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Araştırma makalesi/Research article

The Strategic Use of Memory in *the Book of Margery Kempe*

Margery Kempe'in Kitabı'nda Hafızanın Stratejik Kullanımı

Azime Pekşen Yakar*

Abstract

The Book of Margery Kempe (1430s) narrates Margery's life story in loosely-knitted episodes, mainly focusing on her spiritual experiences, sufferings, and development. It is actually an autobiography dictated by Margery Kempe herself and written by two different scribes. However, it is recited and written after twenty years of her visions including personal conversations with God and Jesus Christ. Memory, thus, with its various types occupies a crucial place in both the writing process of the text and the text itself. As Margery, an illiterate woman as she claims, recites her experiences relying only on her memory, she may not be able to accurately recollect all memories of the past covering almost twenty-five years. Even, she may select, manipulate, and reconstruct them for various reasons.

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*Dr. Öğr. Üyesi. Ankara Bilim Üniversitesi İngilizce Mütercim Tercümanlık Bölümü.
azimepeksen@hotmail.com. ORCID 0000-0002-5227-813X

In this context, this paper aims to analyze how Kempe provides the fictional Margery with an alternative role of a mystic, a religious authority, and a pilgrim other than allotted roles of wifehood and motherhood for a medieval woman. To be able to achieve this, Margery Kempe makes use of the fictional Margery's visions beginning after her first childbirth and also other strategies.

Keywords: *Margery Kempe, memory, autobiography, womanhood, wifehood, motherhood*

Öz

Margery Kempe'in Kitabı (1430'lar), Margery'nin hayat hikâyesini genel hatlarıyla bölümler halinde anlatır ve daha çok Margery'nin ruhsal ve dini deneyimlerine, ızdırap ve gelişimine odaklanır. Bu kitap, aslında bizzat Margery tarafından dikte edilmiş ve iki farklı kâtip tarafından yazılmış bir otobiyografidir. Buna rağmen, Margery çocukluğundan neredeyse hiç bahsetmez. Ayrıca, en az on dört çocuğu olduğu bilinmesine karşın, kısa bir biçimde bir oğlunu ve aralarında geçen konuşmayı anlatır ve diğerleri hakkında konuşmaktan imtina eder. Çocukları hakkında konuşmaktan kaçınması yaşadığı zor doğum(lar) sonrasında gelişen doğum sonrası psikoz ve bu durumun yarattığı travma olabilir.

Yine de, kurduğu işleri ve bu işlerde nasıl başarısız olduğunu ayrıntılarıyla anlatan biri için, çocuklarından bahsetmemesi düşündürücüdür çünkü Margery otobiyografisinde, dini deneyimlerine, hacca giderken yaşadığı zorluklara, ziyaret ettiği kutsal alanlara ve oralardaki ritüellere, kendisine karşı yapılan dinsizlik suçlamalarına, yargılanmasına ve verdiği cevaplarla aklanmasına, bizzat Tanrı ve Yüce İsa'yla olan sohbetlerini içeren görülerine oldukça geniş yer vermiştir. Ayrıca, problemli bir diğer konu da, Kempe'in, otobiyografisini görülerinden yirmi yıl sonra anlatması ve bunların kâtiplerce yazılmış olmasıdır. Dolayısıyla, hafıza kavramı, çeşitli türleriyle hem metnin üretim aşamasında hem de kendisinde çok önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Örneğin, kurgusal Margery iddia ettiği gibi okur yazar olmayan bir kadın olarak anılarını sadece hafızasına dayanarak anlattığından, neredeyse yirmi beş yılı kapsayan tüm geçmiş anılarını doğru anımsayamıyor olabilir. Hatta, bu anıları seçebilir; manipüle edebilir ve çeşitli sebeplerle yeniden oluşturabilir. Bu bağlamda, bu makale Kempe'in kurgusal Margery'ye Orta Çağ'da yaşayan kadınlara biçilen anne ve eş rollerinden farklı olarak mistik, dini otorite ve hacı rollerini nasıl sağladığını ve böylece kadın kimliğini nasıl güçlendirdiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Margery Kempe, hafıza, otobiyografi, kadınlık, eş olmak, annelik*

"The mater cam to the creatur in mend": The Strategic Use of Memory in The Book of Margery Kempe[7]

