Lollard adherents. Due to the increased religious knowledge of the laity, however, the clergy began to fear "the laity's too eager pursuit of knowledge" and,
consequently, limited religious discussion in all vernacular forms. This restraint not only dealt with the literary themes but with the actual distribution of vernacular texts. Watson notes that Constitutions made the ownership of various texts, both religious and secular, dangerous to the holder of the work, particularly if he or she was not from the upper class. It would be interesting to know how much the text and life of Margery Kempe was affected by the Constitutions. Perhaps her Book, being written in the vernacular, after the passing of the Constitutions, was considered potentially subversive material despite her emphasis on her loyalty to the Church. This authorized censorship may have not only limited the availability of her text but also made the act of writing it suspect.

Before an examination of the influence of contemporary literature, the visual arts should be examined since contemporary artwork would have played an integral role in the intellectual milieu of the times. The emphasis on the visual would have been extremely important for women who were unable to read because paintings and stained glass could tell a story visually. As such, the religious imagery of the period would have influenced the devotional practices and ideas of orthodox women like Margery. In the writings of both Julian and Margery the modern reader can see the importance of the visual in their religious practices. For instance, during Julian’s illness it was not until her parish priest brought a crucifix for her to gaze upon that “the room became dark about (her), as if it were night, except for the image of the cross, which was somehow lighted up.” In this case, it was the crucifix that acted as the stimulus for Julian’s revelations. Further, the detailed descriptions provided by Julian reflect the contemporary emphasis on the visual.
The visual was also extremely important in the devotional practices of Margery Kempe. Many of Margery’s much derided outbursts occurred while she was in contemplation of a religious image. Later, even the sight of everyday occurrences would remind of her Christ’s suffering. Margery claimed that “sumtyme, whan sche saw the cruycfyx, er yf sche sey a man had a wownde er a best whethyr it wer, er yf a man bêt a childe befor hir er smet an hors er another best wyth a whippe, yyf sche myth sen it er heryn it, hir thowt sche saw owyr Lord be betyn er wowndyd.”15 Another incident occurred in Norwich, at St. Stephen’s Church, when Margery was “compellyd to cryn ful lowde and wepyn ful sor, as thei sche schulde a deyd” when she “sey a fayr ymage of owr Lady clepyd a pyte.”16 Margery’s disturbance earned her rebuke from a priest who reminded her that Jesus was “ded long sithyn.” Margery defended herself by stating that his death was “fresch” to her and should be that way “to alle Cristen pepil.”17 This particular incident ended happily with the priest ultimately thanking Margery for her words of wisdom. From this account we can gather the importance of the image in keeping religious messages alive for the illiterate and even for those who were literate. In addition, it has been speculated that a depiction of the Flagellation of Christ, found in the Norwich Cathedral, may have influenced Margery’s vision of the Passion.18 Hope Phyliss Weissman suggests that Margery’s physical posture during her cries at Mount Calvary in Jerusalem also held iconographic overtones, in that her stance resembled the crucifix.19

Surprisingly, the illiterate members of the Lollard communities, both male and female, rejected imagery, preferring instead to emphasize the importance of the written word, even if their only access to the word was through oral transmission, normally from male members of
the group. This stress on the written word also suggests the prominence of memorization in the community. Memorization, however, played a fundamental role in lay devotion for both the orthodox and heterodox.\textsuperscript{20} Even the Lollard rejection of imagery cannot be considered startlingly heretical. W.R. Jones writes that this “critique of images (was), in fact, truisms of contemporary reformist opinion.”\textsuperscript{21} The Lollards, however, did not necessarily believe that the images were being used incorrectly or ineffectively by the laity, but rather they denounced images as useless and idolatrous.\textsuperscript{22} In the heresy trials, Hawise Mone stated that “no worship ne reverence oweth to be do to ony ymages of the crucifix, of Our Lady ne noon other syntes, for all suche ymages be but ydols and maade be werkyng of mannys hand, but worship and reverence shuld be do to the ymage of God, which oonly is man.”\textsuperscript{23} Margery Baxter also gave evidence of her rejection of images when she stated that “lewed Wrights of stokkes hewe and fourme suche crosses and ymages, after that lewed peyntors glorye thaym with colours.”\textsuperscript{24} As well, Baxter had scandalized her neighbour, Joan Clyfland, when she offered to show her the true cross and “extended her arms out, saying ... this cross you can see and adore every day here in your own house, and it will come to you that you labour in vain when you go to church to adore and pray to any dead images or crosses.”\textsuperscript{25} Lollards in East Anglia had even participated in the desecration of religious images.\textsuperscript{26} Shannon McSheffrey contends that this rejection of imagery “may have affected women more negatively than men.”\textsuperscript{27} She asserts that in the Lollard communities it was believed that women were more susceptible to the lure of painted images and this sensitivity was demonstrative of their overall simplicity.\textsuperscript{28}
Conceivably this claim can indicate a more general trend in popular religious practices. It is possible that Lollard sermons emphasized the threat of women and religious images simply because women were more likely to be drawn to them. Women, regardless of class, were more likely to be illiterate and consequently may have relied more on images for their religious instruction. Although the Lollards may have rejected imagery as idolatry there remained the fear of female backsliding, indicating the existence of a strong connection between women and religious imagery. This can also be viewed in The Book when Margery recounts the tale of a woman traveling with the Grey Friars who carried around “a chyst and an ymage therin mad afytr our Lord.”

The woman would remove the image and place it in “worpful wylys lappys” generating a positive response from the women and, of course, sobbing from Margery. As well, Norman Tanner’s study found evidence of one Mabel Maloysel of Norwich who “bequeathed in 1383 a gold ring ‘with a stone called a diamond with an image of Saint Mary of Walsingham’.” Consequently, documentation exists that supports the overall importance of religious imagery in the devotional practices of later medieval women.

Another popular form of visual religious instruction, produced by the laity, could be found in contemporary plays. Gail McMurray Gibson speculates that during the fifteenth century East Anglia became “one of the most important drama centres in England,” thereby making the study of drama essential in an evaluation of the contemporary intellectual climate. The feast of the Corpus Christi had, in certain towns, elicited a response from the guilds in the form of cycle plays. The guilds initially joined in the Corpus Christi celebration simply by
participating in the procession, wearing their guild livery and following the Corpus Christi in their assigned position. As time progressed the guilds began to be accompanied by "pageants - moving wagon platforms. On these, props and actors were assembled into depictions of Scriptural scenes and incidents." Some towns, such as York, developed their plays to the extent that they exceeded the allotted time and conflicted "with the processional and liturgical aspects" of the Corpus Christi Feast. These plays were fundamental to the celebration and became firmly entrenched in the community.

James Mervyn posits that the plays provided an opportunity for the community to define itself since they attracted a wide audience of gentry, urban dwellers, people from the countryside as well as visitors from all classes. Further, Mervyn notes that "the influx of strangers also brought a brief flurry of enhanced commercial activity to the urban markets." Again, we see the emphasis on the burgeoning economic market, one of the many layers in both the material and textual world of Margery Kempe. The role of the guilds is also important to remember since this was one aspect in which the laity was able to publicly enhance their devotional status. Margery’s connection with the most important guild in King’s Lynn made her susceptible to the pride that this type of activity could produce. Early in her life, she may have been influenced by the importance of the guild in the Corpus Christi procession and later translated it into religious pride.

As David Aers has suggested, viewing an event such as the Corpus Christi play cycles, did not necessarily guarantee a uniformity of discernment as there existed the "basis for a wide range of attitudes, perceptions and ideas" among the audience. Still, the events considered
could inspire the viewer to imitation, albeit according to his or her own interpretation of the episode. Suzanne Craymer suggests that Margery Kempe displayed this characteristic by modeling herself on the Mary Magdalene presented in the “Digby Plays.” Craymer contends that “Kempe had the opportunity to become familiar with Mary Magdalene’s role in the Corpus Christi plays.”

Margery’s text evidences a strong affiliation with Mary Magdalene, and this connection can even be used as another source for the validation of her gift of tears.

Margery shares other characteristics with the saint, as she was portrayed in the play. These include the sins of pride and lechery and the Magadalene’s “emphasis on her physical senses.” Further, both women signify the ability to retain a spiritual virginity in the face of lost physical virginity.

Margery can also be seen as an imitative of the role of the Virgin Mary in the mystery play cycles. Theresa Coletti examined the mystery plays and found that the plays “transform the biblical story of Christ’s conception, birth and early life into a prominent site of domestic struggle and social critique.” She contends that this “refashioned biblical story exploits highly charged topics such as age and sexuality in marriage, adultery, cuckoldry and illegitimacy, and that explores the interaction of domestic and economic relationships.”

Coletti only examines the troubling nature of the paradox the virgin birth represented to the laity, but many of her theories can be strengthened by an examination of the life of Margery Kempe. Just as Margery’s text focuses primarily on the physical, Coletti notes that the play cycle tends to highlight the significance of Mary’s body. This grounding of Mary in the material world was reflected in other medieval writings. As well, the plays reflected the
confusion felt by the laity and their attempt to reconcile the notion of the virgin birth. This is an issue that appears in Margery’s continuous questioning of spiritual virginity and physical virginity. What is most intriguing is Coletti’s argument that the Marian plays had the “power to disrupt traditional ideologies of gender” as she points out how Mary’s role actually inverts the domestic power relationship. Obviously, then, Margery’s transgression of gender expectations may be more typical than has generally been perceived. Finally, the role of gossip and public opinion dominated the Marian plays just as slander and community opinion exercised considerable influence on Margery’s activities.

Further evidence that Margery may have been influenced by the play cycles can be found in her account of her vision of the Passion. As Margery and Mary watch Jesus bear the cross “owr Lady seyd unto hym, ‘A, my swete sone, late me help to ber that hevy crosse.’” B.A. Windeatt suggests that this scene resembles an episode in the Wakefield Mystery Play of the Scourging in which Mary tries to carry the cross. Viewing the Corpus Christi play cycles would have held different significance for each individual. Margery’s imitative approach would not have been taken by all members of the audience. As a contrast, Lollard belief would have denied the ability of Mary to intercede on the behalf of a supplicant and would have dismissed the notion of virginity as integral to union with God. Followers of Wyclif tended to criticize the Corpus Christi plays as “essentially rites of reversal.” Additionally, the connection of the Corpus Christi plays to the celebration of the eucharist would have further distanced Lollard viewers from the proceedings. Therefore, their attendance at the cycle plays may have had more to do with community watchfulness rather than the desire to
attend, or any belief in, the plays. Still, the Lollard community itself was careful to continue
to denounce the plays for, as Gail McMurray Gibson found, the dramas tended to appeal to
women.\textsuperscript{55} Obviously the visual was integral to medieval women’s devotional practices.

