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Apophasis, agency, and ecstasy: reading mysticism and madness in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for a reinterpretation of madness and mysticism through an apophatic lens. By using Wouter Kusters' theo-philosophical definition of madness, I argue for a re-evaluation of female mysticism which rethinks ecstatic and ascetic devotion as a form of agency. Focusing on The Book of Margery Kempe, I reconsider theological passion and ground Kempe's madness within the historical tradition of affective piety, which expresses a desire to join with the humanity of Christ. Within modern readership, there has been an impulse to label Kempe and other mystics with specific psychiatric diagnoses. In resisting this urge, I instead argue for a convergence of madness and mysticism which enables a paradoxical agency through negation of thought and language. This apophatic agency is precisely what imbues female mysticism with the potential for radical, queer social resistance. In extending this discussion to issues of fasting and abstinence, I then consider the role eucharistic devotion plays in enabling women control over the gastronomical and sexual parameters of their bodies. The denial of food and sex becomes integral to Kempe's mysticism in asserting agency over the psychosexual self. Finally, I end with some reflections on how Kempe's mysticism might influence contemporary discussions of mental health.

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Introduction

In *A Philosophy of Madness: The Experience of Psychotic Thinking*, Wouter Kusters presents an evocative case for a theo-philosophical apprehension of psychosis, inseparable from epiphenomenal experiences of mysticism. Through this framework, Kusters advocates for a psychotic praxis of madness, which "in spite of all its sufferings and digressions – is best understood as the desire for infinity and absolute freedom" (Kusters, 2020: p.xvii). Not only does this view of madness complicate the clinical language of psychosis

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as symptomatic of mental illness, but it brings concepts of madness to commune with the Latin Christian tradition of negative theology (otherwise known as apophaticism or mysticism), which unsays and undoes knowledge of God in favor of infinite negation and divine mystery. The parallels that Kusters draws between madness and mysticism raise many questions about the shared lineage of mental illness and religious experience, calling into question the fine line between pathology and passion. Passion, as a deeply theological term relating to both physical and emotional pain, originating from Christ's suffering on the cross (Passion, n.d.. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2022), has been embodied and exercised by contemplatives for centuries through pious acts of christic devotion. This is especially true of late medieval (c.1300–1500) female mystics, exemplified by Margery Kempe, who expresses the ascetic practices and supernatural qualities which typify medieval female piety (Bynum, 1987).

In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Kempe's mysticism is often called into question, and doubts about her state of mind are frequently expressed. Accusations of demonic possession, and physical and spiritual sickness are used against her by both clergy and townspeople as a way to delegitimise her spiritual experiences. Freeman et al. note that a similar response to Kempe has been pervasive among modern critics, who have used retroactive diagnoses of postpartum and schizoaffective psychosis to undermine the authenticity of Kempe's religious experiences (Freeman et al., 1990, p. 175). For example, Clarissa Atkinson (1983) and Farley (1999) both subsume Kempe's experiences respectively under the diagnostic framework of postpartum psychosis and personality disorders, with Farley going as far to as to call Kempe delusional (Farley, 1999, p. 4). This position stems not only from historical ignorance, but a belief that psychology and other associated sciences are without bias (Farley, 1999, p. 8). Such readings not only prioritize a psychomedical approach to the text, but also fail to consider the temporal construction of illness. This is not at all to say that Kempe's *Book* cannot speak to some issues of psychological difference or neurodiversity in contemporary culture, but to impose a diagnosis *ex post facto* is to dismiss the pervasive cultural and ecclesiastical frameworks which not only shape Margery's visions, but which ultimately give voice to *The Book* as a piece of devotional literature.

Other scholars such as Hope Phyllis Weissman have taken a more measured approach to Kempe's excessive display of devotion, noting that by "affronting the authority of the patriarchal establishment with her hysteria – her woman's disease of womb suffering – Margery transcended its cure" (Weissman, 1982, p. 217). Whilst Weissman is correct in asserting a connection between Kempe's excessive weeping and female conditions of hysteria or the wandering womb, it is clear from her text that "hysteria" is employed through a psychoanalytic lens and not one engaged with medieval

concepts of female physiology. But even if Weissman were to correct this historical oversight, such an approach would still not help us understand the religious significance of Kempe's mysticism. As Corinne Saunders and Charles Fernyhough explain, framing Kempe's experiences in the language of illness or psychopathology does not give us any insight into how Margery would understand the spiritual weight of her own experiences. They write that, "whilst some of her [Margery's] experiences may have had physiological causes, these bio-medical models, which replace the explanatory frame of the supernatural with the language of delusion and hallucination, are reductive: they do not reflect Margery or her contemporaries' understanding of her experiences and may, indeed, render them more alien" (Fernyhough & Saunders, 2017, p. 211). Therefore, whilst it can be argued that Kempe's excessive passion walks the line between mysticism and madness – with Kempe even describing herself as a "woman without reason" (Kempe, 2001, p.142.) – modern readings of Kempe's mysticism as a kind of pathology have functioned similarly to allegations made against her by her contemporaries and fail to consider Kempe's devotion within the tradition of affective piety.

Kempe(who models herself on Mary Magdalene, St Birgitta of Sweden, and St Elizabeth of Hungary, and who seeks personal counsel with Julian of Norwich) partakes in a longstanding history in which religious women have sought to resist ecclesiastical exclusion in joining with the humanity of Christ. Although affective piety is heterogeneous in expression, Anne Clark Bartlett and Thomas H. Bestul provide a helpful overview, suggesting that the 12th-century bore witness to a spiritual movement which emphasized "self-examination, the inner emotions, and the cultivation of an interior life" (Clark Bartlett & Bestul, 2018: p.2). This later inspired 14th and 15th-century female mysticism. Kempe's devotional *Book* exemplifies this kind of affective piety, which is also characterized by "heightened degrees of emotionalism and a preoccupation with the tortured body of Christ and the grief of the Virgin Mary" (Clark Bartlett & Bestul, 2018: p.2). Sarah McNamer further corroborates this definition of affective piety, writing that "the stirring up of passion would have facilitated an immediacy of experience that was fully of the body as well as of the heart and the mind-one issuing in expressions of fierce desire to meet Christ's suffering body where it is, both now . . . and forever" (McNamer, 2009: p.30). If one reads *The Book of Margery Kempe* with this in mind, then one begins to realize the importance that passion plays in affective devotion as a vehicle of agency.