This article analyzes Margery Kempe's use of memory in The Book of Margery Kempe (1430s) (henceforth The Book) as a subversive method to evade her submissive situation her gender generates and transform it into empowerment. Kempe designs a stronger woman figure having a keen claim of authority in religion and mysticism, which systematically exclude women as authorities. Since Margery recites her past experiences relying on her memory after twenty years of her first vision, she is not able to precisely recall all past occurrences. In this regard, this article establishes its own intervention in the field by claiming that Kempe employs her memory as a strategic device to violate her expected subordination and transforms it into partial domination. Therefore, this article aims to contribute to the studies on Margery Kempe with a new perspective which analyzes her use of memory to subvert institutions and practices disempowering her and create a new figure of a woman with unusual roles of a mystic and a pilgrim.

Previous readings of The Book tend to belittle its literary and religious value and accordingly denigrate Kempe as an eccentric woman with mental problems. Even Kempe's authorship of The Book is questioned, and the scribes are given credit for it. Nevertheless, recently, the revision of The Book within the framework of feminist scholarship has occasioned new analyses of The Book and Margery Kempe, and it has also encouraged novel perspectives to the text. In this respect, Kempe's life and the reception of The Book are of great importance to better understand and analyze the place of memory and Kempe's use of it as a tactic in The Book.

Margery Kempe was an English laywoman from King's Lynn, Norfolk. Her father, John Burnham was an important figure who was five times mayor of Lynn and one of the members of the parliament. Her mother was not mentioned in the extant records of Lynn and Kempe's The Book of Margery Kempe. When Margery was twenty years old, she got married to John Kempe, whose name was also recorded in Lynn records, but he apparently was not as prosperous as Margery's father because Margery constantly and proudly reminded her "worthy" family and he should have never married her. Margery and her husband had fourteen children, whose names and other details except one of them had never been mentioned in The Book. She most probably experienced a postnatal breakdown after the birth of her first child and was haunted by the visions of the devil until the vision of Christ healed her. In The Book, she also talked about her businesses including a brewery and a mill as failures, but she spared most of the space to her spiritual experiences, visions, pilgrimages to holy places, charges of heresy, insanity, hypocrisy, and Lollardy and her defenses to these charges.

Due to The Book, Margery Kempe is one of the much-debated figures of Medieval English literature. This is quite an achievement considering The Book's rediscovery in the 1930s. Early uses of The Book among other devotional writings

are limited in certain circles. The first critical reception of The Book (in the 1930s) is mostly negative and even hostile, which describes Kempe as "eccentric, neurotic, and psychopathic" (Coleman, as cited in McEntire, 1992: x). The second wave of reception of The Book is not very different from the first one, condemning Kempe as a hysterical woman and a false mystic. Therefore, The Book has attracted scholarly attention only after the 1930s. Later, it is appreciated as a social and historical document that offers valuable insight into devotional literature and the religious atmosphere of its time with references to historically identifiable figures such as Archbishops of York and Canterbury.

Memory with its various forms and levels is at the very core of The Book of Margery Kempe. The Book is the oldest extant autobiography written in English (Finke, 1999: 176; Swanson, 2003: 141), and it employs a narrative technique which is only based on "the process of association and the role of memory" (Holbrook, as cited in Ross, 1992: 227). As Margery Kempe8 claims she is illiterate9, she can only rely on her memory while dictating her experiences to the scribe. Also, she decides to write about what she has experienced after twenty years. Therefore, memory, the mental faculty of an individual through which information is encoded, processed, and stored, is already a problematic issue in autobiographies, and it is even deeply problematized in The Book. Nevertheless, Kempe is not preoccupied with the idea of the perfection of her memory. In the "Proem," Kempe (1996) straightforwardly tells she recites the events in the order she recollects them; thus, they are not recorded in chronological order:

> "Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn that sche had forgetyn the tyme and the ordyr whan thyngs befellyn. And therfor sche dede no thing wryten but that sche knew rygth wel for very trewth" 10 (1. 1. 99-103).

The Book, which does not follow a chronological order, is presented in the manner of an autobiography and is highly episodic and fragmented. It is purported to be the life story of Margery, but The Book begins in medias res and lacks Margery's childhood. Still, it covers most of her spiritual experiences, visions, pilgrimage, charges of heresy, insanity, hypocrisy, and Lollardy and her defenses to these charges.