Kathleen M. Ashley suggests that the plays reflect “the influence of conduct literature”
and therefore, were to “mirror proper social behaviours for women in the audience.”\textsuperscript{56} Ashley
cites the humility and prudent behaviour of the Virgin in the Annunciation scenes as a
portrayal intended to influence the female members of the audience.\textsuperscript{57} The plays offered
women guidance on proper social etiquette when greeting their betters as well as those of a
lower status.\textsuperscript{58} Ashley also suggests that the religious tones of the play could be subverted to
suit the nature of secular society, as evidenced in the changing depiction of Martha and Mary.

Although Mary was described by Jesus as having chosen the better service, the plays diminish
Mary’s role and accentuate the active life of Martha. Ashley believes that this reflected the
nature of contemporary bourgeois women, women who were active in their own homes and
still pious in their charitable works.\textsuperscript{59} This evolving nature evident in the plays can serve to
remind us, as Clifford Geertz contends, that “no one, not even a saint, lives in the world
religious symbols formulate all of the time.”\textsuperscript{60} This can also help to account for the
overlapping nature of religious and secular works. Religious ideals often helped to shape the
prescribed behaviour for laywomen, and secular imagery often influenced religious treatises.

This combination of styles can be seen in the devotional texts of the period. These
works, as Bartlett observes, “combine courtly and religious values” such as “characteriz(ing)
Christ as a knightly lover.”\textsuperscript{61} In this sense Christ was transformed into a romantic hero,
described in glowing terms that give the impression of an aristocratic gentleman. Bartlett suggests that the image of the Courteous Christ would have been contrasted by female readers/listeners within "the local context of their individual experiences: their imperfect marriages, ..., social class, ... satisfactions and frustrations." An example of the Christ-Knight can be found in the devotional work for anchoresses, the Ancrene Wisse. The introductory tale tells of an indifferent lady and her powerful, devoted suitor. He provided for her, sent her gifts, protected her and finally, died for her. Despite the fact that the suitor had been "the most supremely handsome of men" and "spoke so very tenderly" the lady remained unmoved by his suit and the author proclaimed that "she was never fit to be his maidservant." The reader is left with the image of Christ assuming the role of the knight and entering a tournament as a testimony to his love for the lady. The lady in this specific incident is more a passive object than an active participant, but other works allow for a more dynamic role. This type of dynamism can be evidenced in the writings of both Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich.

Margery’s first visitation by Christ closely parallels the image of the Christ-knight. While experiencing her postpartum madness she wrote that Christ came to her “in lyknesse of a man, most semly, most bewtyuows, and most amyable that evyr myght be seen wyth mannys eye, clad in a mantyl of purpyp sylke.” This image of Christ helped Margery to achieve one of her social aspirations: she was finally able to marry above her class and rectify her ‘mistake’ of marrying beneath her. Courteous Christ continued throughout the Book to be unwavering in his support of Margery and his love did not entail the physical uncertainty of
childbirth. Further, Margery was encouraged to be an active participant in their relationship since he “must be homly wyth (her), and lyn in thi bed wyth (her)”, then she “myst boldy ... take me to the as for this weddyd husbond ... thu mayst boldy take me in the armys of thi sowle and kyssen my mouth, myn hed and my fete as swetly as thow wylt.” As well, Margery’s patient endurance of her trials may be seen as further proof of her dynamic relationship with Courteous Christ. Christ came to her in the semblance of the Christ-Knight, yet Margery, much like the knight of the Ancrene Wisse, was the one to actually perform the physical acts that offered proof of her love to her suitor.

In Julian’s Revelations the image of the courtly Lord is a recurring motif. Courtesy, along with the term homely, is essential to Julian’s portrayal of the Divine. Her usage of the courtly can be used as an indication of her consciousness of secular attitudes. For, as Anna Maria Reynolds writes, “courtesy is a word whose ramifications and overtones embrace the social, moral and literary.” Evidence of this combination of elements can be seen in the passage where Julian wrote that “it is an expression of royal friendship on the part of courteous Lord that he holds on to us so tenderly when we are in sin.” Here we see the social dimension as the Lord was cast in the role of a King extending his friendship, the courtly is an extension of the literary convention of courtly love, and the moral can be found in the discussion of sin. Julian’s work also contains elements of conduct discourse and often detailed how good Christians were suppose to act. For instance, Julian writes that it was her “greatest comfort” that “our Lord (was) so unpretentious and considerate.” Julian instructed by example and also by suggestion. She wrote that “the greatest honour a great king or noble
lord can do a poor servant is treat him as a friend, especially if, in public and private alike, it is seen to be both genuine and spontaneous. 72 Julian can also be viewed as an active participant in the courtly love model when she resisted the suggestion of gazing up to heaven instead of meditating upon the crucifix. She refused to remove her gaze, saying "'No. I cannot. You are my heaven',' and claiming that "I wanted no other heaven than Jesus, who will be my joy when I do eventually get there." 73 Nicholas Watson contends that this episode was actually a "love-test" for Julian. 74 This section recasts Julian from a passive vision recipient to one who actively seeks the love of God and control of the revelations. 75 Julian was both the object of the Christ-Knight's affection and an active participant in the quest for true-love.

Obviously, then, recurring themes in devotional prose reflected important values of the religious and intellectual milieu. These gender ideals can also be found in the conduct books written for women in this period. Therefore, these values were distinctly translated from the religious into the secular world. There is also evidence that many of these ideas were imbued with an international significance. This can be seen when we turn from English literature, to consider the writing of Christine de Pisan (1365-c.1430). Christine's work was meant to be used as a handbook for the everyday activities of secular women, although her text also offered advice to vowed religious women. Pisan's writing reflected many of the issues and ideals that were expressed in English literature at this time and in The Book of Margery Kempe. One section in The Treasure of the City of Ladies, in particular, can be applied to the life of Margery Kempe. Christine wrote of proud women who felt that they had married beneath
them. She stated that “it sometimes happens that some of them, through a lack of sense and a great deal of pride, are not content, because they regard their husbands as peasants compared to them.” This passage suggests that the shame that Margery felt at marrying beneath her “worthy kentred” may have been prevalent among women. Christine’s work also contains many of the ideals expressed in the religious works of this period. There is an emphasis on patience, the idea of humility and the belief that you should always fear God and keep him in mind.

Pisan also addressed Margery Kempe’s attempt to reach above her station in life. Margery had tried to dress elaborately and took great pride in her natal family and her clothing. In this sense, Margery’s descent into madness and her failed business attempts can be seen as a reflection of Adam’s and Eve’s Fall, which was also attributed to pride and disobedience. When Margery came to realize the error of her ways she “forsoke hir pride, hir coveytys” and changed her manner of dress to one more befitting a religious woman. The emphasis on dress and the rise of the courtesy books in general may have been in part, as Diane Bornstein suggests, due to “the insistence upon hierarchy in political and social theory, the actual social mobility and instability of the time, the attempt of the aristocracy to affirm their position, and the rise of the middle class.” Margery’s acceptance of her more humble dress may have been meant as an encouragement to other women not to dress above their station.

This blurring of religious and secular ideals as well as the rising importance of the secular can be viewed in the increasing amounts of vernacular literature. It is important to
examine contemporary secular literature since Julian, Margery and the Lollard women were all products of the secular environment. As has been noted, the use of the vernacular was on the rise in large part due to the Hundred Years’ War and the resulting increase in nationalism in England. Concurrent with this, however, was also a new fear of the vernacular because of its association with the Lollard movement. Consequently, the vernacular was both a source of pride and an object of suspicion in the period under consideration. It is interesting to note that secular literature can also be used to mark the changing opinions of the laity to the Lollard movement. In Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* there appears to be very little antagonism reflected in the Host’s pronouncement of “‘Ho! Is Johnny there? I smell a Lollard in the wind!’”80 Therefore, literature can be used both to influence its readers or listeners and to demonstrate the changing opinions of society.

*The Canterbury Tales* serves as a very useful source in the study of later medieval piety. The text not only mentions the Lollard movement and suggests its original tolerance if not acceptance, it provides the modern reader with the Wife of Bath, a character whose tale is often compared to the activities of Margery Kempe. Additionally, *The Canterbury Tales* also hints at the life of other religious women through the Prioress and the Second Nun and provides the reader with tales about women such as Patient Griselda and St. Cecilia. Although *Canterbury Tales* can offer the reader information on women, a word of caution should be interjected. These women, as with most medieval works of imagination, are the creation of a male author.81 Still, the text offers a glimpse of later medieval life and the ideals that were important to society.
In Chaucer’s work modern readers can witness what Richard Kieckhefer refers to as patience and “the semireligious, semisecular notion of chivalrous endurance.” This notion of patient suffering is portrayed in The Clerk’s Tale of Patient Griselda. Griselda, a poor woman, is chosen by a wealthy Lord to be his bride. Unsure of Griselda’s loyalty he constantly tests Griselda’s love, and as “it was her husband’s will ... she consented.” Through the loss of her two children and her husband’s announcement that he would take a new bride, Griselda endured silently and without reproach. Kieckhefer notes that “through her patient endurance Griselda manages to overcome her husband, or to persuade him of her worth, but she can only do so because both of them, along with the storyteller and his audience, recognize patience as inherently good.” This confluence of patience and reward, seen in the writings of Margery and Julian, was obviously a concept that intermingled satisfactorily in the secular as well as the religious world. Its dual nature was not a source of concern to contemporary society, which stands in contrast to the concern over the permeation of commercial language into religious affairs.

The connection of commerce and sexuality that often causes distress for the modern readers of Margery Kempe can also be witnessed in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. Deborah Ellis contends that medieval mens’ fears about the threat of female sexuality and commerce can be viewed in the discourse of The Merchant’s Tale and The Book of Margery Kempe. Ellis posits that “merchant women can provide an immediate access to some of the central paradoxes we see in medieval discourses about women.” Ellis suggests that it is May, the merchant’s wife, not Patient Griselda or Alison of Bath, who is “the major analogue to
Margery in the *Canterbury Tales.*" The story of May suggests the economic nature of many urban marriages, and the notion of the wife as the property of the husband and "her role in the *Merchant's Tale* is not to prove, and improve, by suffering but rather to expose the hypocrisy of this ultimate in mercantile marriages." Margery's life can also be seen as a test to traditional ideals. Instead of Margery assuming the accepted female role she subverted the norm and her husband, John, became, more or less, the "female". It was John who remained at home while Margery travelled abroad. In this sense, Margery overcomes the restrictions normally applied to her gender.

Whereas the prevailing economic morality became an integral component in the religious life of Margery Kempe, the question of commerce and religion was a source of grave concern for poet William Langland. As well, Langland's anti-clericalism can also help to shed light on the Lollard movement and make Lollard beliefs a natural part of the intellectual and religious atmosphere. It is in the writing of William Langland that we can best understand the claim that "anti-clericalism is not equivalent to unorthodoxy." Langland's denunciation of the clergy never went beyond criticism, his views never actually rejected any of the Church's policies. In contrast, the Lollards became defined as a heretical movement when the rejected orthodox theories, particularly when they denied transubstantiation. It is because they were "affermynge, belevyng and holdyng be opin errours and heresies and contrarious to the determinacion of the Churche of Roome" that they deviated from the accepted reformist movement into a heretical organization. Calls for clerical change could even be found in the writings of the clergy itself. The Lollards, however, went further in their clerical criticism
than contemporary secular writers and, eventually, any public critique of the clergy could suffice as evidence of Lollardy sympathies. This type of suspicion can be seen in the Book when Margery was often forced to defend herself for her censure of the clergy.  