By using Kusters' text as a springboard for thinking through the phenomenological uses of mysticism, I want to argue for a model of apophatic agency which begins with the mystical and maddening desire for the infinite. This desire, a desire to be one with Christ, a desire for suffering and for self-annihilation, confronts the very threshold of human experience and is considered "madness". Kempe's passion, much like Kusters'

discussion of psychosis, reads as biographical, stemming from “great attacks of illness” throughout her first pregnancy and for a time thereafter in which she “despaired of her life, thinking she might die” (Ibid, p.8.) But my focus will not be to retroactively diagnose Kempe or to query the psychological issues which gave rise to her mysticism. Instead, this paper will analyze Kempe’s mystical encounters, and all the paradoxes they entail, to explore how one might reinterpret theological passion as a salvific pathway to reclaiming bodily agency, and as a way in which one might further renegotiate the boundaries of subjectivity. In reflecting on these issues, I aim to shed light on the ways in which mysticism has, in the past, enabled female contemplatives to achieve these goals. In the context of this paper, madness and mysticism are both understood as the burning desire for infinity. Whilst Kusters’ approach to mysticism focuses on liberating the psychotic patient from psychiatry, my argument invokes mysticism inversely by foregrounding it as the central motif. Although historically grounded, this paper does not take a strictly historicized approach to Kempe’s mysticism. Instead, I invite the reader to share in a theo-philosophical discussion of Kempe’s affective devotion and to consider her passion through the lens of apophatic agency. The choice to use Lynn Stanley’s modern English translation of *The Book of* Kempe (2001) is a deliberate attempt to include readers who are unfamiliar with Middle English.

Noli me tangere

To understand the significance of Kempe’s mysticism, one must first understand her position as a medieval woman and acknowledge how religious texts worked to reify medieval suspicions of female sensuality. Texts such as *Hali Meidhad* (1190–1220) and the *Ancrene Wisse* (1250–1300), which had a mediated female readership, emphasized the physicality of touch, warning women to keep their skin inviolate from both touching and being touched. Skin as the medium of touch became fundamental to texts instructing women on the best practices of virginity. With its ambiguous status as a membrane, the skin protected the inner dimensions of the woman from extraneous penetration, yet, conversely, was itself permeable and susceptible to sin. Depictions of the female body as one simultaneously both permeable and impermeable can be traced through Hebraic thought back to the Babylonian Talmud (Coyne Kelly, 2002, p. 20). In the European Middle Ages, physiological models of the female sex were articulated within a humoral paradigm which constructed biological womanhood in similarly contradictory terms, as something porous yet impassable. This Galenic interpretation of the body was thought to be equipoised by certain environmental factors which would interact with inner somatic states, giving rise to the belief that the female was a permeable and affective body.

The female body thus posed an existential threat to theological binaries which sought to separate it from its external environment. In the Middle Ages, theories of the senses followed an Aristotelian hierarchy which emphasized the inferiority of touch (Kern-Stähler, 2016: p.3.). This was compounded by a Christianization of touch, by which touch was transliterated as sin when God told Adam and Eve "you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die" (Genesis, 3:3).The prohibition of touch in Genesis and the exemplum of Eve as sinful promoted an understanding of the female body as the vehicle through which sin entered the world by means of physical contact. But more than that, this act of touching brought with it a sense of both contamination and contagion, by which female physical contact instigated moral malversation, resulting in exile from the Garden. Touch, which supposes the connection between self and other, came therefore to symbolize absence and displacement, banishing the female and her desire for contact from having knowledge of God.

Many have similarly read Christ's rejection of Mary Magdalene's touch as an articulation of the spiritual limitations of women, who are prohibited from accessing the body of Christ as the Divine Word and excluded from intimate knowledge of the Christian Truth. Ambrose of Milan draws explicit parallels between Eve and Mary Magdalene, both of whom signify the taboo of female touch. The *noli me tangere* scene therefore becomes a pertinent framework for considering the relationship between faith, gender, and the incarnation of Christ. In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Kempe demonstrates a particular affinity for Magdalene, whose penitential weeping she mirrors. Throughout the text, Kempe is asked "why weep you so woman?" (Kempe, 2001: p.92.), an echo of Christ's words to Magdalene at the site of the resurrection. In Chapter 81, Kempe reimagines the *noli me tangere* scene in an orthodox fashion, lamenting Christ's words to Mary Magdalene as a refusal of intimacy. Reflecting on Christ's rebuke of "[t]ouch me not", Kempe states that "it was a great marvel to her that Mary rejoiced, for, if our Lord had said to her as he did to Mary, she thought she could never have been merry" (Kempe, 2001: p.144.). Kempe's countenance grows heavy in this scene, and she is driven mad by "such great sorrow and heaviness . . . [that] she wept, sorrowed, and cried as if she would have died of the love and desire that she had to be with our Lord" (Kempe, 2001: p.144.).

But Christ's utterance of "noli me tangere" is not without linguistic complexity. In the original Greek, the text reads *me mou haptou*, carrying both the literal and metaphorical connotation of "do not touch me" and "do not cling to me" (Baert, 2007: p.16.). Translated in the Latin Vulgate as *noli me tangere*, the phrasing becomes more semantically ambiguous, meaning "do not touch me", "do not continue to touch me", and "do not wish to touch me" (Robertson, 2003, p. 40). The exact meaning of the

phrase is therefore unclear. But if one accepts *noli me tangere* as the scene in which the humanity of Christ transforms into the divinity of Christ, then perhaps it can be said that it is the newly risen body, not Magdalene's gendered body, which sets the conditions for the prohibition of touch.

The scene precipitates a rupture which articulates the threshold of human experience as it reaches toward the divine. The paradox of the encounter is one saturated with sensuality, as the mortal body encounters that which is spiritually removed from it. Christ, as the risen body, enforces the limits of Mary Magdalene's knowledge by prohibiting her touch. The emphasis on touch and proximal distance lends the scene to intense visuality and a focus on hands as an expression of desired and undesired contact. As vehicles of gesture, the hands premeditate both the approach and retreat of the other and therefore typically constitute the central composition of the paintings of the *noli me tangere* scene. Renditions such as Giotto's *Resurrection (Noli me tangere)* c.1304–106 and Fra Angelico's *noli me tangere* (c.1440–1442), demonstrate a reversal of Magdalene's gaze on the tomb and toward a departing Christ, who retreats from her outstretched advances. A body which is already elsewhere, Christ's presence is signified only by the absence of the living flesh through the act of resurrection. As a resurrected body, Christ retreats from death as demise and renders his body irreducible to material remains. The emptiness of the tomb thus becomes symbolic of the resurrection, not in the living's literal and miraculous triumph over death, but in the resurrected body's refusal to be reconciled to either life as continuation of life or death as the ultimate termination. As such, Christ's resurrected body becomes symbolic of disruption as "a matter of the discontinuity of another life in or of death" (Nancy, 2008: p.17.).

