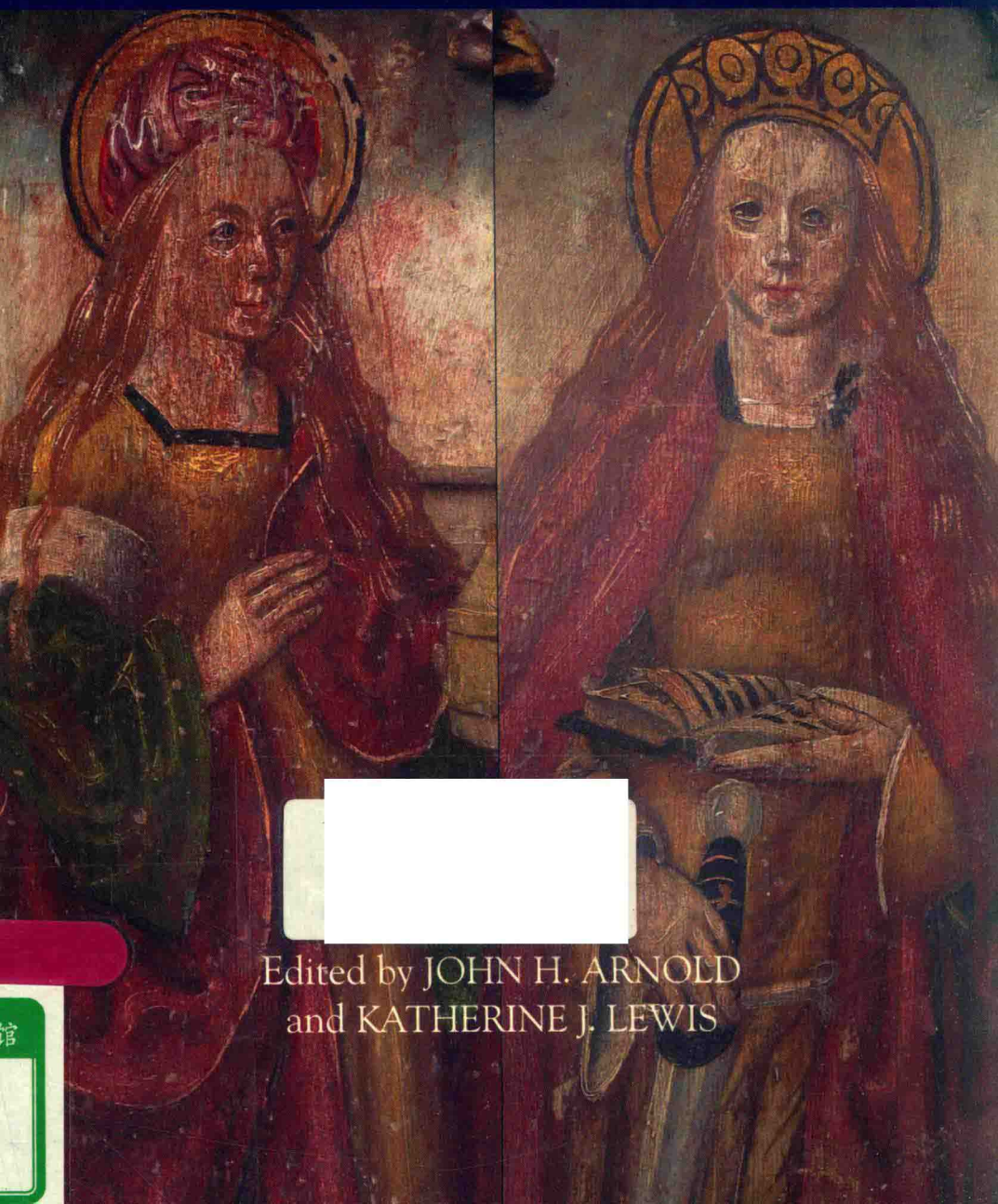
A Companion to THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE



