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The *Swetenesse* of Confection: A Recipe for Spiritual Health in London, British

Library, Additional MS 61823, *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Laura Kalas Williams

I shall say what inordinat love is:
The furiosite and wodness of minde,
A instinguible brenning, fawting bliss,
A grete hungre insaciat to finde,
A dowcet [sweet] ille, a evel swetness blinde,
A right wonderfulle sugred swete erroure,
Withoute labor rest – contrary to kinde [nature] –
Or withoute quiete to have huge labour.¹

The writer of this medieval lyric could almost be describing the *swete*, “inordinat love” for God that Margery Kempe spends much of her *Book* striving to express. But while the poetics of incapacitating love here encapsulate the painful dichotomy of sweetness and affliction (“A

I am indebted to Andrea Clarke, Christina Duffy, and the Board of the British Library, who not only allowed me privileged access to B.L. Add. MS 61823 but generously supplied me with the multispectral images of the recipe folio. Grateful thanks are due to Eddie Jones, Daniel Wakelin and Susan Maddock for helping me to decipher and transcribe the recipe, and to Theresa Tyers, Liz Herbert McAvoy and Laura Varnam for their very helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to Sarah Salih and the two anonymous readers for SAC for their input and advice.

¹ DIMEV 2272. In *Middle English Lyrics*, ed. Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman, (New York: Norton, 1974), no. 76 (my emphasis).

dowcett ille”), it is the inextricability of the “euel sweetness” that functions as the source of its power. Such a sweet “errore” signifies something almost deviant, requiring “huge labour”, but that dangerous love is still “right wonderfule” – it is *sugared*, and all-consuming.² In medieval culture, as Mary Carruthers has shown, sweetness “is not just one thing, but has a contrarian nature that includes within itself its opposites: bitter, salt, and sour”. Like Eden’s tree of knowledge, the “sweet” cross upon which Jesus was nailed, and the sweet excesses of carnal desire, it is a “sensory oxymoron”, but one that is also a source of knowledge.³

In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, myriad references to God’s sweetness illustrate the sensual viscosity of Margery Kempe’s spiritual experience.⁴ To evoke the *swete* sounds, smells, and tastes of rapture helps her to go some way towards describing the ineffable, since the metaphor of the sweetness of Christ holds deep, symbolic value. She asks God how she might make her love “as swet to þe as me thynkyth þat thy loue is vn-to me” (157). She experiences with him such “swet dalyawnce”, or intimate, spiritual communion in her soul that it sustains her very existence, punctuating her day-to-day activity as she penitentially

² MED s.v. *error*, 4.a.

³ Mary Carruthers, “Sweetness”, *Speculum*, 81 (2006), 999-1013 (p. 1001). See also Rachel Fulton, “‘Taste and See That the Lord Is Sweet’ (Ps. 33:9): The Flavor of God in the Monastic West”, *Journal of Religion*, 86 (2006), 169-204, and Rosemary Hale, “‘Taste and See, for God is Sweet’: Sensory Perception and Memory in Medieval Christian Mystical Experience”, in Anne Clark Bartlett et. al., eds., *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 3-14.

⁴ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, EETS O.S. 212, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (London: Oxford University Press, 1997, unaltered reprint). All subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers will appear parenthetically in the text.

tends to “seke folk” or other *euyn-cristyn* (214).⁵ Mystical conversation makes her “mythy & strong in þe lofe of owr Lord”; it is so “swet and deuowt þat it ferd as sche had ben in an Heuyn” (215). And indeed, that paradisal state of perception is an early experience in her spiritual career, sensed first when she is in bed one night with her husband John. Hearing a melody so unearthly, “swet and delectable”, Kempe imagines that she must be in heaven: a taste, she discovers, of the ultimate paradise that is promised when Christ will “take þi sowle fro þi bodd wyth gret myrthe & melodye, wyth swet smellys & good odowrys, & offyr it to my Fadyr in Heuyn, þer þu xalt se hym face to face, wonyng wyth hum wythowtyn ende” (51-2). The heady aesthetics of these sweet smells and odours, combined with the medieval understanding of sweet odours as having health-giving properties, means that Kempe reaches a new spiritual zenith.⁶ Having experienced such a paradise, she is concomitantly repulsed by sexual contact with John, the knowledge of bliss so overpowering that its antithesis – carnality – now appears more bitter and repugnant to her senses. The sort of intense sensory perceptions that occur after her trip to Rome, once she is free of the marriage debt and has been mystically married to the Godhead, frequently conflate in synaesthetic amalgamation – they are sensed physiologically by the body’s faculties yet perceived as being beyond the earth, and so overpowering that she becomes deaf to all human speech:

Sum-tyme sche felt swet smellys wyth hir nose; it wer swettar, hir thowt, þan euyr was ony swet erdly thyng þat sche smellyd be-forn, ne sche myth neuyr tellyn how swet it wern, for hir thowt sche myth a leuyd þerby ʒyf they wolde a lestyde. Sum-

⁵ MED s.v. *daliaunce*: 1) Polite, leisurely, intimate conversation. 2) Serious, edifying, or spiritual conversation; communion. 3) Amorous talk or to-do, flirting, sexual union.