The unmediated division between Magdalene and Christ comes to signify the threshold of death and divine unknowability. At first Magdalene mistakes Christ for the groundskeeper, not recognizing his resurrected body. The resurrected body reveals itself to Magdalene as something which is both similar and dissimilar to Christ. As stated, this revelation does not assume the resuscitation or revival of Christ, but signifies Christ's departure from the world, "incommensurable with every representation of a passage into another life" (Nancy, 2008: p.18.). In this context, the infinite extension of death opens out into an unassailable expanse, and the body, through resurrection, becomes a site of metaphysical rupture which displaces fixtures of presence and absence and transforms them into an apophatic "space in which all bodies meet" (Nancy, 2008: p.44.). The resurrected body, that is to say, neither the dead nor living body, but a body which is simultaneously continuous and discontinuous from itself, therefore risks separation from the world in its infinite alterity. Here, in this apophatic space, alterity shakes the foundations of certainty, and the resurrected body exposes what Kusters

might call “a groundless world, an abyss, an *Ungrund* . . . where there are no boundaries – no ‘containment’” (Kusters, 2020: p.9.).

Despite this boundless alterity, Magdalene recognizes Christ when he addresses her by her name. This familiarity is one already established through faith, for when Christ calls her, she has already identified the resurrected body. In an earlier biblical passage, Magdalene anoints the feet of Christ with perfume in a prophetic act which anticipates both the wounding and fragrant decay of the body (Nancy, 2008: p.19.). Having anointed the messianic body, Magdalene embalms Christ in preparation for his death and resurrection. Magdalene thus knows and comes to recognize the risen Christ through faith. Her desire to touch Christ arises from her desire to reach out to the infinite, with the gap of the resurrection representative of this ineffability. Magdalene, representative of the female contemplative, stands as a figure of faith with her outstretched hands evidencing the assertion of her will whilst also articulating her receptiveness to Christ’s touch. This gap between the two figures thus becomes a hermeneutic gap between the known and the unknowable – a canyon between life and death – which “marks a space not only of epistemological uncertainty, but also of infinite possibility” (Robertson, 2003: p.47.). The interval between Magdalene and Christ is one of critical distance which gives space to measureless capacity. The act of reaching out to the divine becomes disrupted, and the chasm between human and divine gapes open like a bodily wound which overflows with immense possibility and abject revelation.

Affective piety and the apophatic

Paradoxically engendered by this critical distance, intimacy between Christ and the female body saturates *The Book of Margery Kempe*, blurring the boundaries between self and other. Kempe’s “dalliances” with Christ give rise to a covert familiarity, an inward affair of the soul, safe from the chaperoning eyes of the clergy. These dalliances are motivated by the desire of the mystic to touch Christ – a desire which passionately burns with insatiability, and which gives rise to her ever-flowing tears of contrition. Like Kusters madman, who cannot make himself understood, Kempe is all too aware that she can never express her languishing love of Christ with language. Bewailing the failure of words, Kempe bemoans “for they knew full little how homely our Lord was in her soul. Neither could she herself ever tell the grace that she felt; it was so heavenly, so high above reason and her bodily wits . . . that she might never express it with her word as she felt in her soul” (Kempe, 2001: p.4.). At this threshold of faith and madness, language comes into confrontation with itself and brings finite being to the very limits of its own existence, pointing to something beyond what is said. In this beyond, language cannot maintain coherency, and Kempe is left

with an incomprehensible absence that can never be fully grasped but which she nevertheless feels profoundly. The inexpressibility of such emotional and somatic suffering weighs on Kempe and renders her speechless. Like the ruptured body of Christ, Kempe's speech becomes wounded and exposes the gap between mystical experience and language. In this gap, Kempe's words give way to the tides of her wailing and dissolve into a sanguine ocean of unintelligibility. Corroborated by Fernyhough & Saunders, they observe that Margery's narrative "is distinguished by a sense of the impossibility of conveying the ineffable, and the gap between language and experience. *The Book* is dominated by the sound of Margery's cryings, the voice of vision, reflecting the impossibility of fully articulating vision in language" (Fernyhough & Saunders, 2017, p. 212).

In much the same way that Kusters' text rests on the paradox of apophatic language, Kempe's *Book* also speaks volumes about the incomprehensible mystery of the (in)human condition. Kempe's affective piety profoundly communicates this unsayability, as her tears become bodily signifiers which demonstrate her loss of words. According to Karma Lochrie, affective piety is marked by the corporeality of its discourse and the mystic's imitation of Christ's suffering. In this context, the sealed body of the mystic, and her association with Christ, is used to warn against the perviousness of the flesh so as to uphold virginal intactness. However, the pierced and ruptured body of Christ, when held as emblematic of perfection, offers an intimacy with the female mystic that goes beyond sympathetic victimization to realize the active potentiality of the ruptured and broken body. Embodied imitation of Christ's Passion transforms the contemplative's body into a living testament to the Crucifixion by which she becomes intimate with the body of Christ through her own form. Her sexed body, which before excluded her from partaking in the Passion, is now the very thing which grants her intimate access to the divine. In this sense, corporeal similitude transcends mortification of the flesh and opens out into a complex semiotics of apophatic suffering. For the female mystic, this becomes an enacted performance of abjection that disturbs the symbolic order when "[re]ception of the Word, through the imitation of Christ's wounds, is inscribed through the signs of the mystic's own body" (Lochrie, 1991: p.56.).