Edited by JOHN H. ARNOLD
and KATHERINE J. LEWIS

A COMPANION TO *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

EDITED BY

John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis

D. S. BREWER

First published 2004
D. S. Brewer, Cambridge
Reprinted in paperback 2010

Transferred to digital printing

ISBN 978-1-84384-030-5 hardback
ISBN 978-1-84384-214-9 paperback

D. S. Brewer is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

A CiP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2004 018213

This publication is printed on acid-free paper

A COMPANION TO *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

for

FELICITY RIDDY

Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank all of the contributors to this volume for their professionalism and their scholarship. Editing this book has been interesting and rewarding, and never a chore; who could ask for more from one's fellow academics? We are very grateful to Caroline Palmer for her support for this project from its earliest stages, and for her useful ideas and comments as the book has progressed. Finally, to our teacher and dedicatee, we say 'thank you' – for her enduring encouragement for our labours, her generous intellectual energy, and her example both as a scholar and as a friend.

Notes on Contributors

John H. Arnold

John H. Arnold is Senior Lecturer in History at Birkbeck College, University of London. He researches medieval religion and culture, and has published articles on medieval literacy, gender and heresy. He is author of *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). He is currently completing a book on lay belief in medieval Europe.

P. H. Cullum

P. H. Cullum is Head of History at the University of Huddersfield. She has published widely on hospitals and charity in late medieval England, and has interests in female piety and clerical masculinity. She is co-editor (with Katherine J. Lewis) of *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (University of Wales Press, 2004).

Isabel Davis

Isabel Davis is Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Warwick. She is working on aspects of gender and especially masculinity in late medieval English literature and culture. Currently she is writing a book on masculinity and life writing in the later Middle Ages.

Allyson Foster

Allyson Foster is a postgraduate student in English at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. Her Masters thesis considers the reception of Margery Kempe and Catherine of Siena in early modern England, particularly in relation to extracts from their works that appeared in print. Research interests include female mysticism, late medieval and early modern women's literary culture, and early print culture.

Jacqueline Jenkins

Jacqueline Jenkins is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary. Her research areas include the Middle English lives of St Katherine of Alexandria, manuscript production and late medieval women's reading habits, and vernacular devotional literature, especially the writings of Julian of Norwich. She is currently completing a monograph, provisionally entitled *Gender and Social Identity in Guild Celebrations of St Katherine in Late Medieval Bath.*

Katherine J. Lewis

Katherine J. Lewis is Lecturer in History at the University of Huddersfield; she is the author of *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England*

(The Boydell Press, 2000) and several articles which explore the relationships between saints' cults and ideologies of femininity and masculinity. She is currently writing a book on ideas of gender in later medieval England for Routledge (forthcoming 2005).

Kate Parker

Kate Parker is an Associate Tutor in Medieval History at the University of East Anglia. She is presently working on her Ph.D. thesis concerned with the political relationships within and beyond the town of King's Lynn between 1370 and 1420. Her interest in the borough began when she moved to Lynn with her husband in 1986. She graduated from UEA in 2000.

Kim M. Phillips

Kim M. Phillips is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Auckland. She is the author of *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270–1540* (Manchester University Press, 2003), and co-editor of *Sexualities in History: A Reader* (Routledge, 2002) and *Young Medieval Women* (Sutton, 1999). She is currently writing *Sexual Histories: Western Sexualities from the Ancient to the Postmodern*, with Barry Reay, and developing projects on gender and medieval material culture, and on sexualities in later medieval representations of the East.

Sarah Salih

Sarah Salih is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of East Anglia. She is the author of *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (D. S. Brewer, 2001) and co-editor of *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe* (Routledge, 2002) and of *Medieval Virginities* (University of Wales Press, 2003). She is currently working on a study of medieval paganities.

Claire Sponsler

Claire Sponsler is Professor of English at the University of Iowa, where she specialises in late medieval literature and culture, particularly drama. She is the author of numerous essays and of the books *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), *East of West: Crosscultural Performance and the Staging of Difference*, co-edited with Xiaomei Chen (Palgrave St Martin's, 2000), and *Ritual Imports: Performing Medieval Drama in America* (Cornell University Press, 2004).