⁶ See Carole Rawcliffe, “‘Delectable Sightes and Fragrant Smelles’: Gardens and Health in Late Medieval and Early Modern England”, *Garden History*, 36 (2008), 3-21.

tyme sche herd wyth hir bodily erys sweche sowndys & melodijs þat sche myth not wel heryn what a man seyde to hir in þat tyme les he spoke þe lowder (87-8).

In *dalyawnce* with God, Margery Kempe *feels* smells, she *tastes* them as “sweet”. She also receives other auditory “tokenys” of divine love: the sound of blowing bellows; the songs of doves and robins (90-1). She *sees* “white thyngys” flying around her like motes in the sunlight, and is told, through spiritual conversation, that they signify that very communion, that “it is God þat spekyth in þe, for wher-so God is Heuyn is, & wher þat God is þer be many awngelys, & *God is in þe & þu art in hym*” (my emphasis, 88). The fire of *inordinat* love that she feels in her breast, in the tradition of other mystical writings such as Richard Rolle’s *Incendium Amoris*, which Kempe knew, is explained by God as the work of the holy trinity.⁷ As an esoteric ‘confection’ – that is, a compound of often-medicinal ingredients, also associated with the consecration of the host – this love lives and burns *inside* her soul.⁸ Her reward will be extra-sensory experience: “þu xalt heryn þat þu neuyr herdyst, & þu xalt se þat þu neuyr sey, & þu xalt felyn þat þu neuyr feltist” (89).

The recipe on folio 124v of British Library, Additional MS 61823, the contents of which I uncover here, was inserted by a late-fifteenth-century or early-sixteenth-century reader of the *Book* and is, I argue, redolent with such significations of confection, sweetness,

⁷ *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Margaret Deanesly (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1915).

⁸ MED s.v. *confeccioun* (n.): 1. Preparation of a medicine, etc., by mixing ingredients in a prescribed manner. Anything prepared by mixing ingredients, such as (a) a compound medicine or potion; also, any remedy; (c) any other mixture or concoction. DMLBS s.v. *confectio*: 1. putting together, construction. 2. compound of various drugs or sim. (c) confection, comfit, sweetmeat. 3. (usu. w. *corporis Christi*) consecration of the host.

and spiritual health.⁹ As a recipe for digestive *dragges*, or dragées, it is rich with sugar and spice, suggesting a wealthy site of monastic holiness and health. It thus offers a lens through which to explore the sweetness of confection and divine love in the *Book*. The hot spices, used to correct a cold and moist physiological constitution, are at the same time a means of stoking the hot fire of love that is played out in the *Book*. But the recipe imbues more than metaphorical signification. In the Middle Ages, the moral properties of food were imbricated with its ingestion. In consuming a foodstuff, one would take on some of its associated properties (the Eucharistic wafer as an obvious example).¹⁰ As Christina Mazzoni has noted, the Bible presents the promised land as a land of milk and honey, teeming with fertility and nourishment.¹¹ In the *Song of Songs*, the male speaker expresses love for his beloved through images of sweetness, spices and aromatics, constructing an implicit connection between his deep yearning and inebriation with the delicacies: “I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse, I have gathered my myrrh, with my aromatical spices: I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk” (Song of Solomon 5:1). Here, the garden is the site of the bridegroom’s satiation, and there follow echoes of Margery Kempe’s rich and sensuous experience of Christic love. But Kempe yearns for a more interiorised union. She prays for the divine incorporation of his love with sweet spices inside

⁹ A working transcription of the recipe was reported in *The Guardian* (“Recipe found in medieval mystic’s writings was probably for ‘dragges’”, 28th February 2017) and in the *BBC History Magazine* (“Medicinal Recipe found in mystic’s manuscript”, April 2017, 12-13). The dating of the annotator’s hand is according to Sanford Brown Meech. See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, xlv.

¹⁰ See C.M. Woolgar, “Food and the Middle Ages”, *Journal of Medieval History*, 36 (2010), 1-19 (8).

¹¹ Christina Mazzoni, *The Women in God’s Kitchen: Cooking, Eating, and Spiritual Writing* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), 50.

her very soul, as a fitting, and healthy site for Christ's habitation, and illustrative of her own understanding of sugar and spice as a conduit for spiritual ecstasy and health:

And þan þu [Kempe] preyist my blissyd Modyr, Mary Mawdelyn, alle apostelys,
martiry, confessorys, Kateryne, Margaret, & alle holy virginys þat þei xulde arayn
þe chawmbre of þi sowle wyth many fayr flowerys & wyth many *swete spicys* þat I
myth restyn þerin (my emphasis, 210).

Though readers of the *Book of Margery Kempe* have sought to pathologise her manner of devotion since the discovery of the manuscript in 1934, that is not my methodological aim here.¹² Conversely, I wish to suggest that the *Book* is not an 'illness

