Mechthild of Hackeborn and Margery Kempe:
An Intertextual Conversation

Liz Herbert McAvoy and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa

Abstract

Chapter 58 of *The Book of Margery Kempe* documents how a priest new to Bishop's Lynn takes on an eight-year commitment to read scriptural and devotional works to Margery Kempe, thus enhancing both her and his own spiritual expertise. Although not named amongst the works listed in the *Book*, we argue that the 'swech oþer' texts, a term tantalisingly appended to the list of named books presented, would likely have included the thirteenth-century *Liber specialis gratiae* attributed to the Saxon nun, Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1298). Drawing on some of the most vivid and compelling correlations between the two texts, we argue not only for Kempe's familiarity with Mechthild's writing but also for a much more central positioning of this earlier work within the literary and spiritual cultures of fifteenth-century England than has generally been understood.

Introduction

In chapter 58 of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, finally written down in about 1436, the *Book*'s protagonist, Margery Kempe, is recorded as offering a characteristic rebuke to Christ because of his failure to comply with her request for a suitable cleric out of "þe many clerkys as þu hast in þis world" to read to her from the scriptures and other devotional works.[1] Depicting herself as hungering in spirit for such readings, she calls upon Christ's pity for her devotional starvation, causing him to quickly capitulate and promise her: "þer xal come on fro fer þat xal fulfillyn þi desyr."[2] As if on cue, a new priest duly appears in Bishop's Lynn sometime in 1413, one wholly unfamiliar with Margery, but who is arrested by her remarkable pious behaviour and noisy affective performances as she goes about the streets. As a result, he seeks out an introduction and, within days, Margery is invited to this priest's rented accommodation, which he shares with his mother. Soon, the three of them begin reading and discussing together scripture and devotional works, and Margery peppers these gatherings with copious tears of compassion, which clearly impress the priest's mother, if not the priest himself initially. Indeed, it is this mother who vouches for

[1] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sandford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS OS 212 (London, New York and Toronto, 1940, repr. 1997). All quotations will be taken from this edition, unless otherwise stated, and cited by book, chapter and page number (here at 1.58: 142). There has been much debate surrounding authorship of this text and Kempe's own contribution to it. Original critics often saw the *Book* as overly simplisic, naive, or largely shaped by its various scribes. Later commentators tended to separate the protagonist, Margery, from the professed author, Margery Kempe, when discussing the *Book*, suggesting that the figure of Margery was largely a textual construction, a process begun by Lynn Staley in 1994 when she suggested that the scribes mentioned in the text were meant to be tropological: see Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (Philadelphia, PA, 1994). Since then, there has been a number of discoveries regarding the book's first scribe and the scribe of the extant manuscript copy. See, for example, Sebastian Sobecki, "'The writyng of this tretys': Margery Kempe's Son and the Authorship of Her Book," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015): 257-83; and Anthony Bale, "Richard Salthouse of Norwich and the Scribe of *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *The Chaucer Review* 52.2 (2017): 173-87. In this essay, we will comply with convention and refer to the author as Margery Kempe and the internal protagonist as Margery.

[2] Kempe, *Book*, 1.58: 142.

SPICILEGIUM: Online Journal of Japan Society for Medieval European Studies, VOL. 4 (2020)

Margery's spiritual singularity, counselling her son to pursue the acquaintance further: "Hys modyr was wel plesyd & cownselyd þat he xulde [spekyn more wyth hir]."[3] Hence Margery begins a six-year period of deeply satisfying religious exchange with the priest – and possibly his mother too – teaching him – or them – much about "good scriptur and many a good doctor which he wolde not a lokyd at þat tyme had sche ne be."[4] In turn, the priest provides Margery with "many a good boke of hy contemplacyon" – some of which are even named in the text: "þe Bybyl wyth doctowrys þer-up-on, Seynt Brydys boke, Hylton's boke, Bone-ventur, Stimulus Amoris, Incendium Amoris, *& swech oþer*."[5]

Here we find listed a predicable array of texts to be read for devotional purposes *in camera* amongst like-minded people.[6] But what is of particular concern to this present article is the somewhat throw-away reference to "swech oþer" texts included here, of which there must have been a considerable number, given the seven- or eight-year period when this priest and Margery read together between 1413 and 1421. Also significant is the fact that this reading practice is presented as both communal and reciprocal – indeed, it is as beneficial to the priest as it is to Margery, increasing his own "cunnyng and merit." Explicitly, too, it provides him with the spiritual added-value that allows him ultimately to receive a benefice of his own: so much so that he "lykyd hym ful wel þat he had redde so mech beforn."[7] The inference here is that Margery and the priest are actually discovering new works to read together, each informing and developing the other's devotional knowledge-base. Between them, we can also infer, they clearly devour many of the devotional "best-sellers" of the day, a number of which, besides those already mentioned, are alluded to or clearly referenced elsewhere in the *Book*. Indeed, it cannot be of insignificance that, just two chapters later, Margery Kempe's scribe will recount how his faith in Margery was restored and reinforced by his own reading of popular continental women's visionary writing: specifically *The Life of Marie d'Oignies* (d. 1213) and the visions attributed to Elizabeth of Hungary (d. 1231), who displayed similar affective practices to those embraced by Margery Kempe in the fifteenth century.[8] No doubt, these texts also constituted some of the "swech oþer" works read communally by Margery and her priest, demonstrating clearly that female-authored visionary writings were being circulated and read in those milieux in which Margery Kempe was operating at this time. In this article, therefore, we wish to suggest that one of these "swech oþer" texts would have been the *Liber specialis gratiae* of Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1298), most likely in its translated form, *The Boke of Gostely Grace*, although, it is also quite possible that the work could have been summarised

[3] Kempe, *Book*, I.58: 143.

[4] Kempe, *Book*, 1.58: 143.

[5] Kempe, *Book*, 1.58: 153 (our emphasis). There are two extant Middle English translations of Birgitta of Sweden's complete *Liber Celestis*, one found in London, British Library, MS Claudius B.i, the other in British Library, MS Julius F. II. A modern edition of the former has been published as *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden: The Middle English Version in British Library MS Claudius B.i, together with a Life of the Saint from the Same Manuscript*, ed. Roger Ellis, vol. 1, EETS OS 291 (Oxford and New York, 1987). As well as Birgitta's writing and a glossed Bible, the works referred to here are the *Stimulus Amoris*, erroneously attributed to Bonaventure (for which, see Allen's notes on 143/25-6 and 153/38-154/1, Kempe, *Book*, 322 and 323); the *Scale of Perfection* by Walter Hilton; and the *Incendium Amoris* of Richard Rolle – all standard spiritual works of the period.

[6] On private reading as a devotional practice promoting self-reflection, see Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, PA, 2008). Bryan discusses Mechthild of Hackeborn's *Boke* on pp. 36-37 and pp. 90-93. Margery Kempe's role as audience for devotional reading is discussed on pp. 12, 19 and 20. For a wider study of late medieval women's access to, and ownership of, books, See Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK, 2002). Both Jacqueline Jenkins and Rebecca Krug comment on Margery Kempe's reading practices as collaborative. See Jacqueline Jenkins, "Reading and the *Book of Margery Kempe*," in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge, UK, 2004), pp. 113-28 (p. 117); and Rebecca Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader* (Ithaca, NY and London, 2017).

[7] Kempe, *Book*, 1.58: 144.

[8] Kempe, *Book*, 1.62: 153-54. Both of these texts were circulating in Middle English by the early fifteenth century, in their entirety and in excerpted formats. For modern critical editions of these texts, see "The Life of Marie d'Oignies," in *Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis and Marie d'Oignies*, ed. Jennifer N. Brown (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 85-190; and Elizabeth of Hungary, *Two Middle English Translations of the Revelations of St Elizabeth of Hungary*, ed. Sarah McNamer (Heidelberg, 1996). McNamer problematises this authorial attribution in her introduction.

or paraphrased for Margery. It may also be likely that one or other of her scribes had also been strongly influenced by it before or during his writing-up of Margery's life.

This suggestion is not entirely a new one: it was first posited by Hope Emily Allen in her Prefatory Note to the EETS edition of the text produced with Sandford Brown Meech in 1940.[9] Additionally, in Appendix IV of this edition, also prepared by Allen, she argues for the importance of studying *The Book of Margery Kempe* in the context of Dominican – or Dominican-influenced – visionary women operating in Germany during the thirteenth century;[10] Mechthild can, of course, be numbered amongst such women.[11] Indeed, in her preface, Allen tantalisingly declared that, in a second volume, she would be presenting long extracts from the work of Mechthild and others like her to evidence her assertion of strong influence upon Margery Kempe. Indeed, as she asserted of Kempe's literary practice: she had "a habit to drop clues useful to the scholar . . . sometimes split up in widely separated sections."[12] As we know, Allen's collaboration with Meech was subject to considerable difficulties, the promised second volume never materialised, and we are still left to a large extent second-guessing what this remarkable and assiduous early twentieth-century scholar would have presented us with.[13] However, what *does* remain for our own scrutiny is this same series of clues dropped into the text by Kempe and her scribes – some of which we aim to identify and discuss in this present article.