Lollard belief proclaimed that “every man and every woman beyng in good lyf oute of synne is as good prest and hath (as) muche poar of God in al thynges as ony prest ordred, be he pope or bisshop.” Accordingly, Margery Baxter stated that the clergy “cursedly desseyve the puple.” The anti-clericalism of the Lollards could be found not only in their denunciations of the clergy but in their claims that women could also be priests. John Skyly, a convicted Lollard, asserted “that every trewe man and woman being in charite is a prest.” Initially these claims were taken as evidence that women were drawn to the Lollard movement as it accorded women the opportunity to preach. Shannon McSheffrey has demonstrated that the activities of the East Anglian Lollards did not invert gender roles and that women remained in secondary roles within the communities. Nonetheless, the potential that this belief held for women was manifested within the group, as can be observed in Margery Baxter’s belief that she could convert her neighbour as well as a popular Carmelite friar! For women the promise inherent in these words offered them the opportunity to move beyond their passive role in the orthodox community. Although the possibility was never fully realized in the East Anglia community it may have been partly due to the fact that the group was suppressed in its formative years. The community never had the time to develop and allow women the opportunity to act on their beliefs.
Despite the evidence of anti-clericalism among the laity the clergy was integral in the dissemination of information in the later Middle Ages. Most often trade is considered to be the main impetus behind the spread of ideas but at this time the international Church was still united. This international character would have helped to make, as Norman Tanner contends, “Norwich ... one of the most important intellectual and cultural centres in medieval England.” The cathedral priory acted as an integral element in this claim. The English clergy would have retained close ties with the continent and were often expected to relocate to the continent should it be requested of them. Further, clerics from the continent could also be expected to take up residency in England. This existing relationship fostered the diffusion of information from the continent to England and vice versa. This practice is evident in The Book of Margery Kempe when Margery tells of her prophetic ability in relation to a "wosheful man (who) was comyn to Lynne and had dwellyd the but lylil while, whech was a wol worsscheplef clerk, a doctowr of divinite, he was poynyt for to gon ovyr the see to the Kyng into Frawnce and other clerkys also of the worthyest in Ynglond." Margery recounts that after meditating on the issue it was divinely ordained that he would not be removed from Lynn, which, of course, he was not, allowing Margery to retain the support of this respected individual. This incident suggests another issue that should be considered when evaluating female piety: the role of the clergy in the spiritual development of women such as Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich and even the Lollard women. Clerical support, as we have seen in the lives of continental women, was fundamental to a successful religious career.
Consequently, it is important to consider how much assistance the clergy offered to these women and what form of encouragement they provided.

A recent study by J.P.H. Clark notes the connection between East Anglia and Cambridge University in the late fourteenth century. His study also demonstrates the English clerical connection to the continent. For example, he considers the career of William Flete, an Augustinian friar, who left Cambridge in order to become a hermit in Italy. Flete's relocation brought him into contact with Catherine of Siena, and he became one of her followers and an advocate for her canonization. Letters written after Catherine's death show that Flete remained in contact with the English chapter of the Order, and his continued correspondence would have allowed for the dissemination of the prophecies and stories about the activities of Catherine of Siena. In addition, William Flete may have influenced the English mystic Walter Hilton.

Another visionary woman with connections to East Anglia was Bridget of Sweden. It is possible that her life first came to the attention of people in Norwich through the activities of Adam Easton. Easton, whom Pantin identifies as a "monk-scholar from Norwich and Oxford," was well-educated and traveled, spending time in both Rome and Avignon with the papal curia. Easton, possibly after meeting Bridget, became a staunch supporter of her prophetic mission. His defence of Bridget may have paved the way for her acceptance among the clergy in Norwich. Bridget's writings were later disseminated to the laity by the activities of the Carmelite Alan of Lynn. Alan, a contemporary and, most importantly, a supporter of Margery was responsible for indexing Bridget's prophecies. Alan provided Margery with
information on Bridget and perhaps their conversations about this holy woman influenced Margery's actions. Margery would have been limited to information about Bridget that she had gathered on pilgrimages were it not for clerical support. Alan obviously encouraged Margery by continuing to discuss religious works with her. Another contemporary East Anglian, friar Osbern Bokenham, was responsible for the translation of the life of St. Cecilia. Clearly then, the clergy fostered female devotion through both translations of the writings of female religious role models and their willingness to read aloud and discuss these women with their female associates.

Clark also considers the writings of Julian of Norwich and notes that her theology "indicates that she had capable theological advisers at Norwich who helped her to articulate her understanding of her Revelations." Although this observation could produce debate among the supporters of "Julian the Learned," it does raise an important question about how much of her theology was influenced either directly or indirectly by male clergy. Julian's work contains elements of other popular devotional works and the existing tradition of Jesus as Mother. Julian's portrayal of the Motherhood of God may have held some controversial overtones, in light of contemporary Lollard belief, however, as Rachel Jacoff explains, "Julian herself made no connection between her revelations and any particular role for women within the church." Although Julian's work offers a unique interpretation of the motherhood of Jesus, she does emulate existing religious works, most of which were written by male authors. Still, Julian's writing on the subject injects a more positive image of motherhood, in that it is contrasted with the image of the stern father. The usage of the Motherhood of God
was not unknown to the readers of later medieval literature. The debate over Julian’s reading capabilities calls into question whether or not Julian would have been able to read Latin or if she were dependent on the vernacular. If it were the latter, then she would have been dependent on translations of the originals.

It was the clergy who provided English translations of popular continental works. Walter Hilton, mystic and cleric, has been suggested as the translator of the *Prickynge of Love*, initially entitled *Stimulus Amoris*. Clark also notes the “indications of contact between the Cambridge Dominicans and Germany.” Furthermore, W.A. Pantin has observed that the Franciscan school in Norwich “was sufficiently active to attract foreign students.” Pantin’s work also shows a connection with Italy through the activities of Nicholas of Assisi who visited Norwich and Oxford in the mid-fourteenth century. Obviously then, the clergy of late medieval Norwich were well connected to the continent intellectually. This may have been furthered by the activities of men like Adam Easton, who bequeathed his book collection to his monastery in Norwich. By that point, Easton would have collected a diverse assortment of material containing popular continental ideas.

The clergy’s increasing use of the vernacular was also important in the spread of ideas. The clergy often combined “practical theology and secular morality” into their sermons to the laity. G.R. Owst’s study of sermons in late medieval England offers insight into contemporary moral concerns. Owst notes that no one was spared from clerical attacks and that the preachers tempered their sermons to reflect current affairs. For instance, when addressing the subject of women, clerics targeted women’s vanity, particularly their love of
costume and display. Nonetheless, as Janet Coleman’s work stresses, the importance of preaching in the vernacular can best be exhibited in the popularity of the friars. Their popularity can be witnessed in the writing of Margery Kempe and her encounter with “on of the most famows freys in Ingland.” A large gathering turned out to hear the friar who, having been forewarned about Margery’s cries, suffered through her histrionics during the first sermon. The next time he spoke, however, and Margery was moved to tears and cries, the friar had her removed from the church. Despite the attempts of her supporters to intercede on her behalf, Margery was banned from his sermons for years. This friar, who “was at that tyme neythyr bachelor ne doctowr of divinitye.” failed to recognize what the more learned clerics acknowledged, that Margery had been given a gift from God. This account confirms that those who supported Margery tended to be from the higher levels of the clergy and, therefore, more learned. Furthermore, Margery also found support from others known for their piety, such as Julian of Norwich. The friar’s reaction to Margery’s sobs supports Geertz’s claim that there is “a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures” and provides further evidence of individual reaction. In a sense, the friar was an outsider to Margery’s created religious culture. Margery’s support from the priests may have also been a result of the tensions between the secular clergy and the mendicant friars.

The friars, according to the rules of their orders, were expected to follow the precept of apostolic poverty. Accordingly, their monetary support was derived from the laity. This practice, along with their claim that they lived a superior Christian life, created hostilities within the clergy. Friars were often viewed as infringing on the pastoral rights of the secular
clergy and their rejection of land ownership brought them into conflict with monks. The secular clergy began to attack the mendicants for overstepping their privileges and accused them of being theologically and morally weak. Despite the problems within the clergy over preaching and financial rights, the friars remained popular with the laity. The fact that the friars were more apt to travel may have made them more open to new ideas, and their travel in turn may have helped with the dissemination of these ideas.

The precedent for the use of English in religious instruction had been set and Lollard practices can be seen as extension of this belief. Sarah Beckwith contends that the Lollard movement may have spurred some English translations as a method of combating the spread of the Lollards. Nicholas Love's translation of *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* (1410) is a specific example of the attempt to confront the Lollard heresy. Beckwith also notes the difficulty that authorities had in controlling Lollard activity due to "the Lollard habit of interpolating orthodox texts with Lollard propaganda." Again, we see the importance of the clergy in the Lollard movement, both as advocates and detractors. For instance, P.J. Horner speculates that the activities of Adam Easton may have led to Pope Gergory XI's denunciation of Wyclif's ideas. Furthermore, Norwich also produced Thomas Brinton, a one-time monk in Norwich, as a firm opponent to the Lollard movement. Yet, as Shannon McSheffrey has pointed out, "in the early years of Lollardy, clerics were indispensable to its growth and maintenance." William White, Hugo Pye and William Sawtrey were all Lollard clerics who paid for their beliefs with their lives. Interestingly enough in Norwich itself, a city that remained impervious to the Lollard movement, Norman Tanner was unable to locate a
pervasive feeling of anti-clericalism. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact that many of the Norwich clergy came from the citizens of the city. The diocese of Norwich remains a paradox as, clearly, in East Anglia, the clergy helped to foster and to curb Lollard tendencies.

The mystical treatises of the period also reflect the influence of the continent. This can be attributed to the fact that the male mystics were often culled from the religious institutions and some, such as Richard Rolle, may have actually studied abroad. Rolle, out of the fourteenth century mystical school, is most often considered by moderns to be the most like Margery in his devotions. Rolle displays the same tendencies as Margery in his fervent and emotional outpourings as well as his peculiar dress. Margery’s familiarity with the text is well-known and at times her visions seem to paraphrase the writings of Rolle. For instance, her description of the crucifixion and Christ’s body “mor ful of wowndys than evyr was duffehows of holys” and her gift of the “fyer of lofe.” She described it, recalling Rolle, as:

woondir hoot and delectabyl and ryth comfortabyl, nowt wastyng but eyvr incresyng, of lowe, for thow the wedyr wer nevyr so colde, sche felt the hete brennyng in hir brest and at hir hert. as verily as a man schuld felyn the material yyf he put hys hand or hys fynger therin.