Kempe typifies this form of abjection. The profuse exteriorization of her inward-self flows through the excess of her tears. Kempe's reading of Christ comes from the site of his pierced body, which prompts a textual reckoning with the defiled and ruptured flesh. Christ's body, as the Word, becomes a visual spectacle to be read and interpreted. It is precisely Kempe's reading of the divine passion which elicits her profuse weeping. This excessive display of devotion bespeaks an unimaginable and recursive grief, which Kempe reenacts through perpetual mediation on the Crucifixion. The maddening tides of her emotion are caught up in an "unspeakable love" (Kempe, p.51.)

which transgresses the immaterial to affect the states of Kempe's corporeality. As an act of public display, the spectacle of Kempe's tears become an apophatic text by which society may come to read the abject body of Christ through the wounding and rupturing of her own body. Indeed, as Lochrie states, "[t]he wracking of Christ's body, the shrinking of his sinews, and the bursting of his joints tear the blessed body apart, causing Kempe to weep and sorrow even more. At this point, the spectacle of Christ's body becomes transferred to Kempe's, as she weeps and roars so that 'the church wondered at her body'" (Lochrie, 1991: p.174.). Here, Kempe embodies apophatic madness at the height of her mysticism. Her deeply visceral experience of the Passion becomes an all-encompassing somatic rapture which unites Kempe with the Christian Truth. Insofar as Kempe understands these embodied visions as an extension of Christ's Passion, it can be said that her mysticism constitutes a kind of Kusterian "hypertruth" (Kusters, 2020: p.64.) which cannot be mediated by the Church.

Tearful emissions flood the textual topography of Kempe's *Book*, as mediations on the ruptured body of Christ incurs ruptures within the mystic's own body. From these fissures tears flow tumultuously, as if a mnemonic of the sufferings of Christ on the cross. But Kempe's affectivity also recalls the Virgin Mary as a reader of Christ's crucified body. Her positionality at the foot of the cross mirrors that of the Virgin Mother, as she writes in Chapter 28, "that she had such very contemplation in the sight of her soul, as if Christ hung before her bodily eye in his manhood" (Kempe, 2001: p.51.). The rupturing of the Christic text inspires embodied mystical rapture and Kempe recounts how "she fell down and cried with loud voice, wonderfully turning and twisting her body on every side, spreading her arms abroad as if she should have died" (Kempe, 2001, pp. 51–2.). Lochrie parallels Kempe's bodily grieving to depictions of the Virgin Mother in Eastern Christian traditions, who assumes the suffering of Christ as though she were undergoing the physical pains of torture. In this way, the Virgin's body becomes emotionally wounded where Christ is punctured and gashed. Kempe herself recognizes her position as Christ's Mother in Chapter 29, when upon entering the holy site of Christ's grave "thought she saw our Lady in her soul, how she mourned and how she wept her son's death, and then was our Lady's sorrow her sorrow" (Kempe, 2001: p.52.). This act of annexed sufferance does not discriminate between Christ's Passion and that of the women. Thus Kempe, through her assumed position as the Virgin Mother, becomes an enabled reader of the Christic text through the convergence of suffering.

Tara Williams similarly observes this convergence of divine suffering. Having underwent a spiritual conversion after a prolonged postpartum sickness, Kempe is exorcised from her demonic visitations with the

arrival of Christ in her bedchambers. This marks the beginning of her devotional journey. Although seemingly a rejection of physical motherhood, William instead argues that Kempe's maternal body provides the authoritative basis for her spiritual teachings (Williams, 2010, p. 540). Kempe's role as an earthly mother in addition to her profuse weeping aligns her closely with the Virgin Mary, with whom she shares an empathetic and embodied labor. Specifically, Williams notes the unmistakable parallel between Kempe's tears and the significance of weeping in the cult of *Mater Dolorosa*. Although mimetically partaking in Christ's Passion, Kempe physically replaces the Virgin Mother at the foot of the cross in her vision of the Crucifixion. Her sorrow is emblematic of both Marian devotion and the despair she felt having suffered devils shortly after giving birth. Williams asserts that Kempe, through her experiences of motherhood, aligns herself with "Mary as *Mater Dolorosa*, or grieving mother, and as *Mediatrix*, or intercessor. These models are connected because Mary's suffering at Christ's Crucifixion established her as the emotional link between the human and the divine and, therefore, as a mother to and intercessor for humanity" (Williams, 2010, p. 542).

I argue that in enacting the sufferings of both Christ and the Virgin Mother, Kempe articulates the permeability of both the female body and the flesh of Christ, bringing them together in abject and apophatic union. The rendering of tears in Kempe's *Book* spills out from the wounds of Christ in which Kempe inscribes her own passion. In the same way that blood flows from Christic body, Kempe's tears burst forth from metaphysical contusions which inspire somatic rupture and rapture. Her fervent desire for Christ and the compassion she feels for his suffering pushes Kempe to the very limits of her own bodily existence, as she swoons from the violence of her tears and waxes bluish gray in fits of excruciating sorrow. Marian love, as both madness and passion, transpires into physical rhapsody and Kempe is often overcome "as though she should have burst for pity and compassion" (Kempe, 2001: p.135.). Kempe's body, like the wondrous and dissevered body of Christ or that of the laboring mother, convulses and threatens to break apart with furor. And just like the blood of Christ, which makes visible the divine love of God, Kempe's tears pour with boundless love for the infinite divine. In this way, Kempe's tears transform her body into an apophatic text, which literally and figuratively overflows with effluvia in a passion of the wounded flesh. Her flowing stream of tears signifies both the immanence of Christ and of the Virgin Mother, both of whom she now embodies. Consciousness of time, distance, and embodiment dissipate for Kempe. Or to appropriate Kusters' water metaphor, "everything dissolves in the flowing water [Kempe's tears], and there is no longer any distinction between subject and object, remembering and observing, inside and outside" (Kusters, 2020: p.253.). In this way, Margery not only challenges the

relationship between the exterior and interior, but directly rejects ideological constructs of the female body as passive.

It is Kempe's fixation with the Passion and osmotic identification with the humanity of Christ and with the Virgin Mary which ultimately causes her to become an object of scorn both within the Church and among various townspeople. In this way, Margery parallels the archetype of the madman. Kusters' writes that whilst "the madman still lives among others in a community and in the everyday world . . . he himself realizes that he has fallen away from the normal human world and has landed in the world of lonely madness" (Kusters, 2020: p.66.). Kempe very much parallels this isolated figure, whose christic visions separate her from her contemporaries. The immediacy of Kempe's visions inspires tempestuous fits of tears, in which her immeasurable love for God converges with the interminable Passion of Christ and the Virgin Mother. Her desire to emulate the suffering of Christ puts her in dangerous confrontation with both townspeople and church authorities. Kempe is accused of Lollardy and demonic possession, whilst others suspect her fits as symptomatic of "a heart disease or some other sickness" (Kempe, 2001: p.111.). At worst, she is threatened with being burnt at the stake – but despite the dangers that her mysticism presents, Kempe is much too consumed to placate her accusers. Acknowledging the failure of language to grasp the condition of Christ's suffering, Kempe opines "[s]he had many a holy thought and many a holy desire which she could never tell or repeat, nor might her tongue ever express the abundance of grace she felt" (Kempe, 2001: p.136.).