The Boke of Gostely Grace

As mentioned above, *The Boke of Gostely Grace* (hereafter *Boke*) is the Middle English translation of the *Liber specialis gratiae* (hereafter *Liber*), the revelations attributed to Mechthild of Hackeborn, a Saxon mystic and chantress at the Benedictine/Cistercian convent of Helfta in what is now northern Germany.[14] The *Liber* is thought to have been compiled collaboratively by Gertrude the Great (1256–1301/2) and another unknown nun at Helfta during the last decade of the thirteenth century, but it was soon abridged by an anonymous redactor and enjoyed wide circulation in Europe.

The Liber is the only extant Helfta text to have been translated into Middle English – probably at Syon Abbey during the same period as Birgitta of Sweden's *Liber Celesti*s and Catherine of Siena's *Dialogo* were being translated into English in the early fifteenth century, also in a Carthusian or Birgittine milieu.[15] The *Boke* is a translation of an abridged version of the *Liber*, which contains the first five books and concentrates on visions connected with the Church's liturgy, Mechthild's personal piety and prayers for the deceased in purgatory. This translation survives in two manuscripts — Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 220, dating from the mid-fifteenth century, and London, British Library, MS Egerton 2006, dating from the last quarter of the fifteenth century – but it is very likely that the two manuscripts share a common Middle English antecedent, now lost.[16] This would mean that a version of the *Boke* may well have been in circulation when Margery and the unnamed priest were reading together between 1413 and 1421. Indeed, as Liz Herbert McAvoy has argued elsewhere, the clear – and, on occasion, unique – correlations between the *Boke* and

[9] Allen in Kempe, *Book*, I: lxvi.

[10] Allen in Kempe, *Book*, I: 376-8. The Dominican influences upon the texts under scrutiny are discussed further below.

[11] See, for example, Mary Jeremy Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta: Scholars and Mystics* (Athens, GA and London, 1991), especially p. 15, p. 19 and p. 55.

[12] Allen, in Kempe, *Book*, I: lxvi.

[13] For a sensitive account of the issues surrounding the book's twentieth-century publication history, see Marea Mitchell, *The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism* (New York, 2005).

[14] The original Latin text has been edited by Dom Ludwig Paquelin in *Revelationes Gertrudianae ac Mechtildianae* (hereafter *Revelationes*), 2 vols (Paris, 1875–7), II, pp. 1–422. The Middle English translation based on MS Egerton has been edited by Theresa A. Halligan as *The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechtild of Hackeborn* (Toronto, 1979).

[15] For an overview of the history of the Bridgettine foundation of Syon Abbey, see Edward A. Jones, *Syon Abbey 1415-2015: England's Last Medieval Monastery* (Leominster, 2015). See also *Syon Abbey and its Books*, ed. E. A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham (Woodbridge, 2010); and Susan Powell, *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey* (Turnhout, 2017).

[16] Halligan, *Booke*, "Introduction," pp. 6-7.

the 1422 text, *A Revelation of Purgatory*, attributed to an anonymous female recluse in Winchester, would strengthen the case for the *Boke*'s early circulation in such circles.[17]

In terms of their contents, MS Egerton 2006 contains only Mechthild's revelations, while MS Bodley 220 comprises a treatise on meekness, a short text on vices and virtues, and two English poems, concluded by the scribal signature: "Deo gracias Amen, quod Wellys I. et cetera" (fol. 103r).[18] Although the name is perhaps too common for identification, this scribe could possibly be John Wells, a Carthusian monk of the House of Salutation in London, who appears in the record in 1425 and whose death is also recorded at Hinton Charterhouse in 1445 under the name John Wellis.[19] Indeed, dialectical distinction between the two Middle English versions supports the possibility: MS Bodley 220 is written in a London dialect while MS Egerton 2006 is written in a northern dialect. Theresa Halligan, the editor of the Egerton manuscript, however, argues that its scribe was consciously amending the dialect of his master copy, eliminating southern forms of words as he got used to copying the text.[20] She also suggests that MS Egerton 2006 may have been written in the Carthusian house in Axholme on the Lincolnshire and Yorkshire border.[21] That the master copy was written in a southern dialect indicates production in a Carthusian monastery near London – or, again, even at Syon Abbey, with which many other manuscript traces of Mechthild are associated, as we shall see.

In this context, additional to the *Boke* and a number of complete manuscript copies of the *Liber* in England,[22] there are a number of extant devotional works and anthologies that contain passages of Mechthild's revelations in Latin and/or English translation. Extracts from the *Liber*, for instance, were circulating in manuscripts soon after the foundation of Syon Abbey in 1415. *The Myroure of oure Ladye*, written for the nuns of Syon probably between 1420 and 1448, contains two excerpts from "Mawdes boke";[23] however, it is impossible to discern whether these were based on the *Liber* or *Boke*, because of their largely paraphrastic tenor.[24] Extracts also appear in *The Speculum devotorum* (translated as the *Myrowre to Devout Peple*), written between c. 1415 and 1425 by an anonymous brother of Sheen Abbey. In the prologue, its Carthusian author memorably names Birgitta of Sweden, Catherine of Siena and Mechthild of Hackeborn as "approued women," probably

[17] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "'O der lady, be my help': Women's Visionary Writing and the Devotional Literary Canon," *The Chaucer Review* 51.1 (2016): 68-87 (for Mechthildian influence upon *A Revelation of Purgatory*, see pp. 78-86.)

[18] A more extensive account of the manuscripts and anthologies will appear in *The Boke of Gostely Grace, edited from Oxford, MS Bodley 220 with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Anne Mouron and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa with assistance of Mark Atherton, Exeter Medieval Texts (Liverpool, 2021 forthcoming). All quotations from MS Bodley 220 will be cited by book, chapter and folio number.

[19] Halligan, *Booke*, "Introduction," p. 2, n. 4; Rosalynn Voaden, "The Company She Keeps: Mechtild of Hackeborn in Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge, UK, 1996), pp. 51-69 (p. 53).

[20] For example, there are some northern characteristics in the end of Part I, such as *hate* for 'hot'; *amange* for 'among'; *chase* for 'chose'. "The spyrites of þe ordere of seraphyne . . . were kyndlede moreouere in charyte of þe hate luffe" (I. 58, 242); "Amange martyres sche was moste pacyete" (244); "a fulle bryght myrrour þat euerlastyinge luffe wherewith he luffede me ande chase me before any creature" (I. 59, 247).

[21] Halligan *Booke*, "Introduction", pp. 22-23. For northern features, see J. A. Burrow and T. Turville-Petre, *A Book of Middle English*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1996), pp. 5-8. A. I. Doyle speculates that the spelling of this scribe points chiefly to Lincolnshire: see his essay, "English Carthusian Books not yet linked with a Charterhouse," in *'A Miracle of Learning': Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning: Essays in honour of William O'Sullivan*, ed. Toby Barnard, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Katharine Simms (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 122-36 (p. 126-27). According to *Linguistic atlas*, MS Egerton 2006 is mixed with a SE Leicestershire component: see Angus McIntosh and others, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, 4 vols (Aberdeen, 1986), I, p. 109. The same hand is responsible for Cambridge, St John's College 189 and British Library, Additional 37790. See also Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Mechthild of Hackeborn and Cecily Neville's Devotional Reading: Images of the Heart in Fifteenth-Century England," in *Revisiting the Medieval North of England: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Anita Auer, Denis Renevey, Camille Marchall and Tino Oudesluijs (Cardiff, 2019), pp. 25-38.

[22] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Trinity College 32; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 21; Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff. 1.19.

[23] *The Myroure of oure Ladye*, ed. John Henry Blunt, EETS ES 19 (London, 1973), 38-39, 276-77. Mechthild's name appears in a wide variety of forms in Middle English: for example, Mawde, Moll, Molte, Molde, Maude, Maute and Matilde. On this, see Voaden, "Company," p. 54, n. 16.

[24] Voaden, "Company," p. 55.

for the deemed orthodoxy of their visions.[25] But, again it is impossible to tell on which version of Mechthild's writing its extracts are based. Extracts attributed to Mechthild are also found in a number of devotional anthologies, including British Library, MS Harley 494, an early sixteenth-century manuscript which is also connected with the Syon network and includes Mechthild's revelations bilingually as one of its sources.[26] Whether Latin, vernacular or bilingual, Mechthild's text (in a variety of forms) thus forged predominantly Birgittine and Carthusian connections and was widely disseminated under their auspices.