Kempe (1996) starts the autobiography from her twenty-year-old self with her marriage to John Kempe and her conceiving her first child within a short time:

> "Whan this creatur was twenty yer of age or sumdele mor, sche was maryed to a worschepful burgeys and was wyth chylde wythin schort tyme, as kynde wolde. And, aftyr that sche had conceived, sche was labowrd with grett accessys tyl the child was born, and than, what for labowr sche had in chyldyng and for sekenesse goyng beforn, sche dyspered of hyr lyfe, wenyng sche might not levyn" (1.1.130-134).

After she explains her marriage and pregnancy, she suddenly begins to talk about her severe sickness from which she suffers following her first childbirth. She feels extremely ill and wants to confess a past sin, but the priest whom she confesses sternly reproves her. Margery, in her own words, puts:

> "Wherfor, aftyr that hir chyld was born, sche, not trostyng hir lyfe, sent for hir gostly fadyr, as iseyd beforn, in ful wyl to be schrevyn of alle hir lyfetym as ner as sche cowde. And, whan sche cam to the poynt for to seyn that thing whech sche had so long conselyd, hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye and gan scharply to undyrnemyn hir er than sche had fully seyd hir entent, and so sche wold no mor seyn for nowt he mygth do.And anoon, for dreed sche had of dampnacyon on the to syde and hys scharp reprevyng on that other syde, this creatur went owt of hir mende and was wondyrlye vexid and labowryd with spyritys half yer eight wekys and odde days "(1. 1. 142-150).

Margery already feels so overwhelmed with her traumatic memory of her childbirth that the priest's harsh reproach aggravates her worsening mental well-being, and she begins to see horrifying visions of devils haunting her. She elaborates on vivid depictions of devils:

> "Develys opyn her mowthys al inflaymys with brennyng lowys of fyr as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in, sumtyme ramping at hyr, sumtyme thretyng her, sumtyme pullyng hyr and halyng hir bothe nyght and day during the forseyd tyme. And also the develys cryed upon hir wyth greet thretyngys and bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendam, hir feyth, and denyin hir God, hys modyr, and alle the seyntys in hevyn, hyr goode werkys and alle good vertues, hir fadyr, hyr modyr, and alle hire frendys" (1. 1. 151-156).

The devils in those visions tell her to forsake her Christian fate. After troubled by these visions for quite long, she is healed again by a vision in which she sees Jesus Christ who says to Margery: "Dowtyr, why hast thow forsakyn me, and I forsoke nevyr the?" (1. 1. 173). The divine consolation ends her despair and returns her to life and Margery as a medieval wife carries out her daily chores at home: "Sythen this creatur dede alle other acupacyons as fel for hir to do wysly and sadly inow, saf sche knew not veryli the drawt of owyr Lord" (1. 1. 187-188), but she is not portrayed as a mother taking care of her child in The Book.

Therefore, Margery's traumatic memory of her first childbirth and both troubling and healing visions are the influential memories that lead her to a new way of life. This traumatic memory apparently derives from postpartum depression (Finke, 1999: 178; McEntire, 1992: 56) and may be the reason for Kempe's exclusion of Margery's role as a mother in The Book.11 This traumatic memory is so important and influential in her life that it encourages Kempe to share her spiritual experiences triggered by this memory even though many years have passed after it, and hence, it occasions the writing of the oldest autobiography in English.

The Book is considered the oldest autobiography written in English in the Middle Ages. Medieval autobiography, however, is considerably different from autobiography as a modern term. Autobiography, a self-revealing genre in the modern sense, "assumes the existence of a persistent conscious 'self' interacting through a lifetime with the world outside," and "[t]his 'self' is the center of an individual

universe; shaped by experience, it acts in turn to shape events and relationships" (Atkinson, 1983: 23). However, as Atkinson (1983) maintains, the protagonist in medieval autobiography "is nor perceived or presented as the primary agent in the creation of a life" and in The Book, "Kempe's sense of herself pervades every page of her book, but that 'self,' which she called a 'creature,' is of the fifteenth century, not of the twentieth" (23). Kempe puts Margery or "this creature" as "the medieval self" interacting the world with her story. The autobiographer with his/her story, thus, combines his/her inner feelings, thoughts with outer experiences and events to create a narrative. Therefore, it can be deduced that Kempe believes that her story is special and valuable to be shared and remembered (Atkinson, 1983: 23), and importantly, she creates a new world – a world out of the fusion of her inner and outer experiences lived in her past using her own memory.