A queer figure

Although affective piety was not uncommon in saintly Christian devotion, Carolyn Dinshaw argues that Kempe's profuse weeping sets her against the conventions of her society, situating her behavior within a rubric of queerness. Here, queerness is not understood within the context of modern sexual or gender identities; rather, it signifies Margery's vehement resistance of certain clerical and cultural inscriptions which places her beyond contemporary convention. In Dinshaw's words, Kempe's queerness can be read as "disjunctiveness, both *within* her individual person . . . and *between* her person and established social forms" (Dinshaw, 1999: p.158.). Within *The Book*, Kempe is remarked to exceed St Brigid and the Virgin Mother in her outward sufferings, and even the apostles command her to finally be still at Christ's death. Kempe's dramatization of Christ's suffering, and by extension, the mystic's own suffering, brings a framework of queerness to bear upon the apophatic text. The unbridled and exorbitant dramatization of Kempe's tears display a blatant disregard for modesty, and challenges late

medieval conventions which govern how women should behave in both public and sacred spaces. In surpassing even heavenly devotion, Kempe's sufferings exceed all language and contemplation and demonstrate a charismatic authority outwith ecclesiastical traditions.

More than this, however, Kempe's affective piety signifies a disjunction between her spiritual desire and the constraints of her own body. This is particularly evident in the type of clothing that Kempe chooses to wear, which expresses her desire for chastity despite already being a wife and a mother. Kempe's choice to wear a white habit, visually symbolizing the virginity she wishes to promise Christ, conflicts with both the theological and social views of her maternal and thus sexually active body. The queerness of Kempe's dress demonstrates a conflict between her spiritual desires and the external expectations which are placed upon her. Kempe's decision to dress as a virgin symbolizes a need to refashion the imagery of her body in accordance with her internal desires as a mirroring of her spiritual ambitions by visibly reclaiming her virginity after fourteen children. It is in this way that one might interpret Kempe's dress as a kind of premodern cross-dressing, as Kempe experiences "her body as a 'drag' on her spiritual possibilities" and wears it as "an ill-fitting robe for her desiring soul" (Dinshaw, 1999: p.164.).

The discontinuity between the expectations of Kempe's body as a wife and mother and her internal desire to remain virginal emphasizes an uneasiness with the sexual expectations of the female body and enforces a ravine between how others view her and how she wishes to be. Her presentation as a virgin contradicts the impositions placed upon her reproductive body and reinforces a clear dissonance between Kempe and her social context, bringing her again into sympathetic parallel with the Virgin Mary. As a site of conflict, Kempe's body comes to dramatize the battle for authority over who gets to interpret the female body, who establishes the limitations of womanhood, and who beatifies women's claims to holiness. Just as Kempe weeps for the wounds of Christ and the laboring of the Virgin Mary, it can also be said that she weeps for her own body which both expresses and impedes her mystical authority. In such a way, Kempe's body is both queer and apophatic – disrupted and disrupting.

Although not discussed in terms of queerness *per se*, Maureen Fries points to Kempe's exceptional behavior, which she classifies as a social and religious revolt. Fries notes how Kempe's behavior violates both spiritual and social expectations, and how "Margery having chosen marriage, borne fourteen children, and then rejected its obligations must have shocked her contemporaries" (Fries, 1984, p.231). Kempe's self-assertion, both socially and religiously, leads Fries to the conclusion that Kempe transgressed the expectations of her sex. Despite the hyperemotional bouts

of weeping, which would have been understood as a feminine condition, Fries argues that Kempe demonstrates masculine power and authority by determining the conditions of her marriage and directly confronting clerical authority. Fries observes that:

> We see a number of such incidents in the Book, but it is the prolonged struggle to live chaste (significantly reaching its climax on a journey) which is only settled by Margery's using her own money to buy her way out. This tone of male dominance also appears frequently in her conversations with clergy and civic officials. From her initial postpartum "hysteria" (female) to her spirited persuasion of her amanuenses (male) she must have been enigmatic to those who knew her (Fries, 1984: p.232).

Although I question Fries choice of bio-medical terminology (i.e., "post-partum 'hysteria'"), she nevertheless grasps the extraordinariness of Kempe's actions. As an isolated and confrontational figure, Kempe contravenes the expectations of her sex in both claiming and challenging male authority. Fries' discussion of Kempe as enigmatic can therefore be read alongside Dinshaw's discussion of Kempe as a queer figure, as her claim to authority self-governance stokes the rampant anxiety of church leaders.

Indeed, Kempe's choice of dress seems to be a particular vexation for religious men in the *Book*, who take offense at her virginal fashion and accuse her of hypocrisy. In Chapter 48, Kempe affronts the Mayor of Leicester who interrogates her choice of clothing, telling her, "I will learn why you go in white clothes for I believe you are come hither to take away our wives from us and lead them with you" (Kempe, 2001: p.85.). Of course, it is by Christ's instruction that Kempe wears white, who tells her "daughter, I say to you I will that you wear clothes of white and no other color, for you shall be arrayed after my will" (Kempe, 2001:p.25.). The erosion of distance in Margery's visions brings Christ's voice to bear upon Kempe and Kempe to bear upon the voice of Christ. Kempe's ability to rupture and undermine clerical culture comes from *The Book*'s rhetorical strategies, particularly through the dialogic nature of her mysticism. Kempe's insistence of herself as a "creature" in the third person can be read as both deference to her creator and to the clerical culture. Its repeated emphasis serves to distance herself from the voice of God and to assert a non-confrontational identity as a creature that is wretched, frail, and weak. In this way, she sets herself up as a mere vessel for God's voice.