The Boke of Gostely Grace as an approved, vernacular mystical text

Behind the translation of the *Liber* lies the politico-religious tension of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries following Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409, issued to counter the ideological and political struggles precipitated by Lollardy.[27] As Vincent Gillespie has argued, an unintended consequence of the *Constitutiones* may have been concerted translation into English of older texts with "an impeccably orthodox pedigree or . . . reputation."[28] Reflecting the Church's reform agenda for the English Church, Syon Abbey grew to be a centre of orthodox translation into the vernacular during the episcopate of Arundel's successor, Henry Chichele (1414-43).[29] Having resurfaced within the Carthusian/Birgittine milieu, Mechthild's *Liber*, with its emphasis on liturgical worship, clearly fitted comfortably both with Syon's cloistered spirituality and with the type of Church reforms enforced by Arundel and Chichele.[30]

Unlike Birgitta or Catherine, who were both fourteenth-century saints and therefore perhaps of more immediate interest to a vernacular readership, Mechthild belongs to a group of twelfth- and thirteenth-century, continental female mystics celebrated for their charism, intellectual confidence and powerful voices during their own day. The most prominent example is, perhaps, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), who directed her voice, and the esteem within which she was held, at promoting twelfth-century Church reform.[31] As Barbara Newman argues, "Hildegard condemns a Church whose vain, pleasure-loving prelates had lost all manly fortitude and zeal for the Word of God in their craving for worldly honor, soft living, and wealth."[32] Although the Helfta nuns were

[25] *The Speculum devotorum*, or *Myrowre to Devout Peple* is a meditative prose life of Christ in Middle English. See *A Mirror to devout people (Speculum devotorum)*, ed. Paul J. Patterson, EETS OS 346 (Oxford, 2016), p. 6.

[26] On this, see Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "The *Liber specialis gratiae* in a Devotional Anthology: London, British Library, MS Harley 494," in *Late Medieval Devotional Compilations in England*, ed. Marleen Cré, Diana Denissen and Denis Renevey (Turnhout, 2020), pp. 341-60. Besides *The Myroure, Speculum devotorum* and MS Harley 494, other works and manuscripts with Syon or Carthusian connections include: London, British Library, MS Harley 4012, a devotional compilation owned by Anne Wingfield (d.1500) of East Anglia; London, British Library, MS Lansdowne 379, a compilation of prayers and other religious texts dating from the fifteenth century and associated with Mountgrace monastery, where a manuscript of Margery Kempe's book eventually ended up; Downside Abbey MS 26542 (c. 1430), a compilation of Dartford Priory ownership; and Durham, University Library, MS Cosin V.III.16, a Syon Abbey manuscript containing extracts from both Birgitta's and Mechthild's writing. For an overview of these traces, along with those of other Continental women writers, see Alexandra Barratt, "Continental Women Mystics and English Readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge, UK, 2003), pp. 240-55.

[27] On the development and progress of Lollardy in Britain, see *A Companion to Lollardy*, ed. J. Patrick Hornbeck II, with Mishtooni Bose and Fiona Somerset (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2016). See also Robert Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England* (Woodbridge, 2006); Richard Rex, *The Lollards* (London and New York, 2002); *Lollardy and the Gentry in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Margaret Aston and Colin Richmond (London and New York, 1997).

[28] Vincent Gillespie, "1412-1534: Culture and History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge, UK, 2011), pp. 163-93 (p. 174).

[29] For a series of important discussions of this period's turbulent socio-religious politics, see *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (Turnhout, 2011).

[30] The translator of the *Liber* refers to his readers as "Deuoute systren and brethren" in the prologue, suggesting that the *Liber* was translated for a mixed audience.

[31] For a detailed study of the movement for Church reform within the twelfth century, see Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, UK, 1996).

[32] Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), pp. 239-40. See also Finnegan, *The Women of Helfta*, pp. 121-22.

active more than a century after Hildegard,[33] they too are considered to have been working partly within a reformist agenda. Indeed, in a proem to her book, Mechthild and the Helfta scribes pray that all those who will read the work, or hear it read, will worship the Lord for what he had revealed to Mechthild, and that, through his mercy, he will "renewe thys olde world and … reule and reforme men and women olde growyn in sleuth of all goodnesses with such devoute sterynges and holy and verteouse ensamples."[34]

In fifteenth-century England, there may well have emerged an urgent need to look back to these women as pioneering voices within the call for spiritual reform, giving rise, therefore, to a new imperative for the translating of Mechthild's revelations into the vernacular. The fifteenth century, too, bore witness to what Sarah McNamer has referred to as the "gendered logic [of] . . . iterative affective performance" which, for this commentator, was linked to "practices of maternal and feminized sexual holding." In turn, such observations (that are certainly pertinent to the writing of both Mechthild and Margery Kempe) culminate in the assertion that "to feel compassion is to feel like a woman."[35] Within such a climate, the deeply compassionate writing that constitutes the *Liber* seems to have taken on a new urgency and communicative charge as the type of affective devotional practices that proved so important to Margery Kempe came in from the margins to enter the mainstream. In combining orthodox teaching with contemplative aspiration and mediatory prayers for the suffering souls in purgatory, the *Boke* was clearly received as one of the approved texts of vernacular, mystical material by those in orders and the laity alike, to enforce the spirit of reform and ensure a new religious beginning after the trouble with Wycliffe and his followers at the end of the previous century.[36] As such, it is just the type of book that Margery, her priestly friend and his mother would have been reading together at this juncture in the early fifteenth century.

Despite geographical and temporal distance, then, we argue that Margery Kempe was very likely to have had access to Mechthild's *Liber* in Latin or in translation. Again in a prefatory note to *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Allen asserts that the books of revelations by Birgitta, Catherine and Mechthild had all been translated into English before Margery Kempe finally succeeded in getting her own revelations recorded (1436-38).[37] She also offers the examples of the readership of the "Mauldebuke," which was owned by Eleanor Ros of York as early as 1438,[38] and points out that the MS Egerton 2006 version of the *Boke* belonged to "R. Gloucester and Anne Warwick," that is to say the king Richard III and his wife Anne, in the latter part of the fifteenth century. Indeed, the names of both appear on the folio facing the beginning of the text. It is also of interest to us here that both of these royal persons were direct descendants of the Lady Westmorland (d. 1440) mentioned in Book 1, chapter 54 of Margery Kempe's *Book*: that is to say Joan Beaufort, legitimated daughter of John of Gaunt and Catherine Swynford, and named as both a close acquaintance and a fan of Margery Kempe in her book – at least according to Margery's perspective ("My Lady hir owyn persone was wel plesyd wyth þe [Margery] & lykyd wel thy wordys").[39] Indeed, one of Lady Westmorland's daughters, Cecily, duchess of York (d. 1495), is also known to have owned a copy of Mechthild's *Boke*, which formed part of her daily reading. And Cecily, of course, was the sister of the same Lady Greystoke whom Margery knew well and for whose decision to leave her husband

[33] Newman argues that "there is no sign that the women of Helfta knew Hildegard, whose difficult books had ceased to be read or copied by their day": see *Book of Special Grace*, "Introduction", p. 11; Albert Derolez, "The Manuscript Transmission of Hildegard of Bingen's Writings: The State of the Problem," in *Hildegard of Bingen: The Context of her Thought and Art*, ed. Charles Burnett and Peter Dronke (London, 1998), pp. 17-28.

[34] *Boke*, I. 2nd prologue, fol. 14r.

[35] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, PA, 2010), p. 7 and p. 19.

[36] Vincent Gillespie, "Chichele's Church: Vernacular Theology in England after Thomas Arundel," in *After Arundel*, ed. Gillespie and Ghosh, pp. 3-42, especially pp. 4-5.

[37] Allen, writing in Kempe, *Book*, I: lxvi.

[38] *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York*, ed. James Raine, vol. 2 (1855), pp. 65-66.

[39] The words here are those of the Archbishop of York to Margery during one of his interrogations of her: Kempe, *Book*, 1.54: 133.

Margery was blamed in 1417.[40] That Margery would not have been aware of Mechthild's work, given this array of interlinking contexts for its ownership and dissemination, seems highly unlikely, therefore.

Intervention of the Carmelites

Other possible routes for Margery Kempe's familiarity with Mechthild's writings emerge within Carmelite contexts. The Carmelite order was one of the older monastic traditions, and one from which Syon sought help in its early history: as Vincent Gillespie points out, Carmelites were involved in developing Syon's own distinctive form of living as advisors.[41] Thomas Netter of Walden (c. 1372-1430), Prior Provincial of the English Carmelites from 1414, was a confessor to Henry V and so must have had a close connection with Syon Abbey, founded by the king in 1415. Moreover, Netter was one of the most prominent figures in anti-Lollard campaigns and international ecclesiastical politics in the early fifteenth century,[42] and was present at Council of Constance as a royal observer or in some other capacity mandated by Henry V.[43] However, Netter was also deeply suspicious of women's revelations and exercised particular concern about *discretio spirituum* and *probatio*, suggesting a vested interest in the ways in which they were copied and disseminated.

As Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa has pointed out elsewhere, we know of Margery's association with the Carmelites from the many references to the friars peppered throughout the *Book*.[44] Among others, Alan of Lynn, native of Lynn, Carmelite anchorite and doctor of divinity, remained a highly-valued spiritual adviser to Margery throughout much of her adult life,[45] having enormous influence on her spiritual education through the intensely intellectual Carmelite network within which he operated. Indeed, a school in the Carmelite Friary in Lynn was almost certainly instrumental in disseminating the latest theological ideas and trends, then shared and discussed by the friars and their associates.[46] Additionally, the cartulary of the Carmelites, which includes various arrangements for corrodies, suggests that the interchange of personnel between England and the continent was very frequent.[47] Such mobility of the well-educated friars strengthened the Carmelites' academic network and enabled them to maintain the high standard of intellectual pursuit for which they were renowned. We know that Alan was keen on cataloguing works of mysticism and accommodating the demands of the laity seeking access to the Bible.[48] He is also recorded as

[40] Kempe, *Book*, I. 54: 133. According to her household ordinance, dating from 1485-95, Cecily's daily devotional reading included the revelations of St Birgitta and Mechthild of Hackeborn and a life of St Catherine of Siena. See *A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household* (London, 1790), pp. 37-39; C. A. J. Armstrong, "The Piety of Cicely, Duchess of York: A Study in Late Mediaeval Culture," in *England, France and Burgundy in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1983), pp. 135-56 (pp. 140-42).