¹² For examples of 'diagnoses' of Kempe, see Herbert Thurston, "Margery the Astonishing", in *The Month*, 168 (1936), 446-56; David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (London: Burns and Oates, 1961), 138-150; Hope Phyllis Weissman, "Margery Kempe in Jerusalem: Hysterica Compassio in the Late Middle Ages", in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in its Contexts 700 – 1600, Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1982), 201-17; and Maureen Fries, "Margery Kempe", in *An Introduction to The Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 217-35. Also see Mary Hardman Farley, "Her own creatur: religion, feminist criticism, and the functional eccentricity of Margery Kempe", *Exemplaria*, 11 (1999), 1-21; Richard Lawes, "The Madness of Margery Kempe" in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Ireland and Wales, Exeter Symposium VI, Papers Read at Charney Manor, July 1991*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 147-68; Richard Lawes, "Psychological Disorder and the Autobiographical Impulse in Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Thomas Hoccleve", in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 217 – 243. Also Nancy P. Stork, "Did Margery Kempe suffer from Tourette's Syndrome?", *Mediaeval Studies*, 59 (1997), 261-300, and Becky R. Lee, "The Medieval Hysteric and the Psychedelic Psychologist: A Revaluation of the Mysticism of Margery Kempe in the Light of the

narrative' or indeed a portrait of disorder, but instead a revelation of divine love (to coin the titular designation of Julian of Norwich's writings) brought about by a curative paradigm of affective union – or confection – with God.¹³ Indeed, the *topos* of spiritual joy and intoxication has its roots in a long tradition of mystical discourse on sweetness, seen in Richard Rolle's emphasis on *dulcor* as central for spiritual amelioration, for example. In fact, with particular resonance for Kempe's *Book* and my present focus, Nicholas Watson observes that in Rolle's work, "[t]he elect are those who violently love God; the violence of their love compels them to cry out; those who cry out most loudly and most eloquently are those who love most continually. Here we have a *recipe* not only for exalting Rolle's sanctity, but for defining his literary output explicitly in terms of evangelism".¹⁴ Similarly, the Cistercian sensuality that Wolfgang Riehle regards as being predicated on sweetness and influential upon many medieval devotional writers leads him to conclude that sweetness is "an essential

Transpersonal Psychology of Stanislav Grof", *Studia Mystica*, 23 (2002), 102-26. Conversely, on the social construction of illness, see Juliette Vuille, "'Maybe I'm Crazy?' Diagnosis and Contextualisation of Medieval Female Mystics", in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Naöe Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), 103-20.

¹³ On the methodological approach of 'illness narrative' in the medical humanities field see, for example, "Narrative, Pain, and Suffering": Special Issue, ed. Martha Stoddard Holmes and Tod Chambers, *Literature and Medicine*, 24, (Spring 2005); Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and "Narratives of Illness", in Thomas R. Cole, Nathan S. Carlin and Ronald A. Carson, eds., *Medical Humanities: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 125-137.

¹⁴ My emphasis. Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 159.

aspect of English mysticism in general”.¹⁵ Yet, surprisingly, no work has been conducted on this feature in relation to Margery Kempe’s spirituality.¹⁶ I therefore suggest, first, that the recipe in the manuscript offers a powerful metaphor through which to understand the sweetness of Kempe’s confection with Christ and its centrality to her journey towards eschatological perfection. Second, whether consciously or otherwise, I argue that the recipe annotator inserted the remedy for *dragges* as a means of enhancing – or acknowledging – the medical subtext of the *Book*. And third, since Kempe herself functions as a type of medicinal candy, or *comfete*, via her caregiving praxes which are themselves made possible by her *swete dalyawnce* with God, the *Book* itself becomes an object of healing potential for subsequent readers who themselves witness the “dowcet ille” of Margery Kempe’s profound love for her beloved, Christ. As Rebecca Krug has recently demonstrated, the *Book*’s creation as a work of collective comfort, a “communal impulse” – as Krug puts it – to share her “devotional intensity” in order for her readers to experience solace, the recipe adds a further dimension to the affective reader-response.¹⁷ As a medico-religious addendum, the recipe at the end of the manuscript evidences a later reader who connected Kempe’s spiritual journey with a medicinal, sweet remedy, and offered a way for her transformational narrative to be ‘ingested’, and internalised. Like the prophet, John, who eats the heavenly scroll and experiences at once a sweet taste in his mouth and a bitterness in his stomach, holy medicine

¹⁵ Wolfgang Riehle, *The Secret Within: Hermits, Recluses, and Spiritual Outsiders in Medieval England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 33.

¹⁶ Rebecca Krug has recently pointed to some devotional works which concern sweetness (for example, *The Prickyng of Love* and *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*) in relation to the *Book* and its function as a work of consolation, but the particular aspect of sweetness is undeveloped. See Rebecca Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 33-4.

¹⁷ Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader*, 55.

can be experienced as *swete* whilst simultaneously effecting the bitterness of excess; a simultaneous joy, and moral lesson:

And I went to the angel, saying unto him, that he should give me the book. And he said to me: Take the book, and eat it up: and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey. And I took the book from the hand of the angel, and ate it up: and it was in my mouth, sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it, my belly was bitter (Apocalypse 10:9-10).

Indeed, the homogeneity of spiritual and bodily health plays out in the *Book* as audibly and resonantly by its close as Kempe's loud weeping: a focus that we are given in the Proem which tells how it is a story of Kempe's journey from sickness to health, "tyl ower Lord be grace restoryd her a-geyn" (2). The first part of this article will therefore reveal the recipe and its medico-religious meanings. The second part will analyse two episodes of Kempe's care-giving – her kissing and communing with the sick, and the nursing of her infirm husband, John – which I suggest to be at once inspired by, and contributory towards, her *swete* confection with God. As an addition of multivalent properties, then, the recipe will be shown to be symbolic of the love, affliction, dalliance, heat and sweetness written into the *Book* – and a way through which we might understand what these phenomena mean in the medieval imaginary. Its inclusion in the manuscript might, then, be regarded in itself, as medicine for the soul.