As well, Julian may have been influenced by the writings of earlier male English mystics. Julian’s writing is often compared to the work of Walter Hilton, who lived in close proximity to Norwich. Unlike Margery and Rolle, Julian never paraphrased the work of Hilton but she did share certain characteristics with him, particularly an emphasis on introspection.

Although the Norwich clergy appeared to have been quite comfortable with spreading continental ideas at home and supporting religious women abroad, their efforts seem to have been more limited when it came to the activities of English women. The clergy were willing
to encourage and support orthodox religious women, but they seemed hesitant to promote their revelations on a larger level. For instance, Thomas Netter, who was “recorded as a special patron of women recluses and an encourager of holy women” disapproved “of publicity for them.” The clergy played a paradoxical role in the spread of Lollardy: clerics acted as both advocates and detractors of the movement. Nonetheless, their influence should not be overlooked. The religious women of East Anglia lived in an oral, textual, and visual intellectual climate. All of these elements combined to create highly individualistic forms of personal piety among the women of East Anglia. Devotional prose mirrored secular values, while religious texts reflected the ideals of the laity. The prevailing intellectual climate permeated the lives of the East Anglian women and found varied outlets in their religious practices. The importance of the clergy cannot be understated in an evaluation of the cultural environment. Most of the vernacular translations came from the clergy as did women’s access to these written works. Clerics may also have assisted in writing the play cycles. Support of the clergy was fundamental in a successful religious life. This was evidenced in the lives of orthodox as well as heterodox women. The Lollard movement ultimately failed because it lacked popular support. In Norwich the absence of Lollards suggests a strongly anti-Lollard clergy. Finally, it was impetus from the clergy that ended Lollard activity in East Anglia. In the case of orthodox women, there is no evidence of a posthumus cult for either Margery or Julian, which indicates that clerical support may have ended with their death. The support of the clergy was crucial for the maintenance of cults. Without their continuing support these women faced erasure from popular memory. It was only because of their own writings that
they managed to survive, if only marginally. Julian's work, written before Arundel's Constitutions of 1409, reached a broader audience than Margery's text, which was written in a more cautious literary climate. Without proper clerical authorization the writings of these women were not widely disseminated.
“Dowtyr, I have ordeynnd the to be a merowsr”: Conclusion

Nevrytheles, dowtyr, I have ordeynnd the to be a merowsr amongys hem for to han gret sorwe that thei schulde takyn exampl by the for to have sum litil sowre in her hertys for her synnys that thei myth therthorw be savyd, but thei lovyn not to heryn of sowre ne of contricyon.

- The Book of Margery Kempe

When evaluating the activities of medieval women it should be noted, as P.H. Cullum suggests, that “it is perhaps also true that female charity, even more than male charitable activity, is likely to be underestimated because it is invisible to the modern eye.”¹ Cullum’s notion of the inaccessibility of female charity can be extended further to encompass all of the religious activities undertaken by women. In this respect the area of Norwich provides a fascinating glimpse of the diversity of religious activity that was available to women in the later medieval period in England. Norwich had the unparalleled distinction of producing two female mystics in addition to numerous female Lollards. Norwich was probably not unique in the religious zeal felt by its female inhabitants; this can readily be seen in the writing of Margery Kempe when she encountered women who secretly embraced her teachings and devotion.² What does appear to be unique to the diocese of Norwich, however, was its willingness to foster a sense of female religious freedom. This “autonomy” offered women a relatively liberal environment in which their lives and visions could become the focus of a written text, such as Julian’s Revelations and Margery’s Book. The clergy sanctioned their
religious writings, if only through the activity of clerical scribes. Notwithstanding these women’s achievements, it is apparent, through the evidence of the heresy trials, that there were limits on the extension of this religious freedom. In this sense, Margery Kempe provides modern readers, not with a bizarre anomaly, but rather with a woman who can be viewed as mirroring the multifaceted nature of later medieval church and society. Kempe’s life yields information on a variety of religious trends preceding, encompassing and even stretching beyond her own lifetime. Moreover, her writing contains a wealth of information on the nature of urban life. This overlapping nature of the secular and the sacred brings us back to Geertz’s notion of the cultural web.

As Geertz’s contends “that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun,” it is, therefore, vital that the East Anglian women be analyzed in their chosen cultural web. As each individual creates her own web of significance it is necessary to examine the layers which constitute her life. As demonstrated by this examination of the women of East Anglia, some cultural webs challenge the historian with more intricate interweaving. By examining their contemporary culture, layer by layer, the historian is more likely to be able to spot the meaningful elements that contributed to each individual’s overall web. Susan Stuard also encourages “the importance of understanding women in the context of their own society and the opportunities that their times afforded them.” Utilizing the layering technique also provides the historian with the opportunity to emphasize the importance of the individual, as promoted by David Aers. The apparent diversity in the lives of women such as Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and the Lollard women demonstrates the variety of
choices offered to women in later medieval England. Further, the creation of individual webs helps to explain the confusion generated by individual activity.

This confusion can be best explained when examining Margery Kempe. Margery is an expressive example of an individual's attempt to create a unique cultural web. Historians such as Lynn Staley Johnson and Karma Lochrie have noted that Margery rejected her own society and sought to create a new community and/or to provide a critique of her own class. Under the application of thick descriptions, however, Margery's behaviour can be viewed as that of a woman simply choosing what was meaningful to her out of a plethora of cultural symbols. Margery began to combine secular and sacred symbolism, supporting Paula Cooey's theory that "the more consumed one is by the piety and practices of a tradition, the less sense it seems to make to draw a line between religious and nonreligious or secular experience." Her approach is such that only when her "audience" is in the know, that is insiders to her world of significance, can they truly understand her. That is why Margery often appeared to be understood only by the more enlightened and upper levels of the clergy. Julian of Norwich offered her support of Margery's tears but, in Julian's web of construction, tears need not be physical but symbolic. By examining the individual in the layers of her particular life a more detailed description of her chosen cultural web can be achieved.

Previous studies on the growth of female piety in Norwich have tended to focus on the economic aspect of the community. Historians have noted Norwich's well-developed trade with the continent and, consequently, have made the connection that continental religious ideas were imported along with the material goods. This concept, while important to note, is
deceptively simple. Trade with the continent was merely one aspect of contemporary society that led to an increase in female piety. The growth of the urban economy, in general, helped to foster piety among both laymen and laywomen. For instance, the development of the guilds and pious confraternities allowed laypeople the opportunity to exercise a measure of control in secular devotions. Guilds became a fundamental element in the Corpus Christi procession, later developing plays for the Corpus Christi cycles. The activities of these guilds may have allowed women their first taste of lay piety. Economics, as Deborah Ellis suggests, may have altered society’s view of women, further deepening their connection to the deception of Eve.

Consequently, in an environment that doubted the truth of women’s speech, Margery’s endeavours to teach the populace were met with scepticism, even hostility. Moreover, given the Lollard assertion that a woman could preach, her attempts to ‘teach’ the word of God generated accusations of heresy, further revealing the dangers of female speech.

Town life may have added to Margery’s ability to gain control of her marriage as P.J.P. Goldberg suggests that “the greater the economic autonomy for women the greater control women exercised over their own marriages.” Margery, certainly, was able to buy her way out of her unwanted conjugal debt by paying her husband’s debts. This, in turn, provided her with the freedom to undertake her religious travels. Trade also allowed for intercontinental marriages as merchants met and married women from foreign communities. For example, Margery’s son married a woman from Prussia. This type of contact would also allow for the cross-cultural transmission of ideas. In addition, the burgeoning economic atmosphere also stressed the notion of the individual. Margery’s failed attempts to improve
her reputation by economic and social success demonstrate the importance of individual gain and perception within the community. This sense of the individual was later translated into her religious practices. The increase in the emphasis on the individual may also account for the growth in England's anchorite community, the life chosen by Julian of Norwich. Mysticism itself was an inherently solitary activity. Contemplation stressed the relationship between the individual and the Divine. This sort of direct relationship can also be seen in Lollard activities whereby Lollard advocates rejected the intervention of the clergy, stressing the individual's relationship with God.

Margery's individualism can also be seen in her refusal to chose a life of enclosure and her decision to remain an active contributor in the secular world. Margery's unwillingness to select an enclosed religious life may in part be attributed to the female continental models with which she closely identified. The lives and visions of continental women cannot be ignored because they inspired other women, both on the continent and in England, to a life of secular piety. Their activities were of particular importance in the construction of the cultural web of Margery Kempe, as Margery incorporated many of their symbols, for instance the tears of Marie d'Oignies, into her own devotions. It is also conceivable that Margery wished to emulate Marie and the practice of the Beguines, by establishing herself, through her Book, in the tradition of Marie d'Oignies. There is the possibility that Margery did succeed, as Norman Tanner's study of late medieval Norwich wills reveals intriguing, yet slight, information on, what he refers as, "communities of lay women closely resembling beguines." Perhaps Margery was able to inspire the formation of a group of laywomen to live a life of piety. Her
religious life, chosen in defiance of family obligations, would not have been the first example of a pious English woman able to motivate other women to follow her lifestyle.\textsuperscript{15}

The lives of continental women can be used to help to establish the importance of the international milieu of religious life. Many of the characteristics exhibited by continental women can be seen in their English counterparts. Margery may have modelled her own writings on \textit{vitae} of continental mystics because similar motifs can be recognized. For instance, religious women appear to have embraced similar features of penitential practices, devotions and the Imitation of Christ. Although the English mystics were not as extreme in their ascetic practices, this can be attributed to a more conservative English intellectual climate. Still, the writings of female mystics expressed the desire to suffer, the need for patience and the necessity of humility in order to imitate Christ. Other religious values that contained intercontinental significance include active participation in religious life by penance, confession and pilgrimage.

The importance of the pilgrimage and its potential impact on the subsequent religious activities of the pilgrim should not be underestimated. While on pilgrimage Margery was able to gather information, not only about the objects of her pilgrimage but also about religious female subjects. Furthermore, Margery was completely autonomous when she undertook her continental pilgrimages. This freedom provided Margery with the opportunity to grow as an individual and allowed her the chance to form her own opinions about her activities. Margery was able to increase her knowledge of St. Bridget and may have learned of the mystic Dorothy of Mantau while on pilgrimage. The culmination of the arduous journey and contemplation
may have heightened the emotional attachment that Margery felt towards many of the objects being viewed. It was on her pilgrimage to Jerusalem that she began to experience her crying. Margery’s intense contemplation of Mount Calvary may have produced an extreme reaction. She would not have been the first pilgrim to have demonstrated a profound emotional response. For instance, the Blessed Angela of Foligno was moved to unintelligible cries on her pilgrimage to the Church of St. Francis in Assisi.\textsuperscript{16} Pilgrimage, then, could produce a heightened religious awareness for the participant. This intense emotional focus on religious imagery and personal response may also account for the Lollard rejection of the pilgrimage.