[41] Vincent Gillespie, "The Moles in the Vineyard," p. 137.

[42] Kevin J. Alban, *The Teaching and Impact of the Doctrinale of Thomas Netter of Walden (c. 1374-1430)* (Turnhout, 2010); *Thomas Netter of Walden: Carmelite, Diplomat and Theologian (c.1372-1430)*, ed. Johan Bergström-Allen and Richard Copsey (Faversham, 2009).

[43] Richard Copsey, "Thomas Netter of Walden: a biography," in *Thomas Netter of Walden*, ed. Bergström-Allen and Copsey, pp. 23-111 (pp. 56-58).

[44] Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Carmelite Spirituality and the Laity in Late Medieval England," in *Anchoritism in the Middle Ages*, ed. Catherine Innes-Parker and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Cardiff, 2014), pp. 151-62; 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, UK, 1992), pp. 1-16, especially pp. 13-14 for Alan of Lynn.

[45] Hope Emily Allen identifies Alan as one of Margery's principal confessors. See Kempe, *Book*, I: 259, n. 6/9. In her recent essay, Susan Maddock identifies his probable surname as Warnekyn and speculates that he was much younger than previously thought, having been confused with a considerably older Alan by generations of scholars. For this reason, we leave his birth date (c. third quarter of the 14th century) undetermined. See "Margery Kempe's Home Town and Worthy Kin," in *Encountering The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Laura Varnam and Laura Kalas (Manchester, forthcoming 2021).

[46] Kukita Yoshikawa, "Carmelite Spirituality," p. 152.

[47] A. G. Little and E. Stone, "Corrodies at the Carmelite Friary of Lynn," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 9 (1958): pp. 8-29 (pp. 9, 15-17).

[48] See *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500*, ed. A. B. Emden (Cambridge, UK, 1963), pp. 381-82 for the list of his works credited by John Bale.

having made indexes of the revelations and prophecies of St Birgitta of Sweden and of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Stimulus Amoris*, both known to Margery, as mentioned earlier.[49] Moreover, he was even interested in radical revelatory theology, such as the Franciscan apocalypticism of Henry of Costesy, and he compiled a detailed index of Costesy's Apocalypse commentary.[50] It was, no doubt, Alan's active involvement in the dissemination of vernacular theology that inclined Netter to censor the friendship between Alan and Margery, to Margery's great distress, as documented in Chapter 69 of her *Book*, when she tells us: "þe worthy doctwr was chargyd be obediens þat he xulde not spekyn ne comownyn wyth hir."[51] Such proscription, however, was short lived and, to her great relief, Margery continued to interact regularly with both the reading priest and Alan of Lynn. There were any number of opportunities for her to have become familiar with Mechthild's writings in one or both these ways. Indeed, considering the Carmelites' academic network and close links with the Birgittines of Syon from the Order's early years; and, given Alan's grandfather hailed originally from a German-speaking territory, we can speculate with some confidence that Alan may well have had a specific interest in Mechthild's *Liber* which, like Birgitta's revelations, was circulated out of Syon and would surely have been consulted by him, if the opportunity had arisen.[52]

Margery's Continental Pilgrimage

There remains one more distinct possibility: that Margery's familiarity with Mechthild's writings could have been influenced – or consolidated – by her son and daughter-in-law, residents of one of Lynn's primary trading outposts in Danzig – present-day Gdansk – now a Polish city but part of the northern German territories during the later Middle Ages.[53] In Book 2 of her text, Margery recounts a visit made to Lynn in 1431 by her son, John, who was at that time living in Danzig with his unnamed German wife, whom he brought back to England with him apparently on her own behest: "sche wolde leeuyn hir fadyr & hir modyr & hir owyn cuntre for to comyn into Ingolonde & seen hys modyr."[54] With this journey and his subsequent residency in Margery's home having been recently historically verified by Sebastian Sobecki, even more grist has been added to the mill pointing towards this son as Margery's first scribe.[55] Indeed, given that the text also records how pious conversion, followed by marriage to a local woman in Danzig, had saved the son from a dangerously dissolute life-style, it is very likely that he – and, perhaps more importantly, his wife – brought back with them to Lynn knowledge of the renowned holy women of northern Germany, amongst whom Mechthild of Hackeborn was a dominant figure.

In a recent unpublished conference paper, Santha Bhattarcharji has turned the spotlight for the first time firmly onto Margery's much overlooked daughter-in-law, who, following the sudden deaths of Margery's son and husband during their stay in Lynn, stayed on as a young widow to spend more than a year and a half with Margery between the end of 1431 and April 1433.[56] As Bhattarcharji suggests, there is absolutely no reason to discount the likelihood that the daughter-in-law also played a role in scripting Margery's book. For one thing, it would completely explain the

[49] Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Margery Kempe and Felip Ribot's *Liber de institutione primorum monachorum*," in *Celebrating St. Albert and His Rule: Rules, Devotion, Orthodoxy and Dissent*, ed. Michelle M. Sauer and Kevin J. Alban (Rome, 2017), pp. 133-49.

[50] The existence of an index for the Apocalypse commentary shows the relative freedom and tolerance of the Carmelite intellectual pursuit: Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), pp. 102-03.

[51] Kempe, *Book*, 1.69: 168.

[52] Alan's grandfather, Stephen Warnekyn, moved to Lynn from a German-speaking part of the Continent in the second half of the fourteenth century. He is thus very likely to have communicated in German at home and Alan's father, Alan Warnekyn senior, may also have had some German. We speculate that there is a good possibility that Alan of Lynn was brought up in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural (English-German) milieu and this facilitated his role as a conduit for transmitting Mechthild's *Liber/Boke* to Margery. For Alan's family, see Maddock's essay as before.

[53] For a more detailed analysis of Margery's trip to Danzig, see McAvoy, "'O der lady'," pp. 71-78.

[54] Kempe, *Book*, 2.2: 223-25 (here at p. 224).

[55] Sobecki, "'The writyng of this tretys'."

[56] Kempe, *Book*, 2.2: 225.

hybrid German-English script and linguistic expression that the second scribe found so difficult to decipher, it being "neiþer good Englysch ne Dewch."[57] It would also provide a more feasible time-frame for the *Book*'s first writing: given the son's business affairs and his having become mortally ill so quickly after his arrival at Lynn, there was very little time left at his disposal to write down an entire book in the space of the month between arrival and death. The daughter-in-law, on the other hand, had plenty of time to get the first version of the book written down during her time with her mother-in-law in Lynn, as Bhattarcharj emphasises. Even if she were not party to the *Book*'s first inscription, the daughter-in law would have had ample time to recount tales of those holy women who had been prominent in and around Danzig in order to stir Margery's imagination and help her recast her visionary experiences within new and exciting narrative frameworks. As the *Book* announces elsewhere, Margery was happy to talk at great length "alwey of þe lofe & goodnes of owyr Lord as wel at þe tabyl as in oþer place."[58] There is no reason to consider things had changed in this respect during the time that she spent with her daughter-in-law, both in England and then in Danzig where Margery stayed after accompanying her newly bereaved daughter-in-law on her journey home.

As McAvoy has previously argued in a similar context, as a resident of Danzig, Margery's daughter-in-law would certainly have been familiar with Dorothy von Montau (d. 1394), who was born in the town and enjoyed elevated status as respected holy woman.[59] It may even be that Margery's seemingly impulsive decision to accompany her daughter-in-law back to Danzig in 1433, where the latter had left her own child in the care of others, was impelled in part by a wish to visit in person the region within which the type of female spirituality she had been espousing for most of her adult life had also long been thriving. We must remember that she, too, was suffering from the same bereavement as her daughter-in-law and, as far as we know, had never met her infant granddaughter. These are reasons enough to want to undertake such a long and dangerous journey. But her husband's death also freed her from the close bodily care and emotional labour she had been expending on him during his years of incapacity, at which time she had had to offer up to God both her frustrations and her labours. As God had assured her: "I wil þat þu be fre to helpyn hym at hys nede in my name."[60] John Kempe's death, therefore, provided another perfectly valid reason for Margery's desire to visit the heartland of the type of female-coded spiritual practices she had long espoused – and, no doubt, had further gleaned from conversational interaction and reading.

Besides being the birth-place of Dorothy of Montau, Danzig also supported one of the first Birgittine foundations and had even provided a stop-off point for Birgitta's daughter, Katharina, as she carried her mother's remains back to Sweden.[61] With Mechthild having had a clear influence on aspects of Birgitta's writings – the soul as a room to be swept clean by its "housekeeper" is probably the best-known example[62] – and with the Danzig foundation still offering indulgences at the time of Margery's three-month stay there, there were doubtless multiple reasons for Margery's visit

[57] Kempe, *Book*, 1. Proem: 4.

[58] Kempe, *Book*, 1.26: 61.