Diane Watt

Diane Watt is Professor of English at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. She is the author of *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003) and *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (D.S. Brewer 1997); editor of the collection *Medieval Women in Their Communities* (University of Wales Press, 1997); and co-editor of two volumes of essays, *Decentring Sexualities: Politics and Representations beyond*

the Metropolis (Routledge, 2000) and *The Arts of Seventeenth-Century Science* (Ashgate, 2002).

Barry Windeatt

Barry Windeatt is Professor of English in the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Emmanuel College. His Penguin Classics translation of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1985) has played a key role in the modern revival of interest in Kempe, and his annotated edition of the Middle English text of *The Book* has just been reprinted by Boydell & Brewer. He has also edited an anthology, *English Mystics of the Middle Ages* (1994), and is working on a major reappraisal of the literature of mysticism in medieval England.

Abbreviations

BMK	S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen, eds, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, EETS original series 212 (London, 1940)
EETS	Early English Text Society
Goodman, *World*	Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World* (London, 2002)
Lochrie, *Translations*	Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia, 1991)
Staley, *Dissenting Fictions*	Lynn Staley [Johnson], *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, PA, 1994)

All quotations from *The Book of Margery Kempe* are taken from the EETS edition and cited by chapter and page number within the text (e.g. 40: 97). Unless otherwise specified the quotation is taken from Book I; quotations from Book II appear as follows (II, 8: 241). In some instances we have included both single and double quotation marks around a quotation from the *Book* – this is in order to convey that the quotation in question is entirely direct speech within the text.

All quotations are given in Middle English with translations provided only for obscure vocabulary or spellings.

Preface

JOHN H. ARNOLD AND KATHERINE J. LEWIS

The Book of Margery Kempe, often described as the first autobiography in English, was probably written in the late 1430s and presents an account of the visionary encounters and conversations with Christ experienced by a woman from a prosperous urban mercantile family, who lived in Lynn in Norfolk. It details her attempts to follow a life of intense spirituality while living in the world, rather than withdrawing from it as an anchoress or nun, and describes the approbation and criticism which she received as a result. The single manuscript preserving the *Book* was in the library of Mount Grace (the Yorkshire Carthusian monastery) during the late Middle Ages, but following the tumultuous events of the sixteenth century it was lost from view and knowledge until the twentieth century. Before its rediscovery Margery Kempe was known solely through two printed editions of extracts excerpted from the *Book*, which were published in the early sixteenth century.

The last couple of decades have seen a veritable boom in the field of 'Margery Kempe studies'; from being a text that, as Barry Windeatt's essay here shows, aroused largely negative and dismissive responses in its earliest commentators, the *Book* has attained canonical status, appearing as a set text on undergraduate English courses, and functioning as an important primary source on History courses. The editor of the only previous collection of essays dedicated to Margery Kempe noted that interpretations of the *Book* had been, to date, 'largely harsh and negative', but the scholarship of the last twelve years since these words were written has been much more positive and has forced a widespread recognition of the text's importance and utility.[1] In this respect interest in the *Book* has been and continues to be firmly rooted in a wider flourishing scholarship devoted to the lives and experiences of medieval women, as well as medieval ideologies and practices of gender. As a result the allure of Margery Kempe's *Book* to medievalists has very often been rooted in the rare access it provides to the 'marginal voice' of a lay medieval woman. Paradoxically, this allure has now rendered her anything but marginal: there are three modern critical editions of the text available (in addition to the original Early English Text Society edition), as well as translations, and excerpts from it (either in the original or translation) often appear in anthologies too. There have been five scholarly monographs on the *Book*, plus a great variety of articles and essays, and an edited collection.[2] There

1 Sandra J. McEntire, *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1992), p. ix.
2 See the bibliography of works on Margery Kempe at the end of this volume for details.

is also a website which seeks to locate Margery Kempe and the *Book* within its 'cultural and social matrix' through providing access to the material culture of her world, in the form of digital resources.[3] Moreover, Margery Kempe has also entered into more popular realms; her life as described in the *Book* has been dramatised, both as a play and on BBC Radio 4 and it has also been rewritten as a novel.[4] Why, then, a new set of essays?