Furthermore, memory as a mental faculty works in numerous ways affected or not affected by other things. However, many psychologists believe "memory is subject to the strains and stresses of psychic conflict; what we remember (and forget) is determined by our needs, defense mechanisms, and feelings of pain and pleasure" (Atkinson, 1983: 26-27). For example, Conrad (2010) studies chronic stress paradigms and their effects on memory and affirms that hormones released in the bloodstream in response to stressful situations affect the physiological function of memory (751-753). As The Book clearly suggests, Kempe has an extraordinary life which is full of grief, joy, pain, love, poignance, shame, humiliation, and pride, and it cannot be claimed that Kempe's memory was not affected by these strong emotions12. Consequently, when subjective narration as autobiography's generic feature and memory's recreational characteristic are considered altogether, Kempe may select and manipulate what she recollects after twenty years for "self-justification" (Atkinson, 1983: 25). Hence, The Book becomes Kempe's "self-authorization project" (Salih, 2018). That is, Kempe fashions herself a new identity with various roles such as a mystic, Christian, and pilgrim each of which brings in strength and authority she cannot gain otherwise. In Rebecca Krug's (2017) words, "The Book presents a process of self-in-the-making in which the dynamic construction of identity is located both in lived experience and in the act of capturing and revisioning that life in writing" (iii). In these processes of capturing and revisioning, Kempe's memory necessarily makes crucial selections and intentionally creates Margery. While selecting, she opts for specific memories which particularly show and accentuate her spiritual process from an ordinary English wife or mother to a mystic, a religious authority, a pilgrim, a devout Christian, and an ardent traveler. If it were not for her subversive use of memory, Kempe would not be able to claim any authority in mysticism and religion. Kempe's strategic and manipulative use of her memory empowers her and reinforces her claims of authority in those aspects.

Notably, in *The Book*, covering quite a few events, encounters, and journeys, Kempe does not prefer talking about Margery's role as a mother even though she has fourteen children.13 Before she manages to lead a life of celibacy, most of her time must have been occupied by successive deliveries and taking care of her children. However, Kempe is curiously silent about this issue. She probably expunges the painful memories of labor and accentuates her identity as a devoted Christian. When she talks about her children, she avoids giving any details. For example, Christ informs Margery that she is pregnant, yet she is not happy with her pregnancy: "In the tyme that this creatur had revelacyons, owyr Lord seyd to hir, "Dowtyr, thow art wyth childe." Sche seyd agen, "A, Lord, how schal I than do for kepyng of my chylde?" Owir Lord seyd, "Dowtyr, drede the not, I schal ordeyn for an kepar"" (1.

21.1107-1109). Even, she feels guilty about it since it shows she is sexually active with her husband. Margery's avoidance of this topic and reason for her feeling guilty imply that she cannot achieve maidenhood due to her children and the conjugal debt to her husband, which is the highest status a Christian woman may attain:

> "Than seyd the creatur, "Lord Jhesu, this maner of levyng longyth to thy holy maydens." "Ya, dowtyr, trow thow rygth wel that I lofe wyfes also, and specyal tho wyfys whech woldyn levyn chast, yyf thei mygtyn have her wyl, and don her besynes to plesyn me as thow dost, for, thow the state of maydenhode be mor parfyte and mor holy than the state of wedewhode, and the state of wedewhode mor parfyte than the state of wedlake, yet dowtyr I lofe the as wel as any mayden in the world" (1. 21. 1113-1119).

Here, Christ relieves Margery about her status as a married woman for his love is not limited to maidens even though maidenhood is the holiest status. He states he also loves wives with children, who lead a chaste life like Margery. Despite the comfort with which Christ provides Margery, Margery insists on refraining from being pictured as a mother. Yet, still, "maternity [is] an important component of Margery's religion," and as a mother, Margery is responsible for teaching her children at least the basic instructions of her religion (Swanson, 2003: 148). However, Kempe intentionally does not present Margery as a mother except for the scenes where she helps her eldest son in repenting of his sins and leading him to a religious life:

> "The seyd creatur had a sone, a tal yong man, dwellyng wyth a worschepful burgeys in Lynne, usyng marchawndyse and seylyng ovyr the see, whom sche desyryd to a drawyn owt of the perellys of this wretchyd and unstabyl worlde yyf hir power myth a teynyd therto. Nevyrthelesse sche dede as meche as in hir was, and, whan sche myth metyn wyth hym at leyser, many tymys sche cownselyd hym to leevyn the worlde and folwyn Crist in so meche that he fled hyr cumpany and wolde not gladlych metyn wyth hir" (2. 1. 11-16).