[59] McAvoy, "'O der lady'." This is a connection again first posited by Hope Emily Allen in *Book*, p. lix. See also Clarissa M. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The* Book *and the World of Margery Kempe* (New York, 1983), especially pp. 179-81; and David Wallace, *Strong Women: Life, Text and Territory 1347-1645* (Oxford, 2012), pp.1-60.

[60] Kempe, *Book*, 1.76: 180.

[61] Thomas Andrew Dubois, *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2008), p. 296.

[62] When Mechthild deplores the absence of a confessor when she desires to confess, Christ authorises her inner confession by telling her: "It is now of þy synnes as whan a myȝty kyng shall com into an ynne or into a grete place. Anon þe house ys made clene þat noþing may be sene ther þat shuld desplece hys syȝt. But whan it fallith þat þe lord be so nye þat þe fylth may not be caste oute or þe lorde com, anon þei geddyr it and ley it in an herne þat it mow be caste oute afterwarde" (II.16, fol. 60r). In her *Liber Celestis*, Birgitta writes: "For he þat will resaiue a worþi lorde to his herber, he awe noȝt alloneli to arai himselfe, bot also all þat langes to household. And so did he noȝt. For all ife he ordainde his house, ȝit he swepid it noȝt besili with reuerens, ne he strewed it noȝt with floures of vertuse." See *Liber Celestis*, II.ii: 118.

beyond the encouragement she documents as having been received from Christ.[63] Moreover, as we have just suggested, all of these reasons seem to be female-focused: on a maternal sense of duty to a sometimes reluctant daughter-in-law; on a wish to see her unseen German granddaughter in the face of her own loss of an adult child; and on a desire to visit a locale within which pockets of female spirituality continued to be subject to cult status. Indeed, it seems likely that the determination shown by Margery to get her book written in its entirety once and for all when she returned to Lynn was also spurred on by her protracted stay in this region and her journey home.

Upon leaving Danzig after what is documented as a successful stay of five to six weeks, and where she felt she had been received with "ryth good cher of meche pepil for owr Lordys lofe,"[64] Kempe sailed first to Straslund,[65] from where she began her trek overland, heading south to Wilsnack and then on to Aachen, to visit both towns' famous relics.[66] Her most likely route would have been south, taking her through new Helfta itself and nearby Magdeburg. Indeed, it was close to Magdeburg that Margery was abandoned by her travelling companions as a result of her excessive weeping, forcing her to continue south-west towards Aachen alone. On the way, however, she would have had to pass through the important spiritual centre of Erfurt, before eventually joining a convoy of pilgrims journeying back to England.[67] It is in Erfurt that the most authoritative version of the complete Latin version of Mechthild's *Liber* was copied in 1370 by a priest named Albertus, vicar of the church of St Paul in the town; moreover, this manuscript (Wolfenbüttel HAB codex 1003 Helmst), claims to have been closely copied from the original Helfta autograph produced in the last decade or so of the thirteenth century and completed very soon after Mechthild's death in 1298. Indeed, Ernst Hellgardt attributes both the preservation and dissemination of the *Liber* to the Benedictine and Carthusian communities in the town,[68] with this particular manuscript having been preserved in the Charterhouse of St Salvatorberg in Erfurt.[69] Similarly, in an essay documenting the strong Carthusian predilection for such female-authored mystical writings, Dennis Martin identifies Erfurt as a pivot for interest in, and dissemination of the writings of all three Helfta women visionaries: there are, for example, two entries for Mechthild's writing under the terms *exempla* and *revelationes* in the late fifteenth-century Erfurt charterhouse library catalogue of manuscripts.[70] Additionally, the former Erfurt, MS J 2 Halle (now Universitätsbibliotek Y c8o 6), begins with the words *Collectorium ex libris devotarum feminarum* [a collection from the books of devoted women] and includes works by Birgitta, Mechthild, a "certain holy Margareta," Catherine of Siena, Gertrude of Helfta and Hildegard of Bingen, all attested spiritual "heavyweights" and authoritative authors of important female-coded and female-scripted mystical and devotional

[63] "Þe forseyd creatur. . . was comawndyd in hir hert for to gon ouyr þe see wyth hir dowtyr. Sche wolde a putt it owt of hir mende, & euyr it cam ageyn so fast þat sche myth not rest ne qwiet han in hir mende but euyr was labowryd & comawndyd to gon ouyr þe see." Kempe, *Book*, 2.2: 226.

[64] Kempe, *Book*, 2.4: 231. Margery also claims that this warm reception by the people incentivised her to stay longer, in spite of ill-treatment by her daughter-in-law. Christ, however, intervenes to urge her to return home.

[65] Kempe, *Book*, 2.4: 233.

[66] Kempe, *Book*, 2.5-6: 234-35. For an fuller account of this journey, see McAvoy, "'O der lady'."

[67] This, as the most likely route, is testified to by a surviving account of the same journey by Philip, last Count of Katzenellenbogen in 1434, a year after Kempe's own journey. Taking thirteen to fourteen days, the itinerary takes him to Magdeburg, Halle, Erfurt and Cologne, among other places, on his way to Aachen. Kempe, *Book*: 346-47, n. 237/34-37.

[68] See Balázs J. Nemes, "Text Production and Authorship: Gertrude of Helfta's *Legatus Divinae Pietatis*," in *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2014), pp. 103-30 (p. 103). The earliest vernacular translation, dating from the first quarter of the fifteenth century at the very latest, was an important Dutch translation, from which, as Richard Bromberg has argued, all other vernacular translations ensued, including German, Swedish, Italian and English. See Ernst Hellgardt, "Latin and the Vernacular: Mechtild of Magdeburg – Mechtild of Hackeborn – Gertrude of Helfta," in *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany*, ed. Andersen, Lahnemann and Simon, pp. 131-35 (pp. 137-28). This Dutch translation, *Het boek der bijzondere genade van Mechthild van Hackeborn*, has been edited by R. L. J. Bromberg (Zwolle, 1965).

[69] Hellgardt, "Latin and the Vernacular", pp. 133-34.

[70] Dennis D. Martin, "Carthusians as Advocates of Women Visionary Reformers," in *Studies in Carthusian Monasticism in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Julian M. Luxford (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 127-53.

writings.[71] Mechthild, then, was patently a particular favourite within wider, European Carthusian circles in the fifteenth century, and, as mentioned earlier, the English charterhouses of London and Witham both possessed codices containing her writing during the same period. As Voaden notes, too, Mechthild's work tended to "travel in convoy" with that of Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena through Carthusian and Birgittine networks.[72] Indeed, according to the evidence of wills, within English contexts the writing of Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and Henry Suso also formed part of this "convoy". Folio 10 of Suso's *Horologium sapientiae* in Lambeth Palace MS 436, for instance, bears a marginal note pointing the reader explicitly to the links between Suso's writing and Mechthild's extended commentary on the *Paternoster* in *Liber* Book IV,[73] and it is this extended commentary, along with Mechthild's other prayers, which was also clearly familiar to Boccaccio when he wrote his *Decameron* in 1353.[74] In turn, this suggests much wider lay familiarity than has been considered and, as Voaden has suggested, evidences the extent of Mechthild's fame and influence within those literary cultures with which we know Margery had regular contact, both at home and abroad.[75]

Margery's overseas travels, then, offered her direct contact with communities where the spirituality of women had long been nurtured. With ample time for talking of spiritual things, including the exploits of local holy women such as Mechthild, we argue that this had a direct and immediate impact upon Kempe's self-perception as belonging to a privileged, female-focused spiritual community extending far beyond her home town of Lynn. Indeed, the rapidity with which she visited the Birgittine house of Syon Abbey upon her return to England from her travels in northern Europe would testify to this, as does her recording of how a young man at the Abbey addressed her by the title "Modir" – a commonly used title for a seasoned holy woman.[76] At Syon, too, Margery learns from a hermit, who had initially led her and her daughter-in-law out of Lynn,[77] of the deep disapproval of her confessor, Richard Spryngolde, about her disappearing to Danzig without his permission, so she was also clearly in no hurry to get back to Lynn without further validation of the reasons for her journey.[78] We suggest, then, that an important impetus for this Syon visit on Lammas Day was to share with like-minded fellow pilgrims the knowledge she had gleaned about the spirituality and writings of continental holy women like Mechthild which she had consolidated whilst abroad. Indeed, within three years or so, Margery had not only secured a new amanuensis to transcribe her son's and/or daughter-in-law's poorly executed first draft, but had also recorded the events of this important German adventure as a second book appended to the first. Also incorporated into the manuscript at this point were Kempe's own prayers, which, as Allen has pointed out, bear more than a trace of German holy women's influence. These prayers were most likely composed many years before the *Book*, but a precedent for their incorporation had

[71] Martin, "Carthusians," p. 135. The "certain holy Margareta' may well be a reference to Margaret of Magdeburg, also known as "Lame Margaret" (d. c. 1250), who was a respected anchoress in the town during the thirteenth century. Her *vita*, written by a Dominican named John, is unusual in that it was written during her lifetime and apparently presented to her for her own approval. For a careful appraisal of Margaret and the sources that reconstruct her life, see Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, PA, 2005), pp. 148-173. Mulder-Bakker claims that Margaret's *vita* took on canonical status, and its influence extended as far as "Utrecht, Ghent, and even the entire lowland area between the Seine and the Elbe (p. 173)."