The power of the visual is readily apparent in the writings of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich and in the Lollard rejection of iconography. The visual arts were used to help shape the devotional practices of the laity, particularly those who were illiterate. Contemporary artwork and stained glass could be, and were, used to tell a story to the masses.

In the writings of Margery and Julian readers are able to witness how images acted as a stimulus for their devotional activities. The Lollard sermons also suggest a connection between women and imagery. Women were often targeted in the sermons for backsliding and continuing to worship images. Another visual form of worship, the play cycle, could also act as a spur to the viewing audience. The response generated by the plays can be studied in the writings of Margery Kempe, who appears to have incorporated elements of the play cycles into her devotional practices.

Due to encouragement from secular and ecclesiastical writers, both male and female, medieval women were more likely to adopt a mode of religious life that embraced both the
active and the contemplative. Devotional works from this period reflect the paradoxical manner in which women were viewed.\textsuperscript{17} The women of East Anglia provide moderns with the opportunity to examine the complexities within the system. While women were expected to, and did, take an active role in local charity, such as alms-giving, they were also, as managers of the domestic sphere, responsible for the moral tone of the household. As Diana Webb writes “in the later medieval period, the home certainly played an important part in the religious observances of many laypeople.”\textsuperscript{18} The prominence of the home is also evident in the Lollard movement. Lollard activity and beliefs, as revealed by Shannon McSheffrey, did not attempt to invert the existing social order but accepted and embraced contemporary norms.

McSheffrey’s examination demonstrates that “Lollard communities were a microcosm of English society in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries or at least certain parts of English society.”\textsuperscript{19} The truth of her statement is clear when the activities of the Lollards are examined layer by layer. Just as the home was important in orthodox practice, it was of equal or greater significance in the Lollard community. Examining the intellectual milieu that enveloped contemporary society clearly reveals the reforming nature of the Lollard movement was throughout English society.

This tendency to ecclesiastical reform is exemplified in both Margery Kempe and the Lollard movement. Margery’s ready denunciation of clerical sin reflected the broad trend in female mysticism. This kind of mystical criticism, as suggested by Caroline Walker Bynum, was actually expected by the laity.\textsuperscript{20} Margery’s critique, however, can also be seen as part of a greater social trend. Margery was not alone in her desire to see a cessation in clerical
abuses. Her accounts of meetings with prominent ecclesiastical officials contain reproof over their lavish lifestyles, contrasting unfavourably with the popular notion, endorsed by Margery, of apostolic poverty. Contemporary secular writers such as Chaucer and Langland reflect the concern felt by the laity over ecclesiastical practices and privileges. Langland, in particular, has been noted by literary historians for his virulent anti-clericalism. In this respect the Lollard movement can be seen as part of the clerical reform tradition carried to an extreme. The Lollards were somewhat more extreme because, while the others called for reform and listed abuses, they denied the validity of certain orthodox practices, such as the eucharist. Despite their criticism the significance of the clergy in the lives of the East Anglian women should not be underestimated.

The importance of the clergy in the support and encouragement of these women has often been overlooked by historians. The late medieval clergy was international in character. This international flavour was quite important in the construction of the lives of the religious women of East Anglia. For instance, it was the clergy who were responsible for the English translations of the writings of the continental female mystics. Margery’s supporter, the Carmelite Alan of Lynn, was responsible for the translation of St. Bridget’s prophecies. Furthermore, as Margery Kempe reported, sympathetic clerics would read aloud to laywomen thereby increasing their knowledge of religious practices. English clerics, such as Adam Easton, also lent their support to female mystics abroad. Clerical support was fundamental in the lives of religious women. Without the protection of clerics women would not have been able to pursue their chosen paths. Ultimately, they needed the support of clerics to be
successful mystics and reformers. Clerics were needed to record the experiences of women and maintain support for female visionaries, often in the form of canonization. Without posthumous clerical support the activities of religious women could be lost to ensuing generations. The clergy were also initially involved in the transmission of Lollard ideas. They were also responsible, however, for the suppression of the Lollard movement. Interestingly enough, Norman Tanner was unable to find significant anti-clerical sentiment in the city of Norwich, which helps to account for why it was a stronghold against the Lollard movement.²¹ The diocese of Norwich reflects the paradoxical nature of late medieval Church and society because it both fostered and suppressed female piety, whether it were orthodox or heterodox in nature.

Thus, Norwich itself provides historians with an excellent opportunity to delve into female piety. Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and the Lollard women continue to serve as mirrors of their society, mirrors that can reflect, as Atkinson contends, what “is determined in part by the position of the beholder.”²² Depending on what they are searching for, contemporary readers will find different elements within the texts and trials. A close examination can reveal as much about the values of contemporary society as it does of the past.²³ The women of East Anglia, in particular Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and the Lollard women, mirror the multifaceted nature of both the later medieval Church and society.

Moreover, these particular women reflect more broadly “women in (their) communit(ies), their frustrations and aspirations.”²⁴ Their experiences provide evidence of the heterogeneous nature of later medieval life, and reflect the diversity of the intellectual, social and religious milieu of the period. It is unlikely that there will ever be consensus on the interpretation of
Julian's theology, the role of the Lollard women or the true motivations of Margery Kempe. Moderns will continue to debate the meaning of their lives and writings, just as medieval society questioned their religious activities and was unable to produce a unanimous evaluation. This disputation will, however, continue to grow and in the process enrich our understanding of the complexities of women, piety and the Middle Ages.
Endnotes

Introduction


2 Stuard notes that “no major female writer from the Middle Ages had failed to have her writings attributed to a male author.” Susan Mosher Stuard, “The Chase After Theory: Considering Medieval Women,” Gender & History 4:2 (1992), 136.


4 Power, Medieval Women, ed. Postan, 16.


6 Power, Medieval Women, ed. Postan, 34.


8 Geertz, “Thick Description,” 14.
9 Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 57-64.

10 Tanner, *The Church*, 58.


14 See Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532*.


16 It should be noted, as Tanner points out, that these groups were not referred to as Beguinages but simply as communities of pious laywomen. Tanner, *The Church*, 64-66.


18 It should be noted that one factor of women's history is challenging traditional historical periodization. It has been found that periods that have significance for men may not necessarily have a similar import for women. Particularly effective is Joan Kelly-Gadol’s work, "Did Women Have A Renaissance?" which demonstrates that "...women, as a group, ... experienced a contraction of social and personal options that men of their classes did not." Thus, by changing periodization for the study of women different results may be generated Joan-Kelly Gadol, "Did Women Have A Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible. Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz and Susan Stuard (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 176. See also: Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *Feminist Studies* 3:1:2 (1975), 10.

19 See: John C. Hirsh, *The Revelations of Margery Kempe. Paramystical Practices in Late Medieval England* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989); Roy Porter seeks to place Margery in the category of the "mad", a term he defines loosely. He claims that by her own words Kempe can be classified as such although he recognizes that Margery only believed herself to be mad at one point and was subsequently restored. He contends that other phrases reveal the continuation of her madness. Roy


22 Nona Fienberg also sees Margery as transforming herself within the confines of contemporary ideology. By utilizing that which was designed to oppress Margery inverts the existing order to increase her own status. Margery does not follow the traditional path taken by contemporary female mystics. For instance, it is not through the preservation of her virginity, or through a pious widowhood, or even a martyr's death but through her secular survival that she eventually triumphs. In addition, Fienberg recognizes the importance of how the economic is linked to both the spiritual and physical in Margery's world. Nona Fienberg, "Thematics of Value in The Book of Margery Kempe," Modern Philology (Nov. 1989), 132-141.

23 Lynn Staley, Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions (University Park: The University of Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

24 Partner also concludes that Margery was hysterical but insists that "to accept that Margery Kempe's experiences ... were hysterical in origin is not to denigrate them or dismiss them, but rather to see clearly the extreme distress and thwarting of women's lives, and the lengths to which they were sometimes driven for expression and relief." Nancy F. Partner, "Reading the Book of Margery Kempe," Exemplaria 3:1 (1991), 63.

25 Bynum notes "Moreover, criticism of corrupt clergy was - in the eyes of both men and women - the special role of religious women." Female mystics were expected to provide a critical examination of the clergy and they were not that far removed from the secular world. Bynum continues "Throughout women's lives from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, we find women having striking political visions for the assistance of men." Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women


See Hirsh, The Revelations of Margery Kempe.

Hirsh explains paramystic as "visions had, and messages heard, in contemplation and meditation. They were like but not the same as mystical awareness." Hirsh, Revelations .87.


" Nevyrthelesse, dowtyr, I have ordeyned the to be a merowr amongys hem." The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 178; "Nevertheless, daughter, I have ordained you to be a mirror amongst them." The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 226. Although this actually refers to Margery as a spiritual example we can use Margery to serve as a mirror of her own society. Clarissa Atkinson's work devotes attention to Margery's use of the mirror imagery. Atkinson writes that "what appears in the glass is determined in part by the beholder." Clarissa Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 14. This again, allows us to recognize the importance of individual choice and perspective. Further, I have chosen this passage from Margery's Book because it appears to invert what was normally used as a symbol of women's vainglory. Margery travelled, both literally and theologically, from a woman who focused on her vanity to one who focused on God. She is still placed within the glass to be admired, but for reasons that now go beyond her outward appearance.

See Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim.

Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim. 24-25.

Sarah Beckwith, "Problems with Authority in Late Medieval Mysticism," 182.


40 Frances Beer, however, has noted that Julian has been "domesticated" by ensuing generations, She writes that Julian is usually depicted as "...kind, gentle, ... a source of comfort but not quite dependable theologically. The implication has been that if we want to be illuminated as to the heavy mysteries of Christianity, we must turn to the real, male experts." Frances Beer, Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), 6.

41 Fries, "Margery Kempe," 233. See also The Book of Margery Kempe where Marie is used to justify Margery's tears, for instance: "for afterwards he read of a woman called Mary of Oignies ... of the abundant tears that she wept." The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 191-92.


In The Book of Margery Kempe Margery records her visit with Dame Julian, during which time she states "Great was the holy conversation that the anchoress and this creature had through talking of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ for the many days that they were together." The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 77-79. During Julian’s illness historians believe that she was probably in her own home because she wrote of being with her family and friends. Bradley, "Julian of Norwich: Writer and Mystic," in An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics, ed. Szarmach, 196.


The wording "fraught with contradictions" is taken from a lecture given by Professor Murray, September 5, 1996. I particularly liked the phrasing and find it is extremely appropriate for the situation in Norwich. For a further study of the challenge to the homogeneity of the Middle Ages see: David Aers, "Rewriting the Middle Ages: some suggestions," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 18:2 (1988).


Geertz, "Thick Description," 14.

Geertz, "Thick Description," 5.