Reading the Recipe Religiously

The term 'confection' has been associated, historically, with pharmaceuticals. The Latin term *confectio* means a "putting together, or construction", and "a compound of various drugs... a

sweatmeat or comfit”,¹⁸ while an apothecary (fifteenth-century, *apotecary*; late Latin, *apothēcārius*) denotes “one who kept a store or shop of non-perishable commodities, spices, drugs, comfits, preserves, etc”.¹⁹ Dragges, in Middle English, or *dragées*, known for their value as digestives, were concocted according to the art of the apothecary.²⁰ The recipe contains a considerable quantity of sugar, which was understood to be medicinal in the Middle Ages, indicating their highly sweet and curative nature. In Middle English, *swete* can mean taste, but also smell, sound, pleasure, a beloved, God and the saints, and preciousness.²¹ The meaning of *sweetness* can thus be at once sensory, emotive, and figurative. In John Trevisa’s Middle English translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, which was widely circulated and popularised medical scholasticism in the fourteenth century, sweet flavours that are *pure* “by kynde [nature]” are noted to be beneficial for bodily health. Sweetness is restorative and softens the body with moisture; it “restoreþ in þe body þinge þat is lost, and most conforterþ feble vertues and spirites, and norissheþ speciallich all þe membres”.²² Sweetness is also the “heed” and “welle” of all the flavours, just as white is the

¹⁸ See n. 8.

¹⁹ OED s.v. apothecary.

²⁰ MED *dragge* (n.2): 1.(a) A sweet confection, sweetmeat; a sweet sauce or condiment; (b) a sweet medicinal preparation. Liliane Plouver notes that “‘épices’...elles désignent des confiseries aux vertus digestives préparées selon les règles de l’art par les apothicaires, don les très prisées ‘dragées’”. See “À la Table des Grands-Ducs d’Occident”, in *La Noblesse à Table. Des ducs de Bourgogne aux rois des Belges*, ed. Paul Janssens and Siger Zeischka (Upa: Vubpress, 2008), 94-103 (101). With thanks to Theresa Tyers for this reference.

²¹ MED s.v. *swete* (adj).

²² *On the Properties of Things*: John Trevisa’s translation of *Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum*, ed. M.C. Seymour (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Vol. II, Bk. XIX, cap. xliv, 1307.

head and source of all the colours. It is thus a “frende” to the “spiritual membres” of the body as it

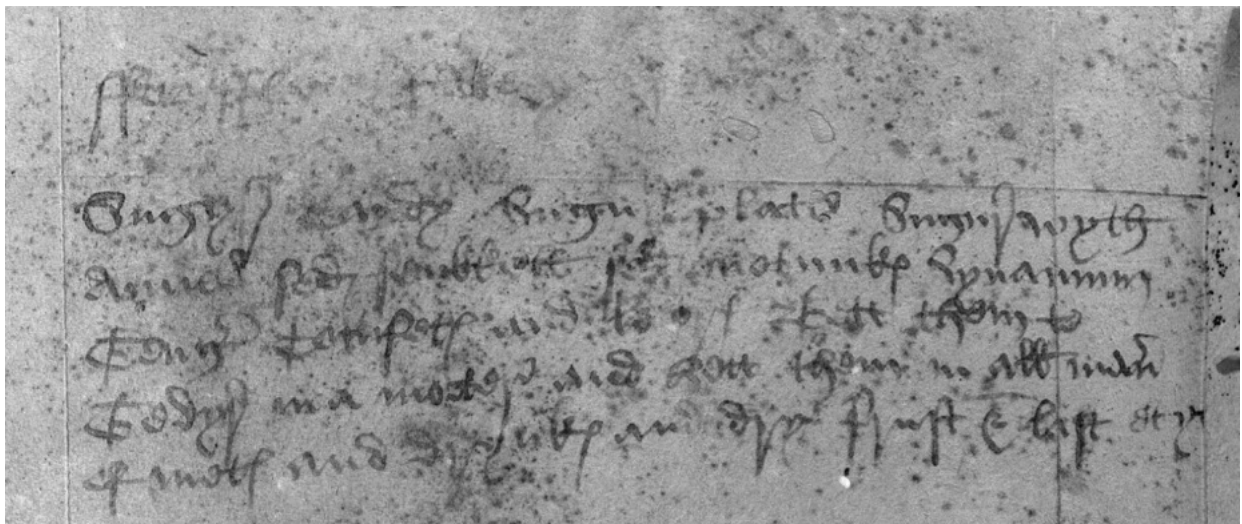
... easeth hem and doþ away alle rowþnesse þerof, and clereþ þe voice and cleanseþ þe wosen [tubes or arteries] of [al] superfluyte, and openeþ the pypes [windpipe] and wosen of þe longe [lung] and of þe brest [chest], and doþ away alle vncleanesse of þe [wosen and of þe] þrote, and destroyeþ þe pose [catarrh] and superfluyte of humours aboute þe spiritual membres, and bringeþ alle þe lymes [limbs] of spirit and of lyf into due state and disposicioun, and abateþ alle swellyng of squinancy [quinsy or tonsillitis] and wastep stuffyng moysture in þe membres.²³