Margery does not act as an affectionate mother towards her son, but as a religious authority, who scorns and chides him because of his non-Christian lifestyle. She threatens him with God's possible punishment if he does not lead a decent life.

In the following chapter of Book II, the readers are announced that her son gives up his previous lecherous life, gets married to a woman in Germany and has a child. His visit to Margery with his wife s"urprises Margery as her son has changed in the way she desires:

> In fewe yerys aftyr that this yong man had weddyd he cam hom in to Inglond to hys fadyr and hys modyr al chongyd in hys aray and hys condicyonis. For afor tyme hys clothys wer al daggyd and hys langage al vanyté; now he weryd no daggys, and hys dalyawns was ful of vertu. Hys modyr, havyng gret merveyl of this sodeyn chongyng, seyd unto hym, "Benedicité, sone, how is it wyth the that thu art so chongyd?" (2.2.64-68).

Margery, who is amazed by her son's sudden change, takes pride in his finding the right path and living as a devout Christian not as a mother but as a religious authority.

This conversation between Margery and her son is very significant with regard to Kempe's portrayal of Margery as a pious woman instead of a mother because even in the case of giving advice, Margery does not act like a mother but as a religious authority to warn her son or the sinner about his lecherous life and its consequences.

In her creation process of Margery, Kempe deliberately understates her identity as a mother and chooses to emphasize Margery's literary and spiritual power. First, Kempe insists on recording Margery's experiences in a literary tradition in which writing is considered a male domain. Hence, it can be inferred that she empowers herself by occupying a space due to her writing within the male system disempowering her. Her writing, relying on her memory, registers her name permanently in the male system and strengthens her self-definition as an author. Secondly, in The Book, Kempe meticulously chooses what to narrate. While she is selecting from her memories, she adopts some strategies which will provide her with authority to some extent. One of these strategies is the authority of religion supported by her visions and cryings, pilgrimages to Holy places as well as linking herself to the tradition of mystics. To gain such authority, Margery first admits her weak position in the dynamics of medieval society. Margery's narrative "is extensively informed of the medieval patriarchal discourse of gender and her self-definition as a woman is largely gender- biased" (Reis, 2005: 152). In this patriarchal culture, as Reis claims, Kempe

> "presents herself as the 'weak creature' of God's world, clearly conforming to the contemporary conception of women as spiritually and morally weak because of the original sin. Accordingly, Margery's narrative is also the narrative of the progress of the "weak" into a position to hold and wield relative power which she manages to generate out of her admission of weakness in accordance with the norms of the society" (2005: 152).

By presenting Margery as "creature" as a narrative strategy, Kempe shows Margery as a humble and sincere woman. Margery assumes the role of a modest, earnest, and weak woman to make space for herself within this gender-biased culture. In so doing, she makes herself visible and asserts her voice. Hence, Margery's narrative can be considered the narrative of Margery's gaining authority by using her weakness imposed by medieval dynamics of society and patriarchy.

Pertaining to this context, it is not surprising to read many events and encounters in which Margery is victimized. In this stage, it is possible to claim that she deliberately chooses to narrate these events in which she is chided and scorned because of her loud and violent sobbings, white dresses, and excessive performances of her feelings. Although she has stated in "Proem" that she does not recite the events chronologically and cannot cover all of them either, she repeats her statement that she is not able to narrate every experience she had and has to choose what to narrate: "It wer in maner unpossibyl to writyn al the holy howtys, holy spechys, and the hy revelacyons whech owr Lord schewyd unto hir" (1. 59. 3402-3404). As she confesses, she selects from her anecdotes, encounters with vicious people, and conversations in which she is victimized. For instance, she usually touches upon the reactions of people towards her cryings occasioned by her compassion for Christ's Passion:

> "And many seyd ther was nevyr seynt in hevyn that cryed so as sche dede, wherfor thei woldyn concludyn that sche had a devyl wythinne hir

> whech cawsyd that crying. […] Sum seyde that sche had the fallyng evyl, for sche wyth the crying wrestyd hir body turnyng fro the o syde into the other and wex al blew and al blo as it had ben colowr of leed. And than folke spitted at hir for horrowr of the sekenes, and sum scornyd hir and seyd that sche howlyd as it had ben a dogge and bannyd hir and cursyd hir and seyd that sche dede meche harm among the pepyl" (1. 44. 2469-2478).