[72] Voaden, "Company," p. 66. For more detailed information on extant manuscripts, see Halligan, *Booke*, 'Introduction', pp. 8-10.

[73] *divina matildi parta quinta c. 10*. Voaden, "Company," pp. 66-67.

[74] On the seventh day of the story-telling forming the frame-narrative of Boccaccio's text, one Gianni Lotteringhi is depicted as having learnt to recite Mechthild's "Hymn" alongside the *Paternoster* in the vernacular as a sure means of protecting "the salvation of his soul": Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Guido Waldman and ed. Jonathan Usher (Oxford, 1993), VII.1, p. 419.

[75] Voaden, "Company," pp. 65-66.

[76] Kempe, *Book*, 2.10: 245-46.

[77] Kempe, *Book*, 2.2: 226 and 2.10: 246.

[78] In fact, her confessor had forbidden her to go ("ȝe may not gon") because of her old age and because she had recently suffered a foot injury from which she had not yet recovered: Kempe, *Book*, 2.2: 226.

already been established by Margery's likely intertexts – that is to say, those texts which directly or indirectly influenced her writing – or, in Hope Emily Allen's words: "the flotsam and jetsam of popular devotion in manuscripts of English origin."[79] The extant copy of the whole work was ultimately produced by the scribe Salthows in the Benedictine priory of Norwich and later read and preserved by the Carthusians of Mountgrace after Kempe's death.[80]

Mechthild and Margery: The Internal Evidence

As mentioned earlier, Margery Kempe, not only read – or had read to her – Birgitta's revelations but is very likely to have had access to Mechthild's text in one or more of the ways documented, access which, we wish to argue in the final part of this article, had significant influence upon a number of episodes in the *Book*.[82] Such a possibility has previously been entertained by Allen, who points out that Margery's vision of a celestial dance with the Lord, his mother and holy virgins in Chapter 22 is based on a remarkably similar visionary episode within Mechthild's book, when, on the feast of All Saints, Mechthild sees "a wounderfull goyng and ledyng aboute in maner of a karoll".[82] Choreographically, a medieval "karolinge" was circular and the dancers' revolving movements thus evoked for Mechthild – and clearly for Margery too – the perfect and harmonious circle of beatitude in heaven, as well as the holy woman's role as *sponsa Christi* dancing with her Bridegroom at the celestial marriage feast.[83] However, we suggest the direct correlations go far beyond this. As Kukita Yoshikawa has argued previously,[84] elsewhere in her text Margery draws upon the same type of musical hermeneutics that proliferate everywhere in Mechthild's writing, no doubt a result of the latter's experiences as longstanding chantress within the Helfta community. For Mechthild, heaven is not only inseparable from the musical harmony enjoyed by the choir at Helfta, but God, himself, *is* divine music. On one occasion, for instance, divine love is envisioned as a "full feyr mayd synggyng;"[85] and on another, Mechthild's own singing in church brings about both mystical encounter and union with God, so that the breath they take in their singing is drawn from the same divine source.[86] In Margery's case, too, we can recall how her first spiritual awakening takes the form of "a sownde of melodye so swet & delectable, hir þowt, as sche had ben in Paradyse."[87] She also relates how, for many years during the Palm Sunday procession "sche herd gret sowndys & gret melodijs wyth hir bodiy erys & þan sche þowt it was ful mery in Heuyn."[88]

Mechthildian spirituality in the discourse of Holy Communion

But there are even more compelling resonances than this between the two books. Other of Margery's meditative, revelatory experiences also correlate with those of Mechthild, particularly the account in Chapter 86 where Margery documents perhaps her most comprehensive statement of a matured understanding of Holy Communion, the Trinity and mystical union.[89] Here she recounts Christ's final monologue centred on Holy Communion, and points to what ultimately lies beyond it — that is, union with the divine. In this monologue Christ first commends Margery for receiving the

[79] Allen in Kempe, *Book*: lix.
[80] On this, see Bale, "Richard Salthouse."
[81] See Allen in Kempe, Book: lxvii. Halligan also suggest a possible influence of Mechthild on Margery Kempe: see Halligan, *Booke*, "Introduction," p. 59.
[82] *Boke*, I. 68, fol. 48r. See Kempe, *Book*, p. 283, n. 52/27.
[83] *Book*, ed. Newman, "Introduction," p. 20.
[84] Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Heavenly Vision and Psychosomatic Healing: Medical Discourse in Mechtild of Hackeborn's *the Booke of Gostlye Grace," in Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge, UK, 2015), pp. 67-84.
[85] *Boke*, II. 35, fol. 66v.
[86] *Boke*, III. 6, fol. 72v.
[87] Kempe, *Book*, 1.15: 11.
[88] Kempe, *Book*, 1.3: 185.
[89] Kempe, *Book*, 1.86: 209-14. But also see, for example, Christ's profession to Margery, based on John 14.20 ("I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you"): "I am in þe, and þow in me" (Kempe, *Book*, 1.10: 23) and *Boke*, 1.4: "thou art in me and y in the, and y shall never forsake the" (fol. 16r).

Eucharist with a company of saints in her soul:

> I knowe þe holy thowtys & þe good desyrys þat þu hast whan þu receyuyst me & þe good charite þat þu hast to me in þe tyme *þat þu receyuyst my precyows body in-to þi sowle*, and also how þu clepist Mary Mawdelyn in-to þi sowle to wolcomyn me . . . & *sumtyme, dowtyr, þu thynkyst þi sowle so large &' so wyde þat þu clepist al þe cowrt of Heuyn into þi sowle for to wolcomyn me*. I wot ryth wel, dowtyr, what þu seist, "Comyth alle xij apostelys þat wer so wel belouyd of God in erde & receyuyth 3owr Lord in my sowle." Also þu preyist Kateryn, Margarete, & alle holy virginys to wolcomyn me in þi sowle.[90]

Although Margery's vocabulary is homely and, perhaps, a naïve and partial echoing of the Sarum Missal here,[91] nevertheless she succeeds in having Christ emphasise the belief that saints are reliable intercessors and mediators in whose merits she should trust in order to attain the bliss in heaven and who should be invited into the expansive soul to receive the body of Christ at the Eucharist.

In a comparable vision, Mechthild also attributes a similar vocabulary of spaciousness and invitation to Christ in his instructions as to how *she* should prepare herself for Holy Communion. In this episode, Mechthild is led into an enormous house where Christ is having his last supper with the disciples, telling her:

> þis house betokenyth þe brede and þe widenes of my largenesse which may nou3t be mesured, which house frely and gladlye receyve all þat comen þerto. Therfor he þat wille be commownyd muste comme to þe goodnes of my largyte and þat largynes shall receyve hym as a benigne moder and defend hym from all evylles.[92]

Again, Kukita Yoshikawa has argued that the wide, large space – a house – signifies God's benevolence and generosity, and is thus emblematically figured as a maternal space;[93] this is one of many expansive allegories of enclosed, encompassing space that are interspersed throughout Mechthild's *Boke*. By far the most frequent of these, however, brings them all together in a single, fluid and multivalent hermeneutic, that is to say, Christ's Sacred Heart, a key image in the writings of all three Helfta visionaries. For Mechthild, the heart is predominantly a space of mutual indwelling that transforms in a variety of ways – sometimes into a house, a dining room, a bridal chamber, an enclosed garden, or a silver medicine chest – but all serving to nurture Mechthild's developing mystical relationship with Christ. The house in this particular vision, then, is just as much emblematic of Christ's heart as it is God's womb and echoes any number of spaces in the *Boke* where Christ can enter, rest, and eat a fortifying meal. Indeed, this was this same image that inspired the Benedictine nuns of St Walburga to produce a drawing, called "the Eucharistic Banquet," in which Christ and the nuns share an allegorical meal within the chamber of the heart.[94] Mechthild's

[90] Kempe, *Book*, 1.86: 210 (our emphasis).

[91] Christ's words here seem to draw on 'Canon of the Mass' in the Missal: "In communion with and reverencing the memory, in the first place, of the glorious and ever virgin Mary . . . As also of thy blessed apostles and martyrs—Peter, Paul . . . and of all thy saints; through whose merits and prayers do thou grant that in all things we may be defended by the aid of thy protection." See *The Sarum Missal in English*, Part I & II, trans. Frederick E. Warren (London, 1911), I, pp. 43-44. And "To us, also, thy sinful servants, who hope in the multitude of thy mercies, vouchsafe to grant some part and fellowship with thy holy apostles and martyrs . . . with all thy saints, into whose company do thou admit us, we beseech thee, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences." (*Missal* I, p. 48). For Margery's liturgical meditation, see Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literatures, Liturgy and Iconography* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 111-19.

[92] *Boke*, III. 21, fol. 77r.

[93] Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Mechtild of Hackeborn as Spiritual Authority: The Middle English Translation of the *Liber Specialis Gratiae*," in *The Medieval Translator, Traduire au Moyen Âge*, ed. Pieter De Leemans and Michèle Goyens (Turnhout, 2017), pp. 175-83.