Despite, indeed perhaps because of, the wealth of existing accounts and analyses of Margery Kempe and her *Book*, there is certainly room for another collection devoted to her. A key rationale of *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe* is to complement the existing, almost exclusively literary, scholarship on the *Book* with work that draws on more historical analysis. This is not to suggest a rejection of existing literary and theoretical insights into the work and its author: this volume includes essays written by literary scholars, and others written by historians who are attuned to the *Book*'s status as a textual production, with all the advantages and constraints which this imposes upon our understanding of it and the events which it describes. Both of the editors of this volume are historians and, as such, our aim in putting the collection together has been to attempt to shift concentration away from the *Book* as a unique textual product and Margery as 'author', towards a greater consideration of the text as a source for and of its period. Some might argue that a historicising or contextualising approach is necessarily a reactionary one, and, indeed, historians have often made rather simplistic use of the *Book*; some having perceived it as a window onto late medieval England through which they had a clear and unmediated view of the lives of its inhabitants. There has also been a tendency to cherry-pick episodes from the *Book* to provide illustration for particular arguments about the nature of belief and devotion or the role and experiences of women, with no acknowledgment of the ways in which representation of the episodes that the *Book* presents may well be dictated more by considerations of genre and discourse than by what 'actually' happened, or by 'real' events at all (not least because there is absolutely no corroborative documentary evidence for the vast majority of what is described within the *Book*). Such considerations render inherently problematic straightforward identification of the *Book* and its protagonist as 'representative' or 'illustrative'. However, we believe that informed contextualisation of the *Book* serves to enhance an understanding of its nature and contents as well as providing a path into the culture and society of late medieval England. By this means these essays serve both as an introduction to some of the *Book*'s key themes and as material which we hope will stimulate readers (both those who are already familiar with the *Book* and those who are not) to formulate their own approaches to this extremely important text.

3 'Mapping Margery Kempe' created by Sarah Stanbury and Virgina Raguin http://www.holycross.edu/departments/visarts/projects/kempe/ (consulted 16 June 2004).

4 Roger Howard, *The Tragedy of Mao and Other Plays* (Colchester, 1989), pp. 41–56 for the play 'Margery Kempe', which was written in 1977 and first produced the following year. The BBC adaptation was written by Alison Joseph and originally broadcast in five daily parts on *Woman's Hour* from 2–6 October 2000 (with thanks to Liz Lewis for this reference). Robert Glück, *Margery Kempe* (London and New York, 1994).

Barry Windeatt (whose translation of the *Book* has done a great deal to bring it to a wider audience) provides an introduction to the collection by describing early twentieth-century reactions to the *Book* on its rediscovery and then exploring key trends which have influenced more recent scholarly analysis both of the text and its protagonist. He then turns to consider an aspect of the *Book* which continues, he argues, to 'resist or repel modern assessment'; namely Margery's 'lifetime of conversations with Christ', arguing that 'all else included in the *Book* is significant but secondary'. This is an impression which one would not gain from early writing about the *Book* which judged these conversations 'inauthenic' or found them embarrassing and downplayed (or even excised) them as a result. Nor does it emerge from some modern critical writing with its emphasis on the peripheral details which the *Book* provides about Margery's life. Reconsidering the ways in which the *Book* resembles a variety of narrative forms while resisting easy categorisation, Windeatt concludes with the bold assertion that Margery's inner voices should be central to interpretations of the *Book* and read as 'an insight into her own mentality'.

Broadly speaking, the next five essays explore some of the wider social or cultural contexts which provide settings for the *Book* and which inform its contents and their presentation. Kim Phillips's essay takes both a social and cultural historical approach in its attempt to find 'an appropriate framework' for Margery's life in terms both of lived experiences and the meanings which were attached to these. While recognising that the *Book* cannot be used as simple biographical material, Phillips begins by comparing its presentation of Margery's life to the common patterns which emerge from documentary evidence for the lives of contemporary women of elite urban status. By focusing on the key stages of upbringing, occupation, marriage and motherhood Phillips argues that the *Book* 'can help to illuminate our understanding of women and life cycle'. She then turns to examine the *Book* in relation to medieval paradigms of female life cycle, in particular the 'maid, wife, widow' formula and compares textual representations of these to be found in a variety of texts (romances, saints' lives, courtesy literature) with the representation of Margery. Phillips notes that the *Book*'s divergence from these models is not simply a matter of genre, and her analysis emphasises that, both in terms of the social and cultural means that we can use to frame Margery's life, it is as important to consider what is left out, as what is included.

