

Margery Kempe as the Medieval Magdalene

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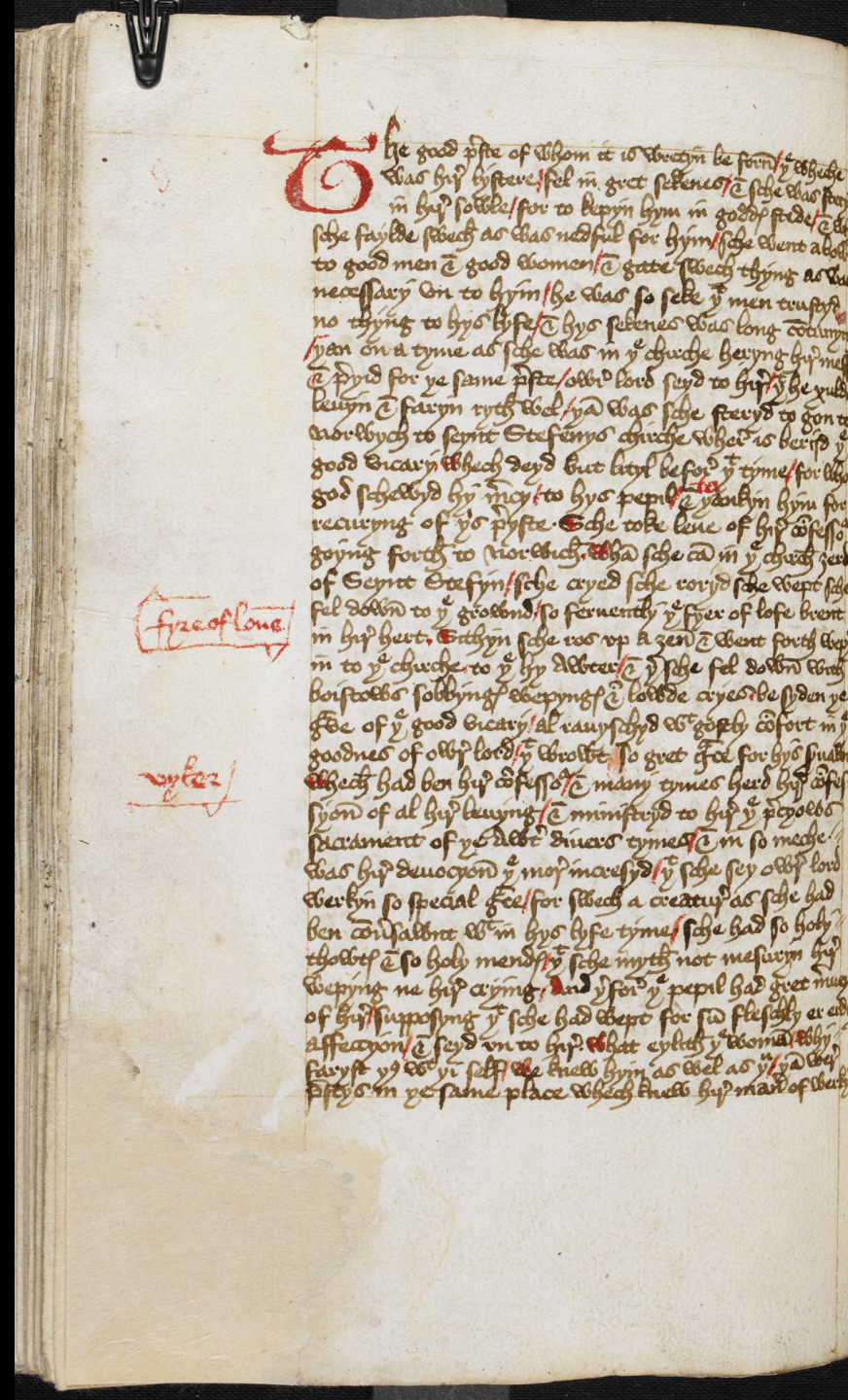
Introduction

The Book of Margery Kempe: 15th-century autobiography

Margery Kempe (c. 1373-1438?): English laywoman, mystic

Book is primarily concerned with her religious experiences; patterns her devotion on many different saints