The assertion of herself as a creature creates a splitting effect, whereby Kempe duplicates the structure of double-voicedness by placing herself both within and outside of herself. At the same time that conciliation between woman and God occurs, a chasm opens to expose the instability of Church authority. Sarah Beckwith credits Kempe with "a brilliant rhetorical maneuver [as] Kempe ... tak[es] the place not simply of the clergy, but indeed of Christ himself, for it is her love which like his

becomes saving, redemptive" (Beckwith, 1992: p.194.). This rhetorical movement allows Kempe to recount Christ's voice through her own words and defamiliarizes the same clerical teachings used to exclude her from ecclesiastical culture. By speaking from the rhetorical position of Christ, Kempe hence draws attention to the human production of language, using the Word of God against the very same institution that claims it.

Further yet, Kempe pushes the boundary still in using this rhetorical maneuver to establish the conditions for a self-fashioned subjectivity. In *A Philosophy of Madness*, Kusters argues for madness and mysticism to be expressed through metaphors of rebirth, as the solitary madperson or mystic experiences the world in such a radically distinct way that is as if the world is new and full of possibility. For Kusters, this rebirth is linked to a new sense of existence, which has the potential to permanently alter a person's sense of self (Kusters, 2020: p.242.). The figure of Christ invites Kempe to a similar kind of rebirth, asking her to redefine herself beyond the limits of ecclesiastical rule and instead orient herself toward divine possibility. In professing her unworthiness to this calling, Christ tells her, "fear you not. I take no heed what a man has been, but I take heed what he will be . . . Have mind, daughter, what Mary Magdalene was, Mary the Egyptian, Saint Paul, and many other saints who are now in heaven" (Kempe, 2001: p.37.). The voice of Christ gives Kempe the choice to fashion her own identity in promoting a sense of being predicated on divine authority and becoming. Here, the historical self is critically distanced from the immediate self, revealing a space wherein Kempe can form her own subjectivity through relational self-constitution.

Insofar as Kempe speaks from the position of the other, she can construct a new identity through this otherness, which she assumes as other to herself. The gap between the present and historical self therefore opens from a place of mystical desire and becomes the anticipation of a future in which Kempe can extend beyond the reach of herself to be remolded in accordance with the will of God. Kempe therefore not only negates the boundaries between self and other, past, present, and future, but does so in a way which both renegotiates and affirms the gendered dimensions of her existence. Where contemporary clerical culture would exclude Kempe from ecclesiastical authority on the basis of sex, Christ sanctions her womanly body, and almost in a reversal of the *noli me tangere* scene, tells her, "if I were on earth as bodily as I was before I died on the cross, I should not be ashamed of you as many other men are, for I should take you by the hand among the people and make you great welcome so that they should well know that I loved you right well" (Kempe, 2001: p.66.). Although evidently uncomfortable with the conditions of her own bodily existence, Kempe nevertheless exemplifies Christ's inclusivity of women and other marginalized bodies.

This is demonstrated most potently by her act of kissing leprous women in Chapter 74.

Eucharistic ecstasy

I contend that Kempe articulates an apophatic yet bodily agency which renegotiates the boundaries of her gendered existence, calling into question the ideological expectations that curtail the female body. Food, which regularly transgresses boundaries between the self and other, becomes central to this renegotiation as an exercise in bodily autonomy and as a symbolic passageway between the physical and psychosexual self. Interestingly, the significance of food and other bodily centric behaviors are notably absent from Kusters' discussion of mysticism and madness. In focusing on the symbolic valency of food within mysticism, I aim to further enrich Kusters' analysis of mystical madness and argue for a uniquely feminine understanding of eating/not eating as way in which one might reclaim the somatic and sexual dimensions of their body.

In mysticism, abstinence from food relied primarily on substituting physical sustenance for the Eucharist, demanding that the female contemplative "let go of her delicacy about her bodily life in order to be able to eat this food at the table of the cross, the table of the teaching of Christ crucified" (Noffke, 1980: p.141.). The eschewing of the physical body and the salient religious symbolism of food marks a clear distinction between male and female forms of mysticism, even between those who share an emphasis on the physiological and sensory nature of divine contemplation (Morgan, 1995: p.427.). Fasting then, as a distinct characteristic of female piety, became associated with eucharistic devotion and formed an apophatic continuity between the female body and the humanity of Christ. Although one may interpret the privation of food and the suppression of appetite as indicative of a desire to abjure the physical body, Susan Morgan helps to recontextualise devotional fasting as part of a theology deeply focused on the body, which demonstrates "a journey into the body, [and] a conjoining with the humanity of Christ in which women's illness and self-starvation became extensions of the agonizing drama of the cross" (Morgan, 1995: p.432.). What appears at first as self-induced annihilation of the body breaks open once again into a composite symbolic system of suffering by which negation of the body and of its appetites transpires into agential self-constitution and a fortification of the body's (meta)physical boundaries as reconceived through the crucified and eucharistic body of Christ.

Insatiable hunger for the eucharistic host becomes a recurring trope in female asceticism, coinciding with languishing compassion for the christic text and a desire to map Christ's suffering onto the female body. Fasting of the somatic body becomes atonement through redemptive suffering and

empties out the body in preparation for receiving the nourishment of Christ. In this economy of suffering, penitential rites involving the restriction or purging of food were often accompanied by other ascetic practices, which, although were enacted as reparation for one's sins, were also self-consciously performed as an emulation of Christ's suffering with the intention of achieving divine union. Fasting as endemic to female mysticism accompanied miraculous acts and ecstatic visions as a result of "a frenzied hunger for the host and an intense fear of receiving it" (Bynum, 1987: p.58.). At this eucharistic juncture, suffering and ecstasy converge in a rapture too tremendous for the contemplative to convey, coalescing in a spiritual and somatic intensity that threatens to cleave the mystic from their body. This apophatic desire for the Eucharist often induced paroxysms whereby the ascetic, overcome with an ineffable desire for Christ, blurs the distinction between pleasure and pain. In this instance of somatic rapture, dichotomies of joy and suffering erode into convulsive episodes and propel the mystic toward the precipice of death. This paradox is captured most elegantly by Kempe, who states that in the prior's chapel at Lynn, "she cried . . . as if her body and soul should have parted asunder, so that two men held her in their arms till her crying ceased, for she might not bear the abundance of love that she felt in the precious sacrament, which she steadfastly believed was very God and man in the form of bread" (Kempe, 2001: p.102.).