Chapter One


7 "She was loth to gon, for it was pestylens tym, and hir thowt that she wolde for no good a deyd ther. Our Lord seyd to hir mende agen, 'Dowtyr, thu schalt go saf and come saf agen.'" Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Lynn Staley Johnson (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, 1996), 192. Translated, it reads, "She was loath to go, for it was a time of pestilence, and she thought she might, for no advantage, have died there. Our Lord said to her mind again, 'Daughter, you shall go safely, and come back safely.'" The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 243.


9 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 109. Which translates as "...remain in Bristol six weeks by God's command, to wait for a ship, in that there were no English ships that could sail for Santiago, because they were requisitioned for the King." The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 144.


20 Other known women of the East Anglian Lollard community include the Wife of William Bate of Seething, Batild Burrell of Loddon, Isabell Chapelin of Martham, Isabella Davy of Toft, Matilda Fleecher of Beccles, Sybil Godsell of Ditchingham, Katherine Hobbs, Hawise Mone of Loddon, the Daughter of Hawise Mone, Joan Waddon, Joan Webbe of Dawne Hill and Joan White. Tanner, Heresy Trials, 26.


22 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 113.

23 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 113.
24 Tanner, Heresy Trials, 142.

25 During the time under consideration England was governed by five different rulers and the transition was not always peaceful. For instance Henry IV usurped the throne from Richard II. The five rulers throughout this period, in chronological order, include: Edward II, Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI.


27 The Book of Margery Kempe, trans Windeatt, 321.

28 See Tanner's Heresy Trials.

29 "As well as a response to the internal problem of heresy in England, which the Convocation of Canterbury province meeting in London on July 1428 had declared to be 'more that usually growing in strength', the persecution was no doubt stimulated by the English bishops' desire to show the forthcoming Council of Basle that they were tackling heresy." Tanner, Heresy Trials, 7-8.

30 Thomson, "Orthodox Religion," 52.

31 Norman Tanner, The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 67-73.

32 Tanner notes "The returns made by English guilds in 1389, in response to the Guild Ordinance of the previous list, list 19 guilds and confratermites in Norwich. Only Lynn with 51, London with 41 and Lincoln with 30 had more." Tanner, The Church, 68. Dorothy Owen writes "it is significant that although not all the gilds which made contributions in 1377 seem to have obeyed the royal command to return certificates, there were at least fifty-nine who did." Dorothy Owen, The Making of King's Lynn: A Documentary Survey (London: David Brown Book Co, 1984), 60.

33 Tanner, The Church, 68.


38 Kowaleski and Bennett found evidence that "in medieval London...the wives and widows of masters in the most influential gilds in the city were often granted exceptional perquisites of gild membership, such as the right to wear gild livery and attend important gild banquets." Kowaleski and Bennett, "Crafts, Gilds, and Women, 478.

39 Tanner, The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 73.

40 Tanner, The Church, 74.

41 Tanner, The Church, 75.


47 Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast," 434.

48 Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast," 435-36.

49 Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast," 441, 443.

50 Staley, Dissenting Fictions, 58.

51 Hannawalt, "Keepers of the Lights," 34.
52 Tanner, The Church, 81.


55 McRee, “Religious Gilds and Civic Order,” 72, and Lynn Staley, Dissenting Fictions, 75-76.

56 Staley, Dissenting Fictions, 76.


58 Staley, Dissenting Fictions, 75-76.


60 See Hannawalt, “Keepers of the Lights.”

61 Although Margery may have continued to worry over the final state of her soul she had been guaranteed of her salvation by God.


63 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 24. Translates as “...sometimes mayor of the town of N., and afterwards he was an alderman of the High Guild of the Trinity in N.” The Book Of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 44.

64 Tanner, The Church, 85.

65 Tanner, The Church, 85-86.

66 Tanner, The Church, 88-89.

67 The Book of Margery Kempe, Ch. 17.
The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 51. The translation reads "whom God had exalted and through marvelous works had shown and proved to be holy." The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 75.

Tanner, The Church, 90.

The Book of Margery Kempe, Ch.39.

Tanner, Heresy Trials, 142.


McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 114.

Tanner, The Church, 92.

Tanner, The Church, 94.


Beer theorizes that although Julian could have been a nun she could have just as easily become a recluse as a pious laywoman. Frances Beer, Women and Mystical Experiences in the Middle Ages (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), 130.


Nicholas Watson, "‘Yf Wommen be Double Naturly’: Remaking ‘Woman’ in Julian of Norwich’s Revelation of Love," Exemplaria 8:1(1996), 16. Leech and Sister Benedicta argue that Julian may have been a young, widowed mother at the time of her revelations. Leech further speculates that Julian wrote her first text and, possibly the Long Text, before she was enclosed. Leech and Sister Benedicta, Julian Reconsidered.


89. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Johnson, 24. Translates as (she) “wore gold pipes on her head and her hoods with the tippets were fashionably slashed” and “the honour of her kindred.” *The Book Of Margery Kempe*, trans. Windeatt, 43-44.


97 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 24. Translation: ‘one of the greatest brewers in the town of N. for three or four years.’ The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 44.


99 Tanner, Heresy Trials, 141.


103 ‘‘Margery, you and your husband spoke to me about my giving you the mantle and the ring.’ The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 70, or ‘‘Margery, ye and your husband spak to me for to gyfe yow the mantyl and the ryng.’ The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 47.

104 Mary Erler found evidence that, between the years 1416 to 1419, Repingdon “four times extended the commission to veil an abbot or suffragan” after they had been duly examined. Mary Erler, “Margery Kempe’s White Clothes,” Medium Aevum, 62:1(1993), 77.


106 Elliott, Spiritual Marriage, 245.

107 For a discussion of the public nature of medieval marriage see Staley, Dissenting Fictions, 60-64.

108 Aers, “Rewriting the Middle Ages,” 223.

109 Tanner, Heresy Trials, 141.


111 Deborah Ellis, “The Merchant’s Wife’s Tale,” 597.
Ellis, "The Merchant’s Wife’s Tale,” 598.


Farmer, “Persuasive Voices,” 541-42.

Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim, 97.

Atkinson writes Margery’s “domestic and social background gave her the necessary confidence to persist in her strange vocation and unpopular way of life in spite of contemporary norms concerning the behaviour of married women.” Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim, 101.


Owen, The Making of King’s Lynn, 28.

Owen writes that “any attempts by the priory to interfere with the nave seem to have been resented; strong complaints were made when in 1439 the prior re-opened a blocked door in the south wall of the cross-aisle.” Owen, The Making of King’s Lynn, 27-28.

Tanner, The Church, 126.


Atkinson finds “Margery’s illiteracy somewhat surprising. By the late fourteenth century, the women of such households usually learned how to read and write. Margery Kempe may have been a rebel even in youth.” Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim, 75. Louise Collis also expresses her surprise at Margery’s lack of education and states “as a girl, Margery evidently had no taste for serious pursuits.” Louise Collis, The Apprentice Saint (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1964), 11.

Tanner contends that “perhaps some of those who claimed to be illiterate and unable to read their own abjurations were not telling the whole truth, and Dr. Thomson’s conclusion that
the level of literacy among the defendants was low may be unduly pessimistic." Tanner. 
Heresy Trials, 29.

126 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 141. Translated: “through listening to holy 
books and through listening to holy sermons, (that) she was always increasing in 

127 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 60.

128 For a more complete look at Lynn’s commercial interests and activities abroad see Owen. 
“The Trade of the Town,” The Making of King’s Lynn, 41-51.

Chapter Two

1 Gail McMurray Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion. East Anglian Drama and Society in the 
Late Middle Ages (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 20.

2 Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion, 22.

3 Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion, 22.

4 Gibson writes that “after the Alnwick trials, the influence of new piety from the Low 
Countries and Germany continued if not increased, and the number of Lollards must have multiplied.” Gibson, Theatre of Devotion, 30.

5 Richard Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls. Fourteenth Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu 

6 Norman Tanner, editor, Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31 (London: 

7 Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, Montaillou. The Promised Land of Error, trans. Barbara Bray 

8 Ladurie, Montaillou, 238.

281-330, and Ann Hudson, “A Lollard Compilation and the Dissemination of Wycliffite 

11 Tanner, Heresy Trials, 26.

12 Shannon McSheffrey claims that this was one of the reasons that men were able to dominate the Lollard communities. Women’s relationships, at that time, “were concentrated among those whom they had strong ties: their families, close neighbours, friends. Men’s lives, on the other hand, brought them more frequently into contact with people outside their immediate familial and social acquaintances, providing them with greater access to information and thus making them more pivotal to the Lollard communities.” Shannon McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 48.


14 St. Bridget was upset by the corruptness of Rome and foresaw the establishment of a separate state for the church, as is noted in her Life “she saw almost the exact boundaries of the present Vatican City.” Bridget of Sweden, Brigitta of Sweden. Life and Selected Revelations ed. Marguerite Tjader Harris (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 10

15 St. Bridget refers “to the warring French and English kings” as “wild beasts.” Brigitta of Sweden, ed. Harris, 10


17 Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 5.

18 Eventually Jesus commanded Margery to give up wearing her hairshirt saying “And, daughter, you have a hairshirt on your back. I want you to leave off wearing it, and I shall give you a hair-shirt in your heart which shall please me much more than all the hair-shirts in the world.” Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. B.A. Windeatt (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), 51.

19 Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Lynn Staley Johnson (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University), 31. This passage translates as “give up that which you love best in the world, and that is the eating of meat.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 51.


Vitry claimed that “She was sustained on fruits of the trees, herbs and beans. For along time she ate the blackest and hardest of bread which even the dogs could hardly chew and her mouth became all bloody with gashes and wounds as a result of its extreme roughness and hardiness.” Marie d'Oignies, trans. King, 24.

Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls, 141.


Johnson writes that “English society expels her for her different eating practices ... (it) marks her distance from communal values.” Johnson, Dissenting Fictions, 51.

The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 78.

The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 94. Translation reads as “discreet penance, especially what their confessor gives them or enjoins them to do.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 126.

The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 38. Which translates as “eat and drink as your husband does” and “this was the reason I ordered you to fast.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 60.

Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 221.

Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 222.

Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 223.

The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 126-27; The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, Margery was ordered to eat meat again by God, 200, and, The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 94-95, 156.

Tanner, Heresy Trials, 148.
34 Miri Rubin marks the entrance of the Corpus Christi in England at 1318. Miri Rubin, 
Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University 

35 Caroline Walker Bynum, “Women Mystics and the Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth 


37 Marty Williams and Anne Echols, Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages 

38 Tanner, Heresy Trials. 141.

39 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, trans., 112.

40 Rubin, Corpus Christi. 320.

41 In this respect, the attitudes expressed by the Lollard defendants in East Anglia go beyond 
the ideas propounded by Wyclif. Rubin writes “Wyclif never stripped the eucharist of 
meaning ... nor did he deny its benefit for the participant in mass.” Rubin, Corpus Christi. 
324-25.