During her analysis Phillips highlights the extent to which representations of female and male life cycle were used to underpin models of gender which rendered a woman's identity dependent upon a man's. This issue is also addressed by Isabel Davis in an essay which locates the *Book* within medieval constructions of patriarchy. This is a setting that has been considered by several previous commentators on Margery Kempe, but Davis's analysis adds a new layer by focusing on ideologies both of femininity and of masculinity. Reading the *Book* in relation to Hoccleve's contemporaneous 'Ballade to Sir John Oldcastle' and its construction of hegemonic and subordinate versions of masculinity, Davis investigates patriarchy 'not simply as a deplorable inequality between the sexes but as a complex set of compromises between women and men, and also between men and other men'. For example, Davis discusses the ways in which Kempe (as author) presents a glamorised account of Margery's marriage to the Godhead which

draws on romance models to use patriarchal fantasies of feminine docility and obedience 'for her own ambitious and challenging ends'. She also highlights the ways in which Margery is seen to take advantage of gender inequalities between men of different status, and between men and God, to authorise her own position. Much analysis of the *Book* has focused on what it can tell us about women's bodies, but Davis concludes by suggesting that the question of men's bodies in the *Book* remains unexplored and would benefit from further consideration.

Kate Parker's essay draws on her considerable knowledge of medieval Lynn to 'describe the activities of Margery's social milieu in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries'. She describes the geographical position and economic status of the town, as well as its religious and intellectual background and presents comparative evidence for the lives of women in medieval Lynn. Parker's essay (in combination with Phillips's) reminds us that Margery Kempe was a member of an elite social group within a wealthy and powerful town. This immediately problematises identification of her as 'marginal'; for, as Parker shows, in her travels Margery was able to draw on a network of hospitality and support derived from her mercantile background and contacts, and her personal status as the daughter of a five-times mayor of Lynn. Parker traces the impact of national events that led to a shift in the political climate of Lynn and the downfall of Margery's father and identifies this as a crucial precursor to Margery's visionary experiences and the composition of the *Book*. In this respect the public humiliation which Margery experienced is central for 'Margery's descriptions of the town's disparagement of her own spiritual manifestations mirror that endured by her friends and family'.

Several times within the *Book* public disparagement and criticism of Margery take the form of accusations of heresy. In his essay John Arnold points out that historiographical opinion usually clears Margery of the charge of heresy, but frequently identifies and celebrates her, nonetheless, as a dissenter; a woman who challenges the various forms of ideological oppression with which male authority figures seek to control and contain her. Arnold questions this approach by asking 'what is the nature of dissent, and what is the nature of the orthodoxy – social, political or religious – from which it demurs?' Scholars have frequently sought to link the *Book* and certain aspects of Margery's presentation within it to contemporary anxieties about Lollardy, but Arnold notes that, while the Norwich heresy trials of 1428-31 might provide a context for the composition of the *Book* in this respect, the atmosphere at the time of the events depicted was actually quite different. Moreover, he notes the ways in which 'Lollard' or 'heretic' could be a catch-all accusation in this period and suggests that Margery also aroused suspicion in other ways, identifying hermeneutics as a key issue: 'the problems that people had, in the context of religious fears, of deciding on how to "read" the interior person from the exterior shell'.