Pictured: *Manuscript page of The Book of Margery Kempe, British Library*



The good wite of whom it is wroght be founde in the
was his hystorie fel in greet sekeneſſe & ſhe was
in his ſolle for to depen hym in goddeſſe & ſhe
ſhe faylle ſeek as was needful for hym / ſhe went al
to good men & good woment & gatte ſeek thyng as was
neceſſary on to hym / he was ſo ſelle y men truſte
no thyng to hys liſe & hys ſekeneſſe was long & tounyng
han on a tyme at ſhe was in y churche heying by me
& dyd for ye ſame wyſe / othir lord ſayd to hyr / he wylde
leuyn & ſaym ryth wel / yd was ſhe ſteyde to gon to
wyllyng to ſerue ſteffens churche wher is berid y
godd ſeruyng wher dyd but luyt be for y tyme / for
godd ſchelyrd hy wyte to hys pepyl & wylthm hym for
reaynyng of yo wyſe. ſhe toke leue of hyr wyſe
goynng forth to more wyche. wha ſhe ad in y churche
of ſeynt ſteffyn / ſhe cryed ſhe wylde ſhe wept ſhe
fel doun to y ground / ſo ſeruenly y ſpex of loſe berid
in hyr hert. & whyn ſhe was up a zen & went forth
in to y churche to y wyſe. & ſhe fel doun & wylde
boiſtole ſolbyng & wepyng & lorde cryed be ſiden ye
ſhe of y good ſeruyng / al rauyſchyd & goſtly confort in y
goodnes of othir lord / & wylthm ſo greet ſhe for hys ſuall
wher had ber hyr wyſe / & many tymes had hyr wyſe
ſhon of al hyr leuynng & minyſtryd to hyr y pepyl
ſacrament of ye aldr diuac tyme & in ſo meche
was hyr deuocyon y moſ maner / y ſhe ſey othir lord
werthm ſo ſpecial ſhe for ſheek a creatur / as ſhe had
ben conſaldrat & in hys liſe tyme / ſhe had ſo holy
thoſt & ſo holy maner / ſhe myth not meſuryn hyr
wepyng ne hyr cryng. And y for y pepyl had greet myng
of hyr ſuppoſyng y ſhe had wept for ſu fleſchly & ad
affeccion & ſayd vn to hyr. what cryth y woma. whyn
ſayst y & y ſhe. he knell hym as wel as y / yd was
ſhe in ye ſame place wher knell hyr man of wech

Research

Question: What influence does Saint Mary Magdalene have on Margery Kempe's devotion?

Sources: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, New Testament Gospels, *The Golden Legend*

Thesis

Margery Kempe could be thought of as engaging in “imitatio Magdalene,” and her *Book* recounts many ways in which Kempe patterns her life and devotion on the example set by Mary Magdalene. Two of the most significant ways Kempe imitates Magdalene is in adopting what are perhaps Magdalene’s best-known attributes: penitent sinner and witness to Christ’s resurrection.

Who Is Mary Magdalene?



New Testament

Witness to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection

Disciple "from whom seven demons had gone out"
(Luke 8:2)

Later legends

Composite figure

Mary of Bethany, woman who washes Christ's feet, woman
taken in adultery

Penitent sinner (prostitute)



Pictured: *Mary Magdalene* by Artemisia Gentileschi, Pitti Palace (top)

Martha and Mary Magdalene by Caravaggio, Detroit Institute of Arts (bottom)



Kempe as Penitent Sinner

“[S]he had a thing on her conscience which she had never revealed before that time in all her life.” (41)

delactacyon: “sensual pleasure”

“Here begins a short treatise and a comforting one for sinful wretches, in which they may have great solace and comfort for themselves.” (33)

Pictured: *The Penitent Magdalene* by Georges de La Tour, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Kempe as Witness to the Resurrection



Vision in chapters 79-81

Magdalene parallels: Kempe witnesses Christ's crucifixion

Kempe and the Virgin Mary as first witnesses to Christ's resurrection

Kempe and Magdalene as messengers of Christ's resurrection

Christ to Mary Magdalene: "Go, tell my brethren and Peter that I have risen." (238)

The Book of Margery Kempe: Kempe's announcement of the resurrection

Pictured: *Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection* by Alexander Ivanov, State Russian Museum

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