People's reactions to Margery's weepings are mostly unwelcoming and hostile. As Margery conveys, some people suppose she is possessed by a devil which makes her cry, and some believe she is ill and she cries along with bizarre movements of her body. In her anecdotes, Margery is often scorned, chided, humiliated, and cursed. Once Kempe characterizes Margery as a weak and fragile victim, Margery begins to tell another anecdote in which religious authorities such as Bishop of Lincoln welcome her and enjoy her talks about her love of God:

> "And than sche cam to hys presens and salutyd hym, and he derly wolcomyd hir and seyd he had long desyred to speke wyth hir and he was rygth glad of hir comyng. And so sche prayd hym that sche mygth speke wyth hym in cownsel and schewyn hym the secretys of hir sowle [. . .] He was rygth glad to heryn hem, and suffryd hir benyngly to sey what hir ysted, and commendyd gretly hir felyngys and hir contemplacyons, seyyng thei wer hy maters and ful devowt maters and enspyred of the Holy Gost, cownselyng hir sadly that hir felyngys schuld be wretyn" (1. 15. 763-772).

This important occasion, in which she is welcomed by a Bishop, and his approving comments on her revelations and divine contemplations are given, is consciously placed after the incident of being scolded and belittled due to her loud cryings. Such narrative strategies of Kempe as re-constructing and re-ordering the chronology of events, her experiences, and encounters are deployed in many chapters of The Book.

Another equally important example of Kempe's re-construction and re-arranging the sequence of events can be observed in Margery's examination by the Archbishop of York. She first presents a scene in which she is humiliated because of her sobbings, and she assumes the role of a victim. Then, she displays the moment she cannot be accused for her acts showing her devotion to God. To give an example, she cries out loudly during her examination by the Archbishop of York, which astonishes both the Archbishop and clerks. After answering all of their questions assessing her knowledge of her faith, Margery is cleared of all the accusations:

> "And than anon, aftyr the Erchebischop put to hir the Articles of owr Feyth, to the whech God gaf hir grace to answeryn wel and trewly and redily wythowtyn any gret stody so that he myth not blamyn hir, than he seyd to the clerkys, "Sche knowith hir feyth wel anow. What schal I don wyth hir?" (1. 52. 2943-2947).

Even though she is not found guilty, her presence in York is considered dangerous for her ideas have many followers. Therefore, Margery's victimization transforms into a subversive device which endorses her religious authority. Margery and people's faith in her talks are so strong that the Archbishop of York does not tolerate her existence in his town: "The clerkys seyden, "We knowyn wel that sche

can the Articles of the Feith, but we wil not suffyr hir to dwellyn among us, for the pepil hath gret feyth in hir dalyawnce, and peraventur sche myth pervertyn summe of hem"" (1. 52. 2947-2949). Hence, Kempe's manipulation of her memory and re-ordering her memories regardless of their chronology enables her to create a strong portrayal of Margery.

Margery's accounts of her pilgrimages also involve Kempe's manipulation of her memory to subvert Margery's weakness into empowerment, her limited roles into demanding ones. Her visits to sacred places can be interpreted as a particularly important means of power in terms of the position she holds in her religion. In a

patriarchal society such as the medieval society of which Margery is a member, women are not regarded as religious authorities except being anchoresses and mystics. Women, who choose to lead a Christian life, have relatively limited opportunities to visit holy places and become pilgrims since women are doubly threatened by the possible encounters with "the unholy and the criminal" (Reis, 2005: 151). Also, women's mobility is condemned as it is associated with autonomy and nonconformity, which are not the desirable characteristics of medieval women. As Jacqueline Murray (1995) explains, "[s]ubmission and obedience were virtues. Pride, ambition, and autonomy were ultimately perceived as rebellious and crimes against both the natural and the moral order. The best thing an inferior woman could do was to know her place" (2). Therefore, Margery, who is well informed of the medieval ideologies disempowering her, first assumes the identity of a weak creature and then manages to generate relative power by going on pilgrimages. As Elizabeth Robertson (1990) affirms, women in the Middle Ages believe that pilgrimage "gives them a healing access to power and a voice they otherwise have had silenced and suppressed"14 (168).