42 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 31. This passage translates “instead of meat 
you shall eat my flesh and blood, that is the true body of Christ in the sacrament of the altar. 
This is my will, daughter, that you receive my body every Sunday.” The Book of Margery 
Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 51.

43 Rubin, Corpus Christi. 316.

44 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 117. This passage reads “I believe that it his 
very flesh and his blood and no material bread.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. 
Windeatt, 153.

45 Clarissa Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim. The Book and The World of Margery Kempe 

46 Nicholas Watson argues that Julian’s emphasis on imagery in her text is, in part, a 
testimony to her orthodoxy and used “to avoid being suspected of subscribing to a Lollard 
position on images.” Nicholas Watson, “The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelations
of Love,” 662. If Julian did focus on images to ward off charges of heresy it still leaves why she did not stress the Eucharist open to debate.


49 For a discussion of Margery’s tears see Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim, 58-64.

50 Mahoney, “Margery Kempe’s Tears.” 40.

51 Mahoney, “Margery Kempe’s Tears,” 41.

52 Mahoney writes “when the parish church of St. Margaret’s is threatened by fire, Kempe’s prayers bring a snowstorm out of a clear sky. During this process her weeping and crying are tolerated, even requested, by the congregation that had formerly complained of them.” Mahoney, “Margery Kempe’s Tears,” 42-43.


54 Douglas Gray, “Popular Religion and Late Medieval Literature,” in Religion in the Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages, eds. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 20.

55 Christian K. Zacher writes that “the widespread late-medieval denunciations of pilgrimage, which in England reached a peak about 1400, claimed that the custom had not only upset social stability and fostered a pursuit of the curious but also subverted the Christian idea that God’s presence could be felt everywhere, not simply in an accumulating number of select spots.” Christian K. Zacher, Curiosity and Pilgrimage. The Literature of Discovery Fourteenth-Century England (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 55-56.
56 Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls. 24.

57 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. McEntire. Holloway includes a map of both Bridget’s and Margery’s pilgrimage routes, 223

58 The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, Ch. 7, Endnote no. 1, 329.


60 Atkinson writes “more middle-class people travelled, and there were more female pilgrims.” Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim, 52.

61 Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim, 57.


63 Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion, 59.


67 Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls, 128-29.

69 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 22; The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 41.


72 Johnson, Dissenting Fictions. 90-91; The Book Of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 21-22. Translation: “the devil - (was) always saying to her while she was in good health that she didn’t need to confess but do penance by herself alone, and all should be forgiven, for God is merciful enough.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 41.

73 Tanner, Heresy Trials, 146.

74 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, trans, 113.


76 Bynum, “‘And Woman His Humanity’,” 260.

77 Bynum notes that “women’s saintly vocations grew slowly through childhood and into adolescence” whereas “male saints were far more likely to undergo abrupt adolescent conversions, involving renunciation of wealth, power, marriage, and sexuality.” Caroline Walker Bynum, “Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages,” in Christian Spirituality. High Middle Ages and Reformation, Jill Raitt, editor. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 130.

78 Elliott, Spiritual Marriage, 224.

79 Elliott, Spiritual Marriage, 235.

80 Elliott, Spiritual Marriage, 255.

81 Kenneth Leech and Sister Benedicta argue that Julian was not attached to the nunnery at Carrow, and waited until she had completed writing her Revelations before she was enclosed. Kenneth Leech and Sister Benedicta, Julian Reconsidered (Oxford: Will Print, 1988).

82 Elliott, Spiritual Marriage, 244.
As they were witnessing the persecution of Jesus Margery was sent to help Mary making Margery "her unworthy handmaid for the time." Margery also acts as a handmaiden to Mary in a vision of the birth of Jesus. The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 230, 54.

Bynum, "Women Mystics," 204-5. Bynum also writes "we frequently find that it is male biographers of women who stress the theme of women's imitation of Mary." Bynum. Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 269.


For a synopsis of the life of Catherine of Siena see Petroff, Body and Soul, 17-19.

Vauchez, The Laity, 245.

Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls, 17.

Bynum, "Religious Women," 129.

Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls, 188.

Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls, 189.

Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls, 189.

Petroff, Body and Soul, 51.


Bolton suggests that the poverty emphasis of the Beguines may have been "a reaction to landed wealth or newly acquired urban prosperity." Bolton, "Mulieres Sanctae," 147. Poverty was a recurring motif in the lives of religious women. For instance Margery gave away her money when ordered by God knowing that he would provide for her.


Bolton writes that "Pious women were neither expected nor allowed to beg but the women felt a strong attachment for mendicant life." Bolton, "Vita Matrum," 262.


Utiz, The Legend of the Good Woman, 171.

Petroff, Body and Soul, 52.


Tanner, The Church, 131.

Tanner writes "Seven donors were clerics: John Niche, rector of St. Michael of Coslany; John Dyra, rector of St. John's Maddermarket; four unbeficed priests; and John Excestre the bishop's registrar. The other donors included four former mayors and two of their wives." Tanner, The Church, 131.

Tanner, The Church, 131

Tanner, The Church, 112

Chapter Three

2 Anne Clark Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers, Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 2.

Bartlett cites Tony Bennett and his idea that “reading is always a process of negotiation between, as Tony Bennett maintains, ‘the culturally activated text and the culturally activated reader, an interaction structured by the material, social, ideological, and institutional relationships in which both texts and readers are inescapably inscribed.’” Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers, 2-3.

4 Again, there is debate surrounding the education of both Margery and Julian of Norwich. For evidence of increasing literacy see Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers, 6-12.

5 Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers, 16.

6 Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers, 17.


9 Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,” Speculum 70:4 (1993), 824. Watson writes that “the Constitutions were issued by the aristocratic ... Archbishop Arundel in 1409 ... as the capstone of the increasingly systematic campaign of opposition to Lollards.” Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” 825.


11 Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” 829. Watson notes that “not only did the writing of original theology decline in the fifteenth century; most of what was written (including many of the pragmatic texts) seems with few exceptions to have been less widely copied than religious works of all types from the fourteenth century.” Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” 834.
Watson writes “if the evidence of Lollard trials is to be trusted, it remained dangerous throughout the century for those beneath the ranks of the gentry and the urban elite to be known readers of texts as divers as The Canterbury Tales, the Prick of Conscience, Dives and Paupers, and The Mirror of Sinners.” Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” 831.


Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love, trans. Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 65. Later Julian writes that “There were times when I wanted to look away from the cross, but I dared not. For I knew while I looked at the cross I was safe and sound.” The Crucifix remains a source of comfort to Julian throughout her visions. Later the same crucifix helps her to keep the demons at bay, “I turned my eyes again to the same cross which had been my comfort previously.” Revelations, trans. Wolters, 95, 186. See also Nicholas Watson, “The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Love,” 660-666, for Watson’s argument that Julian’s focus on iconography helps her “to avoid being suspected of subscribing to a Lollard position on images - and, by extension, perhaps, to other heretical belief.” Nicholas Watson, “The Composition of Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Love,” Speculum 68:3 (1993), 661.

Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Lynn Staley Johnson (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, 1996), 76. Translation reads “sometimes when she saw the crucifix, of if she saw a man had a wound, or a beast whichever it were, or if a man beat a child before her or hit a horse or other beast with a whip, if she saw or heard it, she thought she saw our Lord being beaten or wounded.” Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. B.A. Windeatt (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 104. See also: Douglas Gray, “Popular Religion and Late Medieval Literature.” Gray writes that the “effects of the visual media, ... have a quite remarkable importance throughout the Book. The sight of holy places, or, especially, of images ...., or even people ...., or scenes of pain ... act as visual ‘triggers’ for her imagination, and transport her to an ‘eternal present’ in which she see Christ in his childhood or in his passion.” Douglas Gray, “Popular Religion and Late Medieval Literature,” in Religion in Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages, eds. Piero Boitani and Anna Tort (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1990), 26-27.

The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 145. This passage translates as “compelled to cry out very loudly and weep very bitterly, as though she would have died” (when) “saw a beautiful image of our Lady called a pieta.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 186.

18 The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, Ch. 80, endnote no.1, 326.


24 Tanner, Heresy Trials, 44.


26 The names given are male. no women are listed as taking part. Shannon McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 146.

27 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 144.

28 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 146.


30 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 83. This passage translates as the “laps of respectable wives.” According to Margery the women would “dress it up in shirts and kiss it as though it had been God himself.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 113. Gail McMurray Gibson posits that the incident with the image “provides suggestive evidence about
the close connection in Margery's time between Christian piety and sympathetic magic." Gail McMurray Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion. East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 63.

31 Norman P. Tanner notes that "the objects of piety owned by the citizens cannot be described at all fully because the inventories of the goods of only two of them survive." Norman P. Tanner, The Church in Later Medieval Norwich, 1370-1530 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 90.


33 Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion, 32.


35 James, “Ritual, Drama and Social Body,” 6.

36 James writes that the Corpus Christi play cycle "helped to make Corpus Christi and occasion on which the urban community could effectively present and define itself in relation to the outside world." James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body," 6.

37 James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body," 6-7.

38 James notes that "Individuals in the urban world derived their sense of worth not from their descent, but from the corporate status of their guild or town: the latter being derived ultimately from a religious source - the honour of God himself." James, "Ritual, Drama and Social Body," 19.

39 Aers, "Rewriting the Middle Ages," 225.


42 Craymer suggests that "Kempe's physical description of the heavenly music reveals her familiarity with Mary Magdalene as portrayed in the Corpus Christi plays. In the Digby Mary Magdalene, the angel's music exists solely for the purpose of signifying the Magdalene's ascension." Craymer, "Margery Kempe's Imitation." 175-76.

43 Craymer writes that the "mystical union with Christ transforms her carnal sins into virginity." Craymer, "Margery Kempe's Imitation." 177.


46 Coletti, "Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary's Body," 68.

47 Coletti points out that "medieval dramatists, ..., quite comfortably depicted Mary and Joseph in the familiar institutional settings inhabited by ordinary mortals. When the Virgin Mary addressed Saint Bridget ... she stressed her likeness to ordinary women ... Margery Kempe's Book solicits Mary's childbirth, motherhood and companionibility." Coletti, "Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary's Body," 85.


49 Coletti writes that "the infancy plays continue to enact the blurring and shifting of sex and gender categories ... The play characterizes Joseph and Mary within the discursive tradition that focused on power relationships in marriage" and eventually "Mary literally assumes the public role of head of the family." Coletti, "Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary's Body," 73-74.

50 Coletti, "Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary's Body," 76-82. The question of Jesus' paternity reflected contemporary values. Adultery was a source of public derision and also a potential economic drain, 77. Coletti examines how the couple were the object of charivari in the plays indicating "the social regulation of matrimonial, especially sexual behaviors." Coletti, "Purity and Danger: The Paradox of Mary's Body," 78. Gibson observes that "Margery's accounts of her sufferings and trials shows her pervasive verbal as well as typological indebtedness to gospel Passion narratives." Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion, 48.