For many centuries, the only way in which people could read Margery at all was through the printed extracts from her *Book* published in the early sixteenth century, given the title *A Shorte Treatyse of Contemplacyon*, and this provides the focus for Allyson Foster's essay. The *Treatyse* effectively elides 'any trace of the outspoken, boisterous, independent Margery that is presented in her *Book*'. Foster argues that the reshaping of Margery's *Book* to focus on Christ's words to

her can shed important light on the text's place in early modern piety and literary practices. Rather than focusing solely on what the *Treatyse* fails to do, she highlights the importance of considering what it does do, and why. Foster places her analysis of the *Treatyse* firmly into the setting of late medieval and early modern interest in devotional literature and the particular popularity of such texts among a female readership. In 1521 the *Treatyse* appeared alongside extracts taken from the life of another female visionary, Catherine of Siena, and Foster presents a comparison of both texts to show the ways in which Margery's revelations can be seen engaging in a dialogue with Catherine's to present a model of the mixed life for lay readers. The *Treatyse* demonstrates that far from being dismissed or forgotten in this period, Margery Kempe was apparently recognised as a visionary of some stature whose writings were deemed fit to be read alongside those of an acknowledged saint.

The next three essays have a different emphasis in their approaches as they consider the influence of particular textual models and discourses upon Margery's self-fashioned identity and the *Book*'s retelling of her experiences. Leading on from Foster's piece, Jacqueline Jenkins's remains within the setting of devotional reading and literate practices to re-examine the complex issue of Kempe's ability to read; a subject upon which scholars have often speculated in the past. Jenkins's outlines the varying abilities that could be encompassed in the term 'literate' and the ways in which literacy could be attained by a woman of Margery's status. She also considers the meanings attached to the act of reading and the ownership of books in the later Middle Ages. Focusing on the list of devotional works which Margery had read to her by a priest Jenkins's argues that far from the priest instructing a passive listener, 'Margery "cawsyd" her reader to become familiar with previously unfamiliar devotional works. In other words, she led, he followed.' Moreover, this list of books is not included at random, but in order that the *Book* can convey certain messages about Margery; on the one hand providing a context for understanding why Margery conducts herself in the way that she does, and on the other constructing a legible sign of her devout identity.

Reading matter was not the only means by which medieval lay people had access to devotional narratives and Claire Sponsler's essay argues that in order to understand Margery's piety we need to examine drama and dramatic texts more closely 'not least because Margery's own spiritual expression – as described in the *Book* – is emphatically theatrical'. Medieval East Anglia had a particularly rich performance tradition and Sponsler recounts the evidence for specific plays and other performance activities both here and in the other places Margery visited, in order to give an idea of the sorts of traditions and dramatic paradigms to which she had access. Certain of Margery's visions, particularly of the Passion of Christ, are clearly seen to be predicated on dramatic re-enactments of these, such as are preserved in the York and Towneley cycles. Thus the *Book* provides evidence both of the impact of such performances upon Margery and her appropriation of them in the service of her own spiritual self-definition, and Sponsler argues that Margery uses her body as a performative vehicle in order to make this manifest. The essay concludes by suggesting that dramatic models provided a means for the *Book* to integrate orthodox and more questionable practices in its representation of Margery while still retaining ecclesiastical approval for her way of life.

Both Jenkins's and Sponsler consider the influence of female models upon Margery and the *Book*, considering Bridget of Sweden and Mary Magdalene respectively. Female models are also the concern of Diane Watt's essay as she examines Margery Kempe's self-representation as a prophet. Such a role may seem an extraordinary one for her to have undertaken, but Watt illustrates the ways in which the *Book* fits comfortably into a much wider discourse of female prophetic utterance. Bridget of Sweden was a particularly important exemplar in this respect as Kempe engaged with current affairs both religious and political. The incidents described in chapter 25 where Margery becomes involved in a dispute between the clergy and laity in Lynn, and other instances where she prophesies on issues of importance to her home town, serve both to confirm her supernatural abilities and to emphasise the status of religious authority in Lynn. Watt also explores instances where Margery's prophesies touch on national and international issues and controversies. Contrary to the views expressed in some recent scholarship Watt argues that 'Kempe's prophetic interventions . . . reveal her real interest and involvement in political events and current affairs.' By this token the historical events which underlie the *Book* and which are sometimes referred to within it are absolutely crucial to the meaning of the text and the ways in which it constructs Margery's prophetic identity.