Sweetness can also, then, be therapeutic. Mazzoni has examined the intimate connection between the sweetness of God and medieval holy women’s practice of ingesting spices and sugar, focusing particularly on the sensual experience of Elisabeth of Schönau and the notion of *taste* as a distinctly gendered sense with feminine associations.²⁴ Certainly, that Bartholomaeus regards the efficacy of sweetness to reside in its moistening and softening properties indicates a direct association with the medieval understanding that a softened soul was required for spiritual receptivity. As Mary Carruthers has shown, tears in particular – an affective response associated with Margery Kempe, of course – were considered to be a vital remedy for a dry and barren soul by the early Christian writers, also through their softening

²³ *On the Properties of Things*, Vol. II, Bk. XIX, cap. Xliv, 1307.

²⁴ Christina Mazzoni, *The Women in God’s Kitchen*, especially Chapter Three, “How to Taste Sugar and Spice: The Flavors of Elisabeth of Schönau”, 48-58.

effect.²⁵ They also serve to cry away salty bitterness, leaving only sweetness in the heart and mind.²⁶ Aristotle noted how moisture was an essential prerequisite for the development of flavour and taste to even occur.²⁷ Indeed, Margery Kempe’s tears might be regarded as type of medicinal confection; after all, they are described as the drink of angels, and medicinally-potent: they are “very pyment to hem” (161).²⁸ The recipe, shown here in the form of a multispectral image and in transcription, can be considered in terms of the softening properties of sugar and Margery Kempe’s tears, and the hot, therapeutic spices which Kempe herself prays will line “þe chawmbre of [her] sowle”:



²⁵ Mary Carruthers, “On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument: Chaucer’s Lachrymose Troilus in Context”, *Representations*, 93 (2006), 1-21 (7).

²⁶ Carruthers, “Sweetness”, 1001.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ MED s.v. piment: a sweetened, spiced wine used for refreshment and in medical recipes; a medicinal potion. Kempe also offers a pyment to Saint Elizabeth in her vision of the birth of John the Baptist. See *BMK*, 18.

Enhanced detail of recipe on f.124v of British Library MS 61823 using multispectral imaging technology, with thanks to the Board of the British Library



Enhanced detail of the bottom of the recipe folio of BL Additional MS 61823, as above.

Transcription:

For Fleg²⁹ take

Sugyr candy Sugur plate Sugur wyth'

Annis sed fenkkell sed notmik' Synamum

Geng' Comfet' and I[?icoris] Bett them to

Gedyr' in a morter' and zett³⁰ them in all' man[er]

of met' and drynk' and dry frist & last et yt

[]ger candy sug[?u]r pla[?te] ³¹

²⁹ 'Fleg' is a likely derivation of phlegm. There is space for further letters after the 'g'. Possibly 'flegmon': MED s.v. flegmon; an inflammation caused by an excess of blood and phlegm.

³⁰ MED s.v. setten. Also zetzen; zete; zette: 1 a) To make. 2 a) To move into a certain place; cause to be in a place or position; to put or lay somewhere.

³¹ These hastily-written words feature at the foot of the page. They are perhaps the annotator's first attempt to write the recipe, which was begun again near the top where there was more space to write.

The recipe³² is extremely faint (probably the result of its hasty annotation or the use of inadequate or inferior ink), the folio partially damaged, and there has been some prior restoration which obscures some of the writing.³³ Until now, its full contents and purpose have remained decidedly elusive.³⁴ However, with the aid of the British Library's multispectral imaging technology it has been possible to decipher the recipe, which I suggest to be for remedial sugar-candy, or dragées. That the recipe begins, “*for fleg—*” (probably ‘phlegm’) confirms that the sugar-candy was medicinal.³⁵ As the transcription shows, it

³² Translation:

For Phlegm take –
Sugar candy, sugar plate, sugar with
Aniseed, fennel seed, nutmeg, cinnamon,
Ginger comfetes and licorice. Beat them
together in a mortar and make them in all
manner of food and drinks and dry first and last eat it.
[Sugar candy, sugar plate]

³³ As well as a faint title above the top margin, there is also some writing underneath the bottom margin on the folio, which is only partly visible due to the damage and subsequent restoration of this section.

³⁴ Apart from the note of the recipe's existence in EETS o.s. 212, the only scholarly references about which I am aware, are Kelly Parsons, “The Red Ink Annotator of The Book of Margery Kempe and His Lay Audience”, in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 2001), 143-216 (153-4), and Johanne Paquette, “Male Approbation in the Extant Glosses to the Book of Margery Kempe”, in *Women and the Divine in Literature before 1700: Essays in Memory of Margot Louis*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Victoria: ELS Editions, 2009), 153-69 (158). Gail McMurray Gibson speculates that the recipe might be for a caudel in *Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 51.

³⁵ MED s.v. flegm.

comprises plentiful sugar (and “sugar plate”), plus cinnamon, ginger, aniseed, fennel and nutmeg, which were combined, heated, shaped into sweets, and dried.