In this case, Kempe's manipulative selection of her memories comes forward. For instance, while recounting her pilgrimage experiences, Margery does not give much detailed information about her experiences in the Holy Land or Rome. As Swanson (2003) also remarks, "of the great events she may have witnessed - the liturgies of Rome, the ceremonies of Santiago, the varied proceedings at Jerusalem [. . .] – she says nothing" (143). It is quite an extraordinary situation for a woman who is generally scolded for her garrulousness and excessiveness. The reason for her silence here is probably a deliberate selection again. Rather than recounting rituals, she narrates her own spiritual experiences in detail, thereby putting her own experiences in a more central and essential place. For example, Margery does not describe the rituals taking place around Christ's tomb; however, she spares most of her time reciting her sorrowful feelings and cryings:

> "Whan this creatur wyth hir felawshep cam to the grave wher owyr Lord was beriid, anon, as sche entryd that holy place, sche fel down wyth hir candel in hir hand as sche schuld a deyd for sorwe. And sythen sche ros up ageyn wyth gret wepyng and sobbyng as thow sche had seyn owyr Lord beriid even befor hir. Than sche thowt sche saw owyr Lady in hir sowle, how sche mornyd and how sche wept hir sonys deth, and than was owyr Ladiis sorwe hir sorwe. And so ovyr al wher that evyr the frerys led hem in that holy place sche alwey wept and sobbyd wondyrfully, and specialy whan sche cam ther owyr Lord was nayled on the cros. Ther cryed sche and wept wythowtyn mesur that sche myth not restreyn hirself" (1. 29. 1646-1654).

On the one hand, she does not elaborate on her surroundings or rituals occurring in her visits to holy sites. On the other hand, she meticulously and generously explicates how she weeps and feels upon seeing Christ's tomb. Since Margery is

designated as the central figure of *The Book* by Kempe, Margery's experiences and reactions including her cryings are highlighted thanks to the fact that Kempe prefers to recite those.

Furthermore, Kempe's narrative proposes silence and being silenced as vital terms in *The Book*. The former is deemed a virtue, and the latter is a disciplinary action for medieval women. However, Margery always refuses to be silent and to be silenced. Kempe prefers to offer us pictures of Margery speaking in several different ways among many other anecdotes. Margery's weeping, for instance, occupying quite a space in *The Book*, is one of her mediums of speaking. Although Margery considers her weeping a gift, her cryings are so loud and passionate that she is scolded and even othered. In a church in Canterbury, she is belittled. In her own words,

> "On a tyme, as this creatur was at Cawntyrbery in the church among the monkys, sche was gretly despysed and reprevyd for cawse sche wept so fast bothyn of the monkys and prestys and of seculer men ner al a day bothe afornoon and aftyrnoon, also in so mech that hyr husbond went away fro hir as he had not a knowyn hir and left hir aloon among hem,cheys hir as sche cowed, for other comfort had sche noon of hym as that day" (1.13.620-625).

Margery's tears also cause her other serious troubles. She is accused of fakery and even Lollardy because of her everlasting cries though she is never convicted. Nevertheless, "[tears] also become a source of power, an alternative to the kind of power an anchoress might achieve by her holiness and seclusion" (Mahoney, 1992: 39). As she does not enclose herself to an anchorhold which is the only sacred space where some religious authority is allotted for women, she cannot have any means to demonstrate her spirituality and have spiritual power other than her tears. In this context, "her tears are beyond language; her sobs substitute for the words she cannot find. But they are also, at the same time, themselves language" (Mahoney, 1992: 40). Before Kempe has her book written after many tries and much effort, her tears are "her public language, an individual expression of separateness through bodily action in defiance of the prohibitions of custom and the ecclesiastical system" (Mahoney, 1992: 40). Her tears are also significant in that they link Margery to the long and strong tradition of female mystics who are also known for their weeping. As Margery recounts, she visits Dame Jelyan (Julian of Norwich) and asks her questions about her revelations and sobbings:

> "And so sche dede and schewyd hir the grace that God put in hir sowle of compunccyon, contricyon, swetnesse and devocyon, compassyon wyth holy meditacyon and hy contemplacyon, and ful many holy spechys and dalyawns that wyr Lord spak to hir sowle, and many wondirful revelacyons whech sche schewyd to the ankres to wetyn yf ther wer any deceyte in hem, for the ankres was expert in swech thyngys and good cownsel cowd gevyn. The ankres, heryng the ervelyows goodnes of owyr Lord, hyly thankyd God wyth al hir hert for hys visitacyon, cownselyng this creatur to be obedyent to the wyl of owyr Lord God and fulfyllyn wyth al hir mygthys whatevyr he put in hir sowle yf it wer not ageyn the worshep of God and profyte of hir evyn cristen, for, yf it wer, than it wer nowt the mevyng of a good spyryte but rathyr of an evyl spyrit" (1. 18. 955-965).

Kempe affiliates Margery to the tradition of mysticism due to her meeting with Julian of Norwich whom is regarded an expert on divine revelations. Julian of Norwich affirms Margery's visions, revelations, and cryings are not deceptive, but a gift from God. Thereby, Kempe's recalling and selection of Margery's visit to Julian enables Margery to maintain a safe space for herself in the religious tradition and assert her voice due to the power of her tears as well as connecting herself with Julian of Norwich.

By analyzing memory as Margery Kempe's strategy to avoid subjugation her gender brings about, to liberate from the allotted roles expected from a medieval woman, and to design identity of a woman with authority in The Book of Margery Kempe, I have demonstrated that Margery Kempe fashions herself a strong figure of a woman in the persona of Margery. While reciting her spiritual experiences, encounters, and travels to the scribes, Kempe manipulatively selects from her memories and reshapes them to present an extraordinary portrayal of a medieval woman. In this new portrayal, Kempe primarily focuses on Margery's religious experiences and emphasizes her devotional practices such as her spirituality and excessive displays of piety, yet she avoids detailing her identity as a wife and mother. Thus, Kempe's strategic use of memory as a means of empowerment provides Margery with partial liberation from oppressive labels and titles her gender generates and enables her to assume alternative roles of a pilgrim, a religious authority, and a mystic.

Endnotes

1.This article is an improved version of my conference paper presented in the 25th International Medieval Congress, Leeds, on 2-5 July 2018. It has not been published in any journal or the procee- dings.

2.In this paper, I follow Lynn Staley's practical solution of distinguishing the author and the persona of the book and use Margery Kempe or Kempe as the author and Margery as the persona.

3.Kempe (1996) in The Book depicts Margery as "hir not lettryd" (1. 2. 3030); however, medieval concept of literacy is quite different from modern definitions of literacy and treats writing and reading as separate skills, which complicates her (il)literacy. Samira Lindstedt (2018) discusses Margery's clai- med illiteracy with textual evidences in her "Questioning the 'Book of Life' as Evidence for 'Illiteracy' of Margery Kempe."

4.All quotations from The Book of Margery Kempe are taken from The Book edited by Lynn Staley and are cited with the part and line numbers.

5.This kind of traumatic memory is one of the other aspects of memory in The Book. As my article aims to analyse how Margery Kempe creates herself a new role of a mystic and a pilgrim by her tactical use of memory, I do not focus on this traumatic memory, and I continue to analyse the idea of an autobiography.

6.Actually, her experiences and behavioral patterns have been diagnosed with several illnesses and mental disorders "ranging from hysteria to psychosis to temporal lobe epilepsy" (Saunders and Fernyhough, (2017: 210). Therefore, it is not surprising that her memory was affected by these possible illnesses and what they brought about.

7.The traumatic memory of Margery's first childbirth leads her to develop symptoms of a postpartum depression (Finke, 1999: 178; McEntire, 1992: 56) and she suffers severely from visions, which may be the reason for Kempe's exclusion of Margery's role as a mother in The Book.

8.In this brief article, I analyze pilgrimage as a medium of power which was used by Margery as a means of empowering her identity as a spiritual authority. However, there are also articles which question Kempe's identity as a pilgrim such as Anne E. Bailey's (2020) "The Problematic Pilgrim: Ret-hinking Margery's Pilgrim Identity in The Book of Margery Kempe." Bailey (2020) examines

Margery Kempe's identity as a pilgrim and finds it very problematic in the medieval context.

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