51 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 182. Translation reads "our Lady said to him, 'Ah, my sweet son, let me help to carry that heavy cross.' The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 232.
52 The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt. See Endnotes, Ch. 80, no. 4, 326. Windeatt also points out the similarities with the York plays, The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, Endnotes no. 5 & no. 6, 326.


55 Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion, 60.


57 Ashley writes “It calls for moral and behavioural prudence on the part of young women to resist the seductive words of young men who would lead them astray.” Ashley, “Medieval Courtesy Literature,” 27. For observations on humility see 29-30.

58 Ashley, “Medieval Courtesy Literature.” 30.

59 Ashley, “Medieval Courtesy Literature.” 32.


61 Anne Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers. 3

62 The use of the Christ the Knight allows the female mystic to take “the visitation of a courtly Christ to confirm the accessibility of the higher social level to which she aspires” further he “validates her image of herself as a desirable and desiring female subject.” Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers, 77.

63 Bartlett, Male Authors, Female Readers, 61.

65 “He entered the tournament and, like a bold knight, had his shield pierced through and through in battle for the love of his lady,” *Ancrene Wisse*, *Middle English Prose for Women* eds. Millet and Wogan-Browne, 115.


67 *The Book of Margery Kempe*. ed. Johnson, 24. Which translates as “in the likeness of a man, the most seemly, most beauteous, and most amiable that ever might be seen with man’s eye, clad in a mantle of purple silk.” *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Windeatt, 42.

68 *The Book of Margery Kempe*. ed. Johnson, 94-95. Translation reads “must be intimate with (her), and lie in (her) bed”, then she “may boldly ... take me to you as your wedded husband ... you can boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you want.” *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Windeatt, 126-27.


71 Julian of Norwich. *Revelations of Divine Love*, 72

72 Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 72


75 Watson refers to her continued fixation on the crucifix as “explosive” as it actually increases the level of theology in the visions. Watson “Remaking ‘Woman’ in Julian.” 4-5.


77 “In orthodox thought, the Fall was the outcome of human pride and disobedience.” *Middle English Prose for Women*, eds. Millet and Wogan-Browne, introduction, xvi.


81 Bornstein notes that “in the typical romance, little attention is given to the characterization of the lady, who exist mainly as a motivating force or source of inspiration for the knight.” Although Chaucer’s women are generally quite developed she notes that “Emelye is Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale is an example of the courtly romance heroine ... (she) is never realized as a character ... and remains only an image in their minds and in the mind of the reader.” Bornstein, The Lady in the Tower, 9,9.


83 Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, 354.

84 Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls. 84-85.


86 Ellis, “The Merchant’s Wife’s Tale,” 613.

87 Ellis, “The Merchant’s Wife’s Tale,” 617.

88 Ellis writes that “at the same time, John himself also actively rejects marital stereotypes, as when he helps his wife reverse medieval expectations of a marriage in which the wife stays home and waits for her husband to reappear.” Ellis, “The Merchant’s Wife’s Tale, 609.


91 DuBoulay, The England of Piers Plowman, 71.

92 Tanner, Heresy Trials, taken from the trial of Hawise Mone, 142.

93 Patrick J. Horner, “‘The King Taught Us the Lesson’: Benedictine Support For Henry V’s Suppression of the Lollards,” Mediaeval Studies 52(1990), 205. Horner cites the writings of Thomas Brinton who believed that England had fallen into disarray due to sin and pride of the people, including the some members of the clergy whom, he felt, “had acquiesced to evil and to attacks on the Church.” Horner, “‘The King Taught Us the Lesson’,” 204.

94 Margery travelled to see Thomas Arundel, the Archbishop of Canterbury where the “Erchebysshopys clerkys and other rekles men bothe swyers and yemen whech sworyn many gret othys and sopkyn many rekles wordys, and this creatur boldly undryname hem and seyd thei schuld be dampnyd but thei left her sweryng other synnes that thei usyd.” Despite her criticism of his clerks, Margery was graciously received by the Archbishop, although others expressed a desire to burn her as a heretic. The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 48. Translation of this passage reads “Archbishop’s clerks and other heedless men, both squires and yeoman swore many great oaths and spoke many thoughtless words, and this creature boldly rebuked them, and said they would be damned unless they left off their swearing and other sins they practised.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 69.

95 Taken from the trial of Hawise Mone. Tanner, Heresy Trials, 142.

96 Tanner, Heresy Trials, 45.

97 Similar in nature to Hawise Mone’s statement, it reveals that it was a common Lollard belief, not one asserted only by women in the group. Tanner, Heresy Trials, 115

98 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 4.


100 Norman Tanner, “The Cathedral and the City,” in Norwich Cathedral, 270.

101 Norman Tanner, “The Cathedral and the City”, 270

102 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 165. Translation reads “worthy man (who) had come to Lynn and had lived there only a little while - he was a most respected clerk, a doctor
of divinity - he was appointed to over the sea to the King in France, together with other clerks as well, among the worthiest in England." The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 211.

103 J.P.H. Clark writes "of these regions of England from which Cambridge especially drew its students, East Anglia had extensive trading and cultural links with the mainland of Europe, and so at any rate had the possibility of contact with the contemplative tradition found in the Low Countries and Germany." J.P.H. Clark, "Late Fourteenth-Century Cambridge Theology and the English Contemplative Tradition," in The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Exeter Symposium V, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 2.

104 Flete's letters "to the English Province of his Order, call(ed) for a stricter observance of the rule and eremitical tradition of the Order." Clark, "Late Fourteenth-Century Cambridge Theology,"3.

105 Clark writes that "Flete's De Remediis contra Tentaciones is powerfully echoed at a number of in both books of Hilton's Scale of Perfection." Clark, "Late Fourteenth Century Cambridge Theology," 3.

106 Pantin, The English Church, 122. For the life of Adam Easton see 175-181.


109 Clark, "Late Fourteenth-Century Cambridge Theology," 12.


Jacoff writes that, for Julian, “the paternal and the maternal are complementary aspects, both protective, loving and salvific.” Jacoff, “God As Mother,” 137.


Pantin, The English Church, 119.

Evidence reveals that Assisi attended lectures and disputations held in Norwich and lectures at Oxford. Pantin, The English Church, 119.

Pantin, The English Church, 181.

Coleman, Medieval Readers and Writers, 180.


Owst, Literature and Pulpit, 390-404. For other issues pertaining to women see Owst, Literature and Pulpit, 385-390.

Coleman, Medieval Readers and Writers, 174.

The unknown friar is speculated to have been William Melton. The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 145. Translation reads “one of the most famous friars in England.” Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 187.

The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 148. Translates as “was at that time neither bachelor nor doctor of divinity.” The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 191.

Gray, “Popular Religion and Late Medieval Literature,” 15.

Geertz, “Thick Description,” 7.


Pantin, The English Church, 211.
128 Beckwith recognizes the restrictive nature of Arundel’s Constitutions and notes that the texts that were translated had to be authorized. Sarah Beckwith, “Problems of Authority in Late Medieval English Mysticism: Language, Agency, and Authority in the Book of Margery Kempe,” Exemplaria 4:1 (1992), 186.


130 Beckwith writes that this practice had the effect of “infiltrating heresy into the most correct texts, further eroding in the most alarming way the discerning of voices and spirits into good and evil, orthodox and heretical.” Beckwith, “Problems of Authority,” 187.

131 Easton had written to Abbot Lithington of Westminster for copies of Wyclif’s ideas. His awareness on the subject acts as further support for the interconnectedness of the clergy. Horner, “The King Taught Us The Lesson’,” 193.

132 McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy, 77.


136 Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim, 144-5. See also Catherine A. Carsley discussion of Rolle’s adolescent conversion when he borrowed his sister’s clothing and fashioned an outfit for himself in order to resemble a hermit. Catherine A. Carsley, “Devotion to the Holy Name: Late Medieval Piety in England,” Princeton University Library Chronicle 53:2(1982), 157-172.

137 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 77. Translation reads “more full of wounds than a dove-cote ever was of holes.” The Book of Margery Kempe. trans. Windeatt, 106.

138 The Book of Margery Kempe, ed. Johnson, 93. This passage translates as “marvelously hot and delectable and very comforting, never diminishing but ever increasing; for though the weather were never so cold she felt the heat burning in her breast and at her heart, as veritably as a man would feel the material fire if he put his hand or his finger into it.” The Book of
Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, 125. See also: Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim, 145-46; and The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. Windeatt, Ch. 28, Endnote no.10, 313 and Ch. 35, Endnote no. 5, 315.

139 Denise Baker writes that “although mutual influence is plausible, it is important to remember that neither Julian nor Hilton repeat phraseology unique to their other in expressing their corresponding idea ... the most reasonable explanation is that Hilton and Julian were drawing on the same sources.” Denise Baker, “Julian of Norwich and Anchoritic Literature,” Mystics Quarterly, 19:4 (1993), 157-58. For a comparison of Julian of Norwich and Richard Rolle see Domenico Pezzini, “The Theme of Passion in Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich,” in Religion in the Poetry and Drama, 29-66

140 The Book of Margery Kempe, Windeatt, trans., Ch. 69, Endnote no. 4, 324.


142 Margery may have shared Christine de Pisan’s hope for her writing, “that this work may not remain useless and forgotten.” 180 The Treasure of the City of Ladies, trans. Lawson, 180; however; The Book of Margery Kempe is an excellent example of erasure. Margery’s Book was only recently re-discovered in the 1930’s and then it was only in single manuscript indicating that it did not circulate widely.

Conclusion


12 Aers writes that "whether small or grand, the consequences of a competitive drive for success in the market and the public domain are presented as an aggressive individualism in which the person's sense of identity is, to quote Langland, 'so singuler by hymself' that he considers himself 'an ordre by hymselfe'." Aers, "Rewriting the Middle Ages," 232-3.

13 Although Marie d'Oignies never authored a text English society was familiar with her *vitae* written by James de Vitry. The second priest who assists Margery in her *Book* is able to do so after reading of the activities of Marie d'Oignies. Furthermore, Margery's continental pilgrimage would have increased her awareness of the beguines.


15 Christine of Markyate (1096/98-c.1160) had defied her family and chosen a life of piety, later in her life she gathered a groups of female supporters around her. Talbot, editor and

16 Gail McMurray Gibson notes that “Margery based swaddling clothes on a relic seen on pilgrimage to Assisi. The head veil of the virgin Mary was one of the most venerated relics of the Lower Church of St. Francis at Assisi.” Gail McMurray Gibson, The Theatre of Devotion, East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1989), 51-52.


24 David Aers refers to the writing of Margery Kempe but, when Margery is combined with Julian of Norwich and the Lollard women, coming from a variety of backgrounds and areas, they reflect a more complete cross-section of the diocese of Norwich than he recognizes. David Aers, “The Making of Margery Kempe: Individual and Community,” in Community, Gender and Individual Identity, 98.
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