Dragges, which derive from the Latin *tragēmata*, means an item used to ‘dredge’ or clear. These common medicinal confections aided digestion and cleansed the body, and were used since the time of ancient Rome.³⁶ The ‘digestives’ were frequently offered at the end of a meal, especially as food in the Middle Ages was not always fresh, or temperately-balanced. A phlegmatic constitution was the product of an excess of the humour, phlegm, in the body, and was associated with coldness and moisture. It encompassed not only phlegm but all of the clear fluids in the body and had an “expulsive virtue”, responsible for the elimination of impurities and the transportation of vital nutrients around the body. Since the medieval diet was high in fish, a cold and humid food which might exacerbate a phlegmatic constitution, the heat of the spices in the *dragges* at the end of the meal would correct bodily temperature and deodorise the breath.³⁷ They were sometimes offered in the form of whole seeds of, perhaps, coriander, fennel or aniseed, and for those who could afford the ingredients, the seeds were often cooked in sugar, producing a *comfit*. Sometimes (as with the recipe in MS Add. 61823), the spices were ground up and mixed with ‘sugar plate’ (a malleable sugar paste often made with gum dragon), forming medicinal sweets for postprandial ingestion. Their purpose was both therapeutic and preventative, to relieve and to anticipate digestive

³⁶ MED s.v. dragge: see n.20. See also OED s.v. dredge, n.2: 1) A sweetmeat; a comfit containing a seed or grain of spice; a preparation made of a mixture of spices; cf. dragée.

³⁷ See D. Serjeantson and C.M. Woolgar, “Fish Consumption in Medieval England”, in *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Consumption*, ed. C.M. Woolgar, D. Serjeantson, and T. Waldron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 102-30.

problems.³⁸ In Harleian MS 279, similar, hot spices are ground and used in powdered form to sprinkle on a “good soup”.³⁹ The multiple accounts of meals and suppers enjoyed by Kempe with ‘worthy’ folk during her peregrinations leaves it inconceivable that she would not have consumed dragges herself. Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat explains how “[s]pices were first valued for their antiseptic qualities as well as their aromas’, and ‘[t]o the medieval doctors, as to the theologians... cookery was chiefly a matter of dietetics, with the object of preserving the physical and mental health of a body kindly provided by God”.⁴⁰ Indeed, the interrelation of food and health meant that the strict order of courses to be served at mealtimes was considered a *natural* sequence. The fifteenth-century cookery collection the *Liber Cure Concorum* states that it is a *rule* that heavy foods should be consumed first, “And most daynte, come byhynde: / Pys is a rewle mad in *kynde*”.⁴¹ Dainty, or delicate dishes, like small sweets of ‘sugar-coated nuts and spices’ would, then, be eaten last, in *kynde*, for this is how

³⁸ *Comfits* were sometimes provided by affluent hosts for their guests as take-away gifts in decorative boxes. Known as bedroom, or chamber spices, they were a bedtime ritual. See Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, *A History of Food*, trans. Anthea Bell (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 486.

³⁹ “And þan make a dragge of powder Gyngere, Sugre, canel, Clowes, Maces, an caste þer-on When it is y-dressid, an serue þanne forth for a potage gode”. From *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery Books. Harleian MS. 279 and Harleian MS. 4016, with extracts from Ashmole MS. 1439, Laud MS. 553, & Douce MS. 55*, ed. Thomas Austin, EETS o.s. 91 (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, unaltered reprint, 2000), 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁴¹ My emphasis. *Liber Cure Concorum*, copied and edited from BL MS Sloane 1986, Richard Morris (Berlin: A. Asher, 1862). MED s.v. kinde: 1a) The aggregate of inherent qualities or properties of persons, animals, plants, elements, medicines, etc.; essential character; the nature of emotions, attributes, and the like; after the flesh, according to bodily nature.

the inherent essence, or nature, of the body, is maintained.⁴² As Hieatt and Butler note, medical manuscripts often included recipes for drinks and confections. In BL MS Harley 2378, a late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century *medical* manuscript, there is a recipe for “Anneys in counfyte” [aniseed in comfit]. After a detailed description of how to stir, heat, beat and cool the sugar and aniseed, finally pouring it into “cofyne” [little cases or containers], the writer suggests that the same recipe might be adapted with “careaway, colyandre, fenell, and all maner round confeccions, and gyngour in counfyte”.⁴³ Such spiced digestives are discussed by Thomas Aquinas (d.1274) in relation to fasting practices. He is clear in the *Summa Theologiae* that fasting should not harm bodily health or the ability to perform one’s duties.⁴⁴ Since *digestives* [*electuaria*] were considered to be medicines, not food, they were exempt from periods of fasting:

Although digestives nourish somewhat they are not taken chiefly for nourishment, but for digestion. Hence one does not break one’s fast by taking them or any other medicines, unless one were to take digestives, with a fraudulent intention, in great quantity and by way of food. [Ad tertium dicendum quod electuaria, etsi aliquo modo nutriant, non tamen principaliter assumuntur ad nutrimentum, sed ad digestionem ciborum. Unde non solvunt ieiunium, sicut nec aliarum medicinarum assumptio, nisi forte aliquis in fraudem electuaria in magna quantitate assumat per modum cibi].⁴⁵

⁴² From *Curye on Inglysch*, ed. Constance B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler, EETS ss. 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4-5.