In orienting themselves toward God, many female contemplatives reject or limit bodily sustenance and participate in somatic penance. This is most pertinently expressed by an earlier ascetic, St Catherine of Siena, who instructs her recipients to "[k]ill, kill your own will, that it may not be so tied to your relatives, and mortify your body, and do not so pamper it in delicate ways" (Of Siena, 2016: p.252.). Kempe participates in this common ascetic charity, offering her sufferings up in penance for the salvation of souls. This is made clear in Chapter 34, when Kempe tells us that she served an old lady for six weeks, with "no bed to lie in nor any clothes to be covered save her own mantle. And then she was full of vermin and suffered great pain therewith" (Kempe, 2001: p.63.). Similar to many female ascetics of her time, Kempe's renunciation of bodily necessities, especially food, relied on the eucharistic doctrine of incarnation. As Bynum observes "[t]he humanity of Christ understood as including his full participation in bodiliness, was a central and characteristic theme in the religiosity of late medieval women" (Bynum, 1987: p.246.). This deeply embodied sense of Christ focuses on incarnation and suffering as central to salvation.

In conjunction with the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century devotion of the host, the Doctrine of Concomitance emphasized the miracle of transubstantiation by which Christ's body came to be present in every particle of the eucharistic bread. This emphasis on the bread as flesh provided female mystics a very literal way in which to join their bodies with Christ. The

physicality of God, now bread on the altar, meant that the female contemplative could take Christ's suffering into herself by participating in Communion. To eat the crucified body of God was to become one with Christ in suffering. Put more poetically, Bynum writes that "[t]o eat God was *imitatio crucis* . . . If the agony was also ecstasy, it was because our very hunger is union with Christ's limitless suffering, which is also limitless love" (Bynum, 1987: p.67.).

Fasting, abstinence, and the sexual body

Kempe's eucharistic piety is exemplarily orthodox. In anticipation of the Eucharist, which she consumes once a week by Christ's command, Kempe forgoes meat in favor of the consecrated host. Appearing to her in Chapter 5, Christ tells her "you must forsake what you love best in this world, and that is eating of meat. And instead of that flesh you shall eat my flesh and blood, that is the very body of Christ in the sacrament of the altar" (Kempe, 2001, p. 14). The renunciation of meat, I argue, is particularly significant. Within the paradigm of Galenic humoral theory, meat was widely regarded as a powerful sexual stimulant which increased the bodily heat, and therefore lust, of the person consuming it. As an effective aphrodisiac, meat was to be consumed in moderation and best avoided for those leading celibate lives. Combined with the proximity of the stomach to the genitals, whereby the pressure of a full stomach could incite arousal in lower bodily members, gluttony and lust became inextricable appetites in medieval epistemologies of the body (Bazzell, 1997: p.73.). Indeed, this historical connection between food and sex is corroborated by Morgan, who writes that "[t]he link between eating and sexual dominion has a long history in the Christian tradition of course and was not new to medievalists. The connection had previously been made by the Desert Fathers, particularly Jerome who praised those women who made 'their whole life fast'" (Morgan, 1995: p.429.).

It is no coincidence, then, that Kempe practices both fasting and abstinence throughout the text. She tells us that "[s]he might well endure fasting; it grieved her not. She hated the joys of the world" (Kempe, 2001: p.11.). No doubt imbued by her experiences after giving birth, this hatred of the world extended to sexual intimacy for Kempe, which she reviled even within holy matrimony. Outlining her aversion to sex, Kempe states that "she had never desire to common fleshly with her husband, for the debt of matrimony was so abominable to her that she had rather, she thought, eat or drink the ooze, the muck in the channel than to consent to any fleshly commoning" (Kempe, 2001: p.10.). Kempe's odium for sex manifests through ascetic practices, by which she renegotiates the boundaries between the self and non-self. According to Rebecca J. Lester, "[t]hrough a solidification of the

body boundary through fasting (and the accompanying physiological conditions such as amenorrhea), the anorexic, bulimic, or ascetic woman may literally *redefine* the boundaries of her self. The body boundary may then be crossed *only on her authority*" (Lester, 1995: p.190.). Kempe's refusal of meat is therefore best understood within a symbolic quest for sexual agency.

Meat as both a transitional substance and sexual stimulant becomes fundamental to Kempe's desire for bodily autonomy. In denying meat, Kempe establishes the physical parameters of her body, all the while avoiding substances which might entice her sexual appetite. Not only is this congruent with Kempe's desire to reclaim her virginity, but, paradoxically, it permits Kempe intimate knowledge of Christ through partaking of the Eucharist. If the sacramental host becomes the literal body of Christ, then, as Bynum suggests, eating the flesh of Christ equates to becoming one with Christ. To support this, she gives examples of female contemplatives who envision becoming pregnant with the child Jesus (Bynum, 1987: p.257.). But whilst many female ascetics including Kempe *do* present an overtly maternal relationship with Christ, Bynum's account of the Eucharist strips meat of its sexual symbolism and sanitizes the sexual maternal body. In the context of *The Book*, it ignores the sexual undertones of Kempe's relationship with Christ, which is made explicit when Christ invites Kempe to kiss his body, stating "you desire greatly to see me, and you may boldly, when you are in bed, take me to you as your wedded husband" (Kempe, 2001: p.66.). Instead, I contend that if one considers meat/flesh within the context of humoralism, then Kempe's eating of the host can be said to stoke an erotic desire for the divine body. As such, it can be argued that Kempe and Christ join as one flesh, not only in maternity but through an act of conjugal matrimony. As observed by Lester, "union with Christ allowed a woman to occupy positions on both sides of her defined social role: she was both virgin and bride, simultaneously a maiden and a lover" (Lester, 1995: p.212.). In eating the Eucharist, Kempe is therefore able to fulfil her duties to her celestial bridegroom while paradoxically remaining chaste.