[94] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), pp. 137-41, figure 85, plate 12.

vision and this drawing convey that Christ enters the house of the heart at the moment when Mechthild receives Christ eucharistically. In the same way, Margery, in receiving the Communion, imagines her soul (that is to say, her heart) so large and wide to welcome in the Lord, in a moment of eucharistic union.[95]

There are also strong areas of comparison when it comes to the treatment of the Trinity in both texts when it, too, takes up residence in the devotee's heart upon the reception of the Eucharist in both Mechthild and Margery's books. For example, following the spiritual conversation on Communion just discussed, there follows perhaps one of the most memorable episodes in the *Book* when Margery envisions the Trinity sitting on three cushions in the chamber of her soul. In Christ's words:

> "[Þ]u haddist a cuschyn of gold, an-oþer of red veluet, þe thryd of white sylke in thy sowle. And þu thynkist þat my Fadyr sittyth on þe cuschyn of golde, for to hym is a-propyrd myght & power. And þu thynkist þat I þe Secunde Persone, þi loue & þi joy, sytte on þe red cuschyn of veluet, for on me is al þi thowte be-cawse I bowt þe so der . . . in þi sowle þat I am worthy to syttyn on a red cuschyn in rememorawns of þe red blood þat I schad for þe. Mor-ouyr þu þinkist þat þe Holy Gost sittyth on a white cuschyn, for þu thynkist þat he is ful of lofe & clennesse . . . for he is ȝeuar of alle holy thowtys & chastite."[96]

Here, the visionary meditation signals that the Holy Trinity resides, as if in state, within Margery's own soul, recapitulating the earlier reassurance of Christ in Chapter 77 that God is sitting in her heart.[97] Such a memorable vision of God sitting in the soul emerges also in Mechthild's *Boke*, again in Part V. Here, Mechthild is described as "a full restefull and a full deliciouse trone of God for her cler and clene soule." When she gives instructions to those who ask for advice, she is filled with God's grace "as if she had spoken of þe mowth of God, sittyng in her."[98]

Most significantly in this same context, both women also recount detailed first-person instructions from Christ about how they should worship the Trinity, both bearing overtones, too, of the Athanasian Creed, *Quicumque vult*. Continuing his final monologue, Christ instructs Margery thus:

> "[Þ]u thynkyst þu maist not worschepyn þe Fadyr but þu worschep þe Sone, ne þu may not worschep þe Sone but þu worschep þe Holy Gost . . . þu thynkyst þat eche of þe iij personys in Trinite hath þat oþer hath in her Godhed, & so þu beleuyst verily, dowtyr in thy sowle þat þer be iij dyuers personys & oo God in substawnce, & þat eche knowyth þat oþer knowyth, & ech may þat oþer may, & eche wil þat oþer wil. And, dowtyr, þis is a very feith & a ryght feyth, and þis feith hast þu only of my ȝyfte."[99]

It is through this teaching that Margery ultimately deepens her understanding of the Trinity, mirroring exactly the experiences of Mechthild where she, too, is subjected to a monologue by Christ on exactly the same theme:

> fyrst þou shalt worship and prayse þe myȝt of þe fader which ys allmyghty and with þe which myght he worchith in þe sone, and the holy goost after hys wyll, which myȝt no creatur may

[95] For a detailed analysis of the heart-soul metaphoric alliance in the Middle Ages, see Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago, 2000).

[96] Kempe, *Book* 1.86: 210-11.

[97] Kempe, *Book*, 1. 77: 184. The visual image echoes Julian of Norwich's vision of the Trinity: *Revelation of Love*, in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Turnhout, 2006), chap. 51, p. 81.

[98] *Boke*, V. 22, fol. 100r.

[99] Kempe, *Book*, 1.86: 211.

> fully comprehend in heven ne in erth. Also in þe same maner þou shalt worship þe wysdome of þe sonne which may nouȝt be enserchid be mannys wytte, which wysdome the sone fully comownyth with þe fader and þe holi gost after hys wyll. And þis wysdome may no creatur fully talke. Also after þat þou shalt worship þe benygnyte of þe holy gost, which benignyte þe holy goost plentevouslye comownyth with þe fader and þe sone after his wylle, which benignyte he partith nouȝt fully to no creatur.[100]

Christ's exposition on the Trinity subtly links itself with the sacrament of the Eucharist again, in both cases evoking the concluding doxology of the Canon of the Mass that celebrates the glory of God and envisions the grace of the Trinity uniting the human soul with God through the Eucharist: "Through + him, and with + him, and in + him, all honour and glory are unto thee, God the Father al + mighty, in the unity of the Holy + Ghost."[101] No reader familiar with both texts could miss the similarities between Mechthild's and Margery's discourses on the Trinity here. Indeed, such similarities – whether consciously or unconsciously – recast her meditational/visionary experience within the context of Mechthildian spirituality.

But, there are further compelling resonances, not the least in terms of the ways both women toy with the possibility of universal salvation for humankind in their interactions with God and establish themselves as direct mediators for the release of souls suffering in purgatory via their tears, prayers and intercessions. Chapter 28 of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, for example, recounts how, on her pilgrimage to Jerusalem that began in 1313, Margery undertakes a twenty-four-hour vigil in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and a tour along the *Via Dolorosa*, episodes which sharpen her perception of the living and ubiquitous presence of the Passion. During the procession Margery desires to identify herself with Christ so intensely that when she comes up on to Mount Calvary, she experiences her first crying fit and engages in "wrestyng hir body on euery syde, spredyng hir armys a-brode as ȝyf sche xulde a deyd".[102] This moment marks a turning-point in Margery's meditational experience, with all her preceding practice of Passion meditation seeming to culminate in it, and with these fits of crying and roaring lasting for many years afterwards.[103] Such experiences on this pilgrimage create an indelible memory which Margery is then able to channel into her later meditations, as deep recollection of the holy sites in Jerusalem triggers and accelerates her affective responses to the Passion. Indeed, such memories and reenactments are emblematically submerged in one meditation undertaken during the Good Friday liturgy, recorded in Chapter 57, the setting of which reanimates her first such response experienced in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre:

> þe mende of owr Ladijs sorwys whech sche suffryd whan sche behelde hys precyows body hangyng on þe Crosse & sithyn berijd be-for hir syght sodeynly ocupijd þe hert of þis creatur, drawyng hir mende al holy in-to þe Passyon of owr Lord Crist Ihesu, whom sche behelde wyth hir gostly eye in þe syght of hir sowle as verily as þei sche had seyn hys precyows body betyn,

[100] *Boke*, III. 3, fol. 70v.

[101] *Missal* I, p. 48. Noticeably, in Mechthild's vision which occurs during Mass, she says to Christ: "Y seke nouȝt þerof and I wyll noon oþer thing but þat þis day þou be praysyd and worshipped *of þysilf, and in thysilf, and be thysilf*, as holy and as perfytly as ever þou mayst be commendid, praysyd, and worshipped of all creatures in heven and in erth" (*Boke*, II. 2, fol. 58r, our emphasis). As Barbara Newman comments on this passage: "This Trinitarian formula echoes the final prayer of the Canon of the Mass" (Newman, *Book*, p. 262, n. 4).

[102] Kempe, *Book*, 1.28: 70.

[103] See Kempe, *Book*, 1.28: 68. Allen notes that an element of her beginning to "cry" on Calvary was the memory of the dying cry of the Saviour. See Kempe, *Book*, p. 290, n. 68/12 sq. See also *Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. Michael Sargent (New York, 1992), p. 180, lines 28-33. Such crying and bodily contortion as a response to the Passion forms part of both an *imitatio Christi* and *imitatio Mariae* shown by a number of other female mystics, not the least Marie d'Oignies, whose work, as we have seen, helped testify to the validity of Margery's own excessive weeping for the priest recording her experiences: see Kempe, *Book*, 1.62: 152-53. Such bodily reactions are also recorded in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991).