⁴³ From *Cure on Inglysch*, 151. MED s.v. cofin: 2) A chest, box, or case (as for keeping treasures, documents, relics, sweetmeats, etc.). 3a) A pastry crust or casing, a coffin; cote; (b) a shell.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q. 147, Art. 1, Reply to Obj. 2.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q. 147, Art. 6, Reply to Obj. 3.

Indeed, confectionary was traditionally the domain of the apothecary, which might explain Aquinas' view that dragges are medicinal. *Drageoires* were containers, or trays for dragges at the end of meals, or cupboards, often found in apothecaries, in which dragges were stored.⁴⁶ The properties of food were used to maintain bodily health, as is evident in the many of the regimens of health which gained popularity from the second half of the thirteenth century. By the first half of the fourteenth century, university physicians such as Bernard of Gordon (fl. 1283-1308) and Arnald of Villanova (b.c. 1240), were producing regimen which would have significant impact, influenced largely by the *Canon of Medicine* of the authoritative Arabic physician, Avicenna (b.c. 980).⁴⁷ From the mid fourteenth century, the genre surged; a result of the new urban classes and the regimen's translation into the vernaculars.⁴⁸ Aldobrandino of Siena's *Les Régimes du corps* (1256) classified food under the four headings of cold, hot, dry and wet – not because of the consistency or temperature of the foods themselves but because of their properties – which helped to rebalance humoral disequilibrium. Hot spices, for example, were to be eaten in cold weather.⁴⁹ Such warming, spiced comfits would have thus provided an apt counteractant for Kempe's cold and moist female constitution, made colder still perhaps by her high consumption of fish during periods of fasting from meat. In fact, a cold constitution, associated with the humour of black bile and

⁴⁶ I am grateful to Theresa Tyers for this reference. See Godefroy s.v. drageoir: sorte du soucoupe dans laquelle on servait des dragées sur la fin du repas.

⁴⁷ See Pedro Gil Sotres, "The Regimens of Health", in *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. Mirko D. Grmek, trans. Antony Shugaar (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 291-318 (301-2).

⁴⁸ Sotres, "The Regimens of Health", 302.

⁴⁹ Aldobrandino of Siena, *Régime des corps*, ed. R. Pepin (Paris: Landouzy, 1911). Cited from Toussaint-Samat, *A History of Food*, 486.

therefore a melancholic disposition, was connected to digestive disorders by Aristotle.⁵⁰ He wrote that “melancholy, both the humour and the temperament, produce air; wherefore the physicians say that flatulence and abdominal disorders are due to black bile”.⁵¹

As a warming spice, aniseed, or anise, was used to balance coldness in the body, as well as functioning as a diuretic. It has been highly valued from biblical times, when it was used as a form of tithe.⁵² Bernard of Gordon prescribes anise for stomach indigestion arising from a “cold humoral disorder”.⁵³ Ginger is another spice with warming qualities. In the *Physica*, Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) states, “But, one whose body is dry and almost failing should pulverize ginger and consume the powder in broth, on an empty stomach” [Sed qui in corpore aridus est, et jam fere deficit, ingewer pulverizet, et in *suffen* pulverem istum jejunos modice sumat, et etiam cum pane ejus interdum modice comedat, et meliorabitur]. Similarly, “one who suffers constipation in his stomach or intestines should pulverize ginger and mix it with a little sap of bugloss” [Sed et qui constipationem in stomacho et in ventre patitur, zinziberum pulverizet, et cum modico succo ancusae pulverem istum commisceat]. Indeed, “a person who suffers from any stomach ailment should pulverize ginger” and consume it “after a meal and at night, when going to bed” [et post cibum pulverem istum in

⁵⁰ On Margery Kempe’s cold, melancholic constitution, see Laura Kalas Williams, “‘Slayn for Goddys lofe’: Margery Kempe’s Melancholia and the Bleeding of Tears”, *Medieval Feminist Forum*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2016), 84-100.

⁵¹ Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (London: Nelson, 1964), 21.

⁵² Matthew 23:23: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you tithe mint, and anise, and cumin, and have left the weightier things of the law”.

⁵³ Bernard of Gordon, *Lilium medicinae, Particula 5*, c. 3, trans. Faith Wallis in *Medieval Medicine: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 280.

vinum ponat; et sic bibat, et etiam ad noctem, cum dormitum vadit; et sic saepe faciat, et in stomacho melius habebit].⁵⁴ Cinnamon, also warming, is advised in the most widely-circulated gynaecological text of the later Middle Ages, the *Sickness of Women*, to treat illnesses of the heart due to cold – heart attack, fainting, and the flux.⁵⁵ All three of these hot spices – anise, ginger, and cinnamon – are employed in this text together in a recipe, mixed with sugar, and used to prevent vomiting.⁵⁶ Fennel was employed mostly as a diuretic, purgative or digestive aid. Hildegard recommends fennel for “making... digestion good” [atque bonam digestionem facit] and for “diminish[ing] bad phlegm and decaying matter” [Nam qui feniculum aut semen ejus jejunos quotidie comedit, malum flegma aut putredines in eo minuit].⁵⁷ *De Ornatu Mulierum* [On Women’s Cosmetics], one of the *Trotula* texts, also recommends fennel for cleansing the mouth and whitening the teeth: “let her chew each day fennel or lovage or parsley, which is better to chew because it gives off a good smell and cleans good gums and makes the teeth very white” [masticet cottidie feniculum uel leuisticum uel Petroselinum, quod melius est masticare, quia bonum reddit odorem et bonas

⁵⁴ Sancta Hildegardis Abbatisa, “Physica, cujus titulus ex cod. ms.: Subtilitatum diversarum naturarum creaturarum libri novem”, Cap. XV, Cols. 1135-6, in *Opera Omnia*, PL 197 <<http://0-pld.chadwyck.co.uk.lib.exeter.ac.uk/>> [accessed 20th March 2017]. Translation from Hildegard von Bingen’s *Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Rochester: Healing Arts Press, 1998), 17-8.