Taken together these three essays all emphasise the differing ways in which the *Book* seeks to present Margery as a holy woman, and even as a prospective saint. The next two essays continue this theme by considering the *Book* alongside certain practices which have come to be associated in particular with women's experiences of religion and spirituality. The body has often been identified as the means by which women, denied access to other forms of religious expression and experience, could create their own intimate relationships with God, and, in so doing, gain recognition as holy individuals in the eyes of others. Sarah Salih begins her essay with a survey of the scholarship which has established this argument as almost canonical within Medieval Studies, noting the extent to which the characterisation of women's piety as physical was ideologically informed. The main part of the essay is taken up with an exploration of the bodily practices in which Margery engages in the *Book*, observing that 'unlike the majority of medieval holy women, Margery aspires to a purely interior piety'. Bodies are central to the *Book* but Salih argues that Margery's performance of ascetic piety is located in the early years of her conversion, and that she subsequently begins to eschew this in favour of less physical forms of piety. Slander and public criticism come to substitute for bodily suffering as do practices which Salih labels 'social asceticism': taking care of an old woman in Rome and then her own debilitated husband. Even the most distinctive and controversial aspect of Margery's physical piety – her crying – is seen to be diminished as the *Book* shows Margery moving towards less bodily forms of devotion. In this way Salih uses the *Book* to emphasise that '"Feminine bodily piety" was never a monolithic phenomenon' and makes a strong case for the ways in which Margery appropriates a certain, affective model of piety, but transforms it in performance.

The same case could be made for Margery's appropriation and performance of the model of lay charity, as P. H. Cullum's essay shows. The chief duties of

a Christian in this respect were encapsulated in the formula of the Seven Works of Mercy, both Spiritual and Corporal, and this provided an oft-reiterated blueprint for pious aidworking in late medieval England. Lay people had various means at their disposal in order to carry out these Works but Cullum notes that the practices of charity could be fraught with tension and ambivalence and that this is reflected in the *Book*. Charity is another area in which Margery's experiences are often likened to the hagiographic accounts of holy women such as Frances of Rome. Although there are similarities, Margery is much less given to acts of extravagant almsgiving than they are, and her charitable practices are rather more parochial and conformist as a result. Overall Cullum argues that Margery strongly prioritises the Spiritual over the Corporal Works of Mercy, praying for people rather than giving them material assistance: 'Almsgiving may be described as the kind of thing that she did as an unregenerate soul, in her earlier and more conventional life.' This emphasis therefore serves as part of a strategy which highlights Margery's difference from and elevation over the 'average' lay people who appear in the *Book*.

Finally Katherine Lewis turns to the issue of the *Book*'s intention for Margery, which, it has often been stated, was to instigate and/or confirm her status not simply as holy, but as a saint. Much of the scholarship on Margery in this respect has drawn comparisons between the *Book* and the lives of other saints and holy women to demonstrate the debt it owes to hagiographic models. The fact that Margery did not subsequently come to be recognised or venerated as a saint is often attributed to failures within the text, or to Margery's imperfect or improper performance of sanctity. Taking a different approach Lewis suggests that we should interpret Margery's failed sanctity not solely, or even chiefly, from the perspective of her life, but rather from the setting in which her cult would have operated, considering exactly who it was that late medieval English people identified and venerated as saints, and why they did not come to count Margery among their ranks. The pattern of saint making which this essay identifies establishes that, despite the popularity of saints' lives as reading matter and exemplary inspiration, the fundamental criterion by which most English people recognised sanctity in an individual was through their performance of miracles. No matter how holy her life, without miracles Margery would have little chance of being identified as a saint after her death.

Some of the contributors here are well-established commentators on Margery Kempe, while others present their first published work in this area. Choice of topics was governed by a wish both to revisit aspects of the *Book* that have received a considerable degree of scholarly attention (such as issues of literacy and the bodily nature of women's piety) as well as to present analyses of contexts that have received less or no attention (such as the politics of Lynn and ideologies of masculinity). As editors we have not dictated a 'party line' to our contributors in their approaches to the *Book*. For instance, some of the essays employ Lynn Staley's distinction between 'Margery' the central character of the *Book*, and 'Kempe' its author, while others (including both editors) deliberately do not. As a result this volume does not present a collective or univocal interpretation of any aspect of the *Book* or of Margery Kempe, nor is the coverage which it provides intended to be exhaustive; indeed, there