Indeed, Williams astutely argues that "Margery returns to the physical and sexual aspects of her earthly life in order to transform her Marian spiritual motherhood into this insuperable sexual spousal intimacy" (Williams, 2010, p. 547). With that said, we need not consider Kempe's maternal and sexual relationship with Christ as something necessarily paradoxical or taboo. Similar to her earthly understanding of motherhood, Kempe's sexual experiences give texture to her intimacy with Christ. But whilst Kempe's somatic encounters condition her religious experiences, Kempe is not bound by prescriptive categories. This leads Dinshaw to reinterpret Kempe's interchangeable and fluid relationships with Christ and the Virgin as "one big queer family ... [which] shows up the earthly family (as she knows it) for its limitations, especially for its lack of intimacy"

(Dinshaw, 1999, p. 149). If one follows Dinshaw's argument, then Kempe's seemingly incestuous relationship with Christ becomes a spiritual haven for Kempe to explore the multidimensional aspects of her own earthly sexuality, including motherhood. This not only brings Kempe back into conversation with queerness, as she unsettles "the comfortable unities of gender, desire, and body on which her community, its sexual norms, and its family structure are founded" (Dinshaw, 1999, p. 152), but it further complicates possible incestuous readings of Kempe's relationship to Christ. Throughout the text, Christ repeatedly reminds Kempe that her roles as a mother, sister, daughter, or spouse to him, are not mutually exclusive in the heavenly realm. Only in the realm of the flesh are these identities impossible to reconcile. Here, Williams notes that Kempe not only constructs herself as parallel to the Virgin Mary, but then "stretches – even violates – that parallel to create a closer intimacy with Christ as her son and lover" (Williams, 2010, p. 553).

Yet, despite being wedded to Christ, Kempe is still contracted to her earthly husband. As the husband's literal property, once married, medieval law expected the wife to fulfil marital obligations to her husband by engaging in sexual intercourse at his discretion (Ibid, p.194.). In *The Book*, we are told that Kempe was subjected to non-consensual sex and obeyed her husband with much sorrow and weeping when "he used her as he had done before" (Kempe, 2001, pp. 10–11). Kempe expresses shame when reflecting on the sexual urges and expectations of her body and enacts great bodily penance in reparation for failing to maintain her virginity. Here, it would be easy to read internalized misogyny as the source of Kempe's shame. However, to do so would be to deprive Kempe of personal agency and further reify the female body as a passive object onto which patriarchal anxieties are inscribed and enacted. Where Kempe's ecstatic visions enabled her access to ecclesiastical authority otherwise prohibited to women, fasting allowed Kempe social independence from her husband and granted her sexual autonomy within her marriage. Spiritually empowered by Christ, Kempe bargains with her husband, vowing to pay his debts and break her Friday fasts in exchange for her right to practice abstinence. Kempe's fasting not only enables her to manipulate her domestic environment, but fortifies her body's sexual boundaries, as she is able to barter with her husband and agrees to eat in substitution of sex.

Conclusion

As stated in the opening paragraph, madness, when freed from its Western medical categorizations, may be defined as a desire for the infinite. If one accepts this definition, then it can be said that *The Book of Margery Kempe* presents a paragon of madness in which this desire for the infinite is enacted

through a somatic mysticism, specific to female contemplatives. In reading Kempe with Kusters' *A Philosophy of Madness* (Kusters, 2020) in mind, the permeability of madness and mysticism becomes clear, as Kempe's languishing for the infinite frequently pushes the contemplative to increasing bodily and spiritual extremes. Madness, in this context, becomes unintelligible from mysticism¸ as Kempe's dalliances with Christ fill her with thoughts "so high above her bodily wits that she might never express them with her bodily tongue just as she felt them" (Kempe, 2001: p.147.). Unsayability, then, is what unites madness and mysticism through apophatic expression, whereby language registers its own demise at the extremities of human experience. This apophatic expression culminates in Kempe's convergence with the somatic suffering of Christ, which transforms her body into a spectacle to be both worshiped and reviled. In surpassing the authority of the Church, Kempe enacts agency through mimetic identification with Christ, in which her own stigmatized body is made divine through the wounding of the Passion.

As a mad and arguably queer figure, Kempe's extreme behaviors place her in conflict with patriarchal authority, making her ungovernable and unruly. This not only juxtaposes the medieval notions of the female as passive but demonstrates a deliberate willfulness which guides much of her mysticism. Kempe regularly contravenes ecclesiastic authority, acting instead on behalf of Christ, whose voice is indistinguishable from Kempe's own. It is this union with the divine, both a product and inspiration of the contemplative's mysticism, which ultimately enables Kempe to overcome the restrictions of her own gendered existence. This fusion with Christ is most saliently achieved through the Eucharist, which, when ingested, alters the mystic's somatic constitution by way of physically consuming the Body of Christ. This crossing of the threshold between the self and not self becomes a central theme in Kempe's mysticism, extending from restrictive food intake to sexual abstinence, as ascetic practices ultimately become a way in which Kempe reclaims bodily agency by deciding what does or does not enter the domain of her body. Lester summarizes this succinctly, stating that "[o]n the one hand, fusion with Christ offered a means of voiding oneself of an independent identity through merging with the Lord … On the other hand, the potential of Divine Union seems to have offered ascetics a means of exploring and elaborating their existing 'selves' as women in society" (Lester, 1995: p.213.).

Drawing this paper to a close, I am left with the question of Kempe's legacy: what value does she hold for modern readers? To answer this question, I refer back to Kusters, whose own personal experiences of madness resonate within a mystical paradigm. For Kusters, mysticism and madness share an unsayability which frustrates diagnostic models within psychiatry. Like Kempe's affective piety, which poses a threat to clerical

culture, there is always something about madness for Kusters which exceeds medical-psychiatric classifications, and which disrupts the very boundaries which make it clinically legible. By reframing madness as a "deep-seated existential confusion, a confusion about the boundaries between the self and the world, language and concepts, finitude and infinity" (Kusters, 2020: p.15.), Kusters emancipates madness from a discourse of mental illness, in which madness is seen as a disorder for which the individual should receive therapy. The idea of madness as a disorder of the mind permeates Western thinking, wherein madness marks a departure from reality. But, as Kempe has shown, what we today perceive as hallucinations, phantom ailments, and traumatic memories are not opposed to reality, but instead constitute it for the individual. Here, the question of agency becomes salient, as we are confronted with the pressing dilemma of who determines what is real and what is not, what is normal and what is pathological. Perhaps then, Kempe's mysticism may offer a template to reinterpret madness as not wholly impairing, but as an authentic quest for agency when faced with the frontier of the human condition. Ending on a reflective note, I turn to the words of Alison Torn, who suggests we should view *The Book of Margery Kempe* as Margery's personal quest for sainthood. In this context, Torn reminds us that "Kempe's book is a pre-Enlightenment narrative, where the boundaries between madness and religious experiences were drawn very differently to modern times. Her story could not be told in the same way today, but that does not mean that we should not listen to it and hear her voice" (Torn, 2008, p. 88).

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