> scorgyd, & crucifyed wyth hir bodily eye, whech syght & gostly beheldyng wrowt be grace so feruently in hir mende, wowndyng hir wyth pite & compassyon þat sche sobbyd . . . spredyng hir armys a-brood, seyd wyth lowde voys, "I dey, I dey" . . . hir labowr was so greet. Þan wex sche al blew as it had ben leed & swet ful sor.[104]

Here, Margery's memory of her affective responses seems to replicate her subsequent devotion so intensely that she again spreads her arms and cries out uncontrollably, to the extent that, as she tells us, "wex sche al blew as it had ben leed."[105] Whilst scholarly discussions of these bodily responses are many and diverse, what has been entirely overlooked is how closely they follow similar episodes within Mechthild's devotional practices, as recounted in the hagiographical section of her text, again in Part V:

> Also whanne she sang in þe queer she ȝave so all her entent and besynes to God with all her myȝtes + 'as' if she hadde brenned all hoole in love, in so moch þat she wyst not what she did and shewyd somtyme full mervelouse countenaunce in her poort as in spredyng abrode her + hondes and somtyme she lifte hem up an hiȝe.[106]

Similarly, the text describes the sudden change of colour in Mecthhild's face brought about by her ecstasies, where "her face and her handes semyd of colour chaunged in maner of a sodeyne crabbe which chaungith þe colour whanne it is sode or bake" and where "she was allmoost lifles to syȝt."[107] Although the motif of figures throwing up their arms in despair was widely diffused in thirteenth century art,[108] Mechthild's treatment is not merely borrowed from these types of visual images. Rather, these highly affective responses to the Passion can be contextualised within the culture of holy tears and *imitatio Christi*. In Part 1, Chapter 32, for example, Christ says to Mechthild: "what man or woman heeldith oute teerys for devocion of my passyon, + y wyll receyve h 'e'm as thouȝ he had suffryd passion bodely for me,"[109] and he proceeds to list six ways of achieving the devotion of tears. In the same way, Mechthild's *Vita*, recorded at the end of Book V, recounts how she receives a gift of tears at the thought of Christ's passion: "A wounder affection she hadde in thinkyng, in hering, and in spekyng of Cristes passion in so moch þat full selde she myȝt speke þerof withouten teeris."[110]

There are very many examples in Margery's book, of course, of her similarly drawing upon the trope of holy women's redemptive tears to animate her awareness that they were a particularly efficacious intervention for the salvation of souls. For example:

> sche sobbyd, roryd, & cryed . . . And þe mor sche besijd hir to kepyn hir fro criyng, þe lowdar sche cryed, *for it was not in hir powyr to take it ne euyn* it but a God wolde send it.[111]

In Chapter 57, too, Margery's weeping is directed at begging mercy for the souls in purgatory, along with the souls of Jews, Saracens and all false heretics. This episode forms part of a series of charitable intercessory prayers to God that all people, whoever they are and whatever they have done, should be turned to the faith of Holy Church. Indeed, Margery is clearly hard-placed to believe that God would turn away any contrite soul because of its former sinfulness – and to that end she prays to become "a welle of teerys" to prompt compassion for the suffering and the damned.[112] The well of tears is also a recurrent image in Mechthild's work, associated this time

[104] Kempe, *Book*, 1.57: 139-40.
[105] Kempe, *Book*, 1.57: 140.
[106] *Boke*, V. 22, fol. 99v.
[107] *Boke*, V. 22, fol. 99v.
[108] Moshe Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York, 1976).
[109] *Boke*, I. 32, fol. 29v.
[110] *Boke*, V. 20, fol. 99v.
[111] Kempe, *Book*, 1.57: 140 (our emphasis). See also *Book*, 1.7: 19-20; and *Book*, 1.39: 94-96, for example.

with the purgative properties of Christ's wound and the water flowing from his sacred heart, where "all þo þat desyred gostelye regeneracion"[113] may be washed clean.

In chapters 59 and 64 and 65 of the *Booke* Margery returns concertedly to the theme of purgatory, first recording the pain she felt when she received visions of the damned, and then articulating her anger with God and her disbelief that he could ever allow anybody to be subject to such damnation. There follows protracted, and sometimes contentious, argumentation, with Christ eventually persuading Margery that he does not wish to impose divine vengeance upon anyone, reassuring her that "þer is no man dampnyd but he þat is wel worthy to be dampnyd & þu xalt holdyn þe wel plesyd wyth alle my werkys."[114] He also assures Margery of her own role as successful intercessor as a result of her weeping, prayer and concerted love for him, telling her: "þou wepist so euery day for mercy þat I must nedys grawnt it."[115] In the same way, Mechthild´s text also records visions of hell and purgatory and her own questioning of God about the damnation of sinners such as Samson, Solomon and Trajan, most protractedly in Book V. Here, God's response to her questioning on the salvation of sinners is equally gnomic as he explains to her his rather vague reasons. In the case of Samson, for example, he tells her: "y will þat it be unknowe of men what mercy hath do with þe soule of Salomon þat fleisly synnes mowe be þe more eschewyd of men."[116] Later we hear the full extent of how Mechthild's tearful and prayerful intercessions have released other souls from purgatory: "Whanne þis holy mayde had seid þis preyer with such entencion, she sey a grete multitude of soules ȝeld thankyng to God with a full grete gladnes for her delyveraunce."[117] Indeed, earlier in her book, these souls have been fully enumerated as Christ gives each sister, as a token of friendship, "a thousand soules which he shulde delyver from all boundys of synne for her prayers and sen hem to þe hye kyngdome of hevyn."[118] Such enumeration is echoed by Christ in Margery's own account, when he assures her: "many hundryd thowsand sowlys schal be sauyd be þi prayers."[119] Although, as Newman has shown, the efficacy of holy women's intercessory prayer for purgatorial relief of suffering souls was a common trope within their writings and *Vitae*,[120] nevertheless, the specific correlations between Mechthild's and Margery's recorded intercessions, all interspersed with direct speech, interrogation and conversation with Christ, are highly suggestive of more direct influence – sometimes even at the level of replicated image and vocabulary.

This suggestion is strengthened considerably when we consider where the chapters devoted to the purgatorial narratives are placed in Margery's book. While chapters 57, 59, and 64 concern themselves with Margery's intercessions via prayer, tears and affective bodily responses on behalf of souls suffering in purgatory, they are interspersed by chapters 58, 61, and 62 that concern themselves with the reading of named and unnamed devotional works, including the "swech oþer" texts mentioned above. What we are positing, therefore, is that there is a direct, albeit unstated, link between the "swech oþer" books enumerated in chapters 58, 61 and 62 and the Mechthildian elements that seem to have been appropriated into Margery's narrative in the intervening chapters: the one sets off use of the other, so to speak. For Anna Harrison, Mechthild's book, as a collaborative venture between an at first reluctant Mechthild and at least two other nuns at Helfta, reflects what she terms "a protracted tangle of talk" between the women about the sources that went into its production.[121] Such a "tangle of talk" – another version, perhaps, of Hope Emily Allen's "flotsam and jetsam" analogy – probably best reflects the way in which Margery's orally-received intertextual materials – including Mechthild's writing – were assimilated into her book. By far the greatest

[112] Kempe, *Book*, 1.57: 139-42.
[113] *Boke*, I. 51, fol. 39r.
[114] Kempe, *Book*, 1.64: 159.
[115] Kempe, *Book*, 1.64: 158.
[116] *Boke*, V. 8, fol. 94v.
[117] *Boke*, V. 10, fol. 95v.
[118] *Boke*, I. 69, fol. 49r.
[119] Kempe, *Book*, 1.7: 20.
[120] See Newman's essay, "On the Threshold of the Dead: Purgatory, Hell, and Religious Women," in *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia, PA, 1995), pp. 108-36.
[121] Anna Harrison, "'Oh! What Treasure is in This Book?' Writing, Reading, and Community at the Monastery of Helfta," *Viator* 35.1 (2008): 75-106 (p. 94).

amount of influence, moreover, appears to have been exerted by Part V of Mechthild's text – in fact, the very same part that, as McAvoy has argued at some length elsewhere, had a discernible influence upon the anonymous writer of the early fifteenth-century *A Revelation of Purgatory*.[122] This text also revolves around the visions of purgatory and successful intercessory intervention of an enclosed holy woman. Indeed, with Margery having been directly exposed to works like Mechthild's by her priest from 1413 to 1421, or by her daughter-in-law some years afterwards in her old age, and with *A Revelation of Purgatory* dating itself as written in 1422, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Book V of Mechthild's text was circulating independently – and perhaps even anonymously – from the rest of the work and that its special appeal to women like the Winchester visionary and Margery Kempe led to its absorption into aspects of their own writing without direct citation.[123] Here, Nicholas Royle's view on the subtle dynamics of intertextual appropriation is helpful for understanding the type of process we are arguing for here, within which the source materials can become "textual phantoms which do not necessarily have the solidity or objectivity of a quotation, an intertext or explicit, acknowledged presence and which, in fact, do not come to rest anywhere." As Royle pointedly adds: "Phantom texts are fleeting, continually moving on, leading us away," a concept that chimes perfectly with Hope Emily Allen's "flotsam and jetsam" and the "tangle of talk" that Anna Harrison sees as characterizing the productive environment of the Helfta writings.[124]

By way of conclusion, therefore, we would like to posit a complex entanglement of influence, with Mechthild's writing in its variety of forms – as textual phantom, lexical inspiration and discursive rumination – having left its mark upon Margery's spirituality and her writing. Indeed, given the evidence presented here, it not only speaks to the inconceivability of Mechthild's *Boke* having remained unknown to Margery and her contemporaries but also to the certainty of Mechthild as a central – albeit long overlooked – figure within the devotional canon of fifteenth-century England.

This essay was originally delivered as a joint keynote lecture at the conference, 'Margery Kempe Studies in the Twenty-First Century' (University College, Oxford), in April 2018. We would like to thank Dr Laura Varnam and Dr Laura Kalas for giving us the opportunity to undertake this fruitful collaboration. Thanks are also due to the Leverhulme Trust for financing a wider collaboration between the two authors in 2019-2020.

Swansea University
Swansea, Wales, United Kingdom
Shizuoka University
Shizuoka, Japan

[122] McAvoy, "'O der lady'."

[123] We contend also that the entire *Boke*, whose lengthy Part One contains primarily liturgical visions more relevant to the cloister than to lay consumption, would have been too voluminous to be circulated easily and speedily in the way that other material from the text seems to have been.

[124] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (London, 2003), p. 280.