⁵⁵ *The Sickness of Women*, ed. Monica H. Green and Linne R. Mooney, in *Sex, Aging and Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium: A Medieval Compendium of Women’s Medicine: Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52, Its Texts, Language, and Scribe*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina, Vol. 2 (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 455-568 (499).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 545-6.

⁵⁷ Sancta Hildegardis Abbatisa, “Physica, cujus titulus ex cod. ms”, Cap. LXVI, Col. 1156, *Op. cit.* Trans. from Throop, *Physica*, 39.

gingiuas emundat et dentes facit albissimos].⁵⁸ And nutmeg was seen as having great heat, [Nax muscata magnum calorem habet], providing the operation of ‘opening’ the body’s mechanisms, particularly the heart, and also freeing the brain and judgement, from obstruction [Et si homo nucemmusatam ejus purificat, ac bonum ingenium illi infert].⁵⁹

The popularity of *dragges* as medical remedies can be seen through their appearance in texts from diverse genres. A recipe for “a gude *dragy* for grauele in þe bleddir” (sediment in the bladder), containing similar ingredients to the recipe in B.L. Additional MS 61823, features in the *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, a popular mid-fifteenth-century medical text:

Tak annys sede, fenkell sede, percell sede, comyn, careaway sede, gromelle sede, papworthe, philipendula, chereplane kynells, pyons, clenched radkit, mynt sede, fawthistyll sede ana, & lycoryse þat suffice & mak a dragie þer-of & vse it.⁶⁰

To make a lozenge-style purgative, Hildegard of Bingen recommends a combination of ginger, licorice, zedoary (*Curcuma zedoaria*, or white turmeric) and sugar, along with a little flour and soapwort, to make what she terms a “little cake” [“tortellum”].⁶¹ Indeed, in the medieval poem, *Piers Plowman*, it is stated that one might “...dryuen away deeth with dyas

⁵⁸ *De Ornatu Mulierum* [On Women’s Cosmetics], in *The Trotula*, ed. and trans. Monica Green (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 186-7.

⁵⁹ Sancta Hildegardis Abbatisa, “Physica, cujus titulus ex cod. ms”, Cap. XXI, Col. 1139, Op. cit. Trans. from Throop, *Physica*, 17-8.

⁶⁰ The *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, in the Thornton Manuscript, c. after 1422, (MS. Lincoln Cathedral A.5.2), ed. Margaret Sinclair Ogden, EETS O.S. 207 (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 50.

⁶¹ Sancta Hildegardis Abbatisa, “Physica, cujus titulus ex cod. ms.”, Cap. XV, Cols. 1137A-1137B, Op. cit. Trans. from Throop, *Physica*, 18-19. Thanks to Liz Herbert McAvoy for this reference.

and dragges”.⁶² And such post-prandial confections are also mentioned in Chaucer’s Middle English translation of *Le Roman de la Rose*, when guests are offered “many spices delitable, To eten whan men rise fro table”.⁶³

While the content and purpose of the recipe is now evident, what we might deduce from its inclusion about the *Book*’s ownership and transmission is less clear. Through her consideration of the recipe, and the previously-known ingredients of sugar and cinnamon, as “luxury items certainly at odds with the extreme austerity of Carthusian monastic life”, Kelly Parsons has argued that the annotation of a recipe containing expensive ingredients indicates a lay readership outside of Mount Grace.⁶⁴ Johanne Paquette has concurred, aligning the “possible lay use of the codex around the same time as the red ink annotator’s work on the manuscript”.⁶⁵ We know that the *Book* was held at the Carthusian priory of Mount Grace

⁶² *The vision of Piers Plowman*, William Langland, (London, J.M. Dent and New York, E.P. Dutton: 1978), B text, 20.174 < <http://www.hti.umich.edu/c/cme/>> [accessed 23rd January 2017].

⁶³ *La Roman de la Rose*, ll. 1371-2. At <<http://ummutility.umm.maine.edu/necastro/chaucer/texts/rom/roma07.html>> [accessed 23rd January 2017].

⁶⁴ Kelly Parsons, “The Red Ink Annotator of The Book of Margery Kempe and His Lay Audience”, in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 2001), 143-216 (158).

⁶⁵ Johanne Paquette, “Male Approbation in the Extant Glosses to the Book of Margery Kempe”, in *Women and the Divine in Literature before 1700: Essays in Memory of Margot Louis*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Victoria: ELS Editions, 2009), 153-69 (158). For scholarship on the *Book*’s annotator(s), (but not the recipe) see Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, “Handling *The Book of Margery Kempe*: The Corrective Touches of the Red Ink Annotator”, in *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson and Sarah Baechle (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 138-58. See also Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, “Professional Readers at Work: Annotators, Editors, and Correctors in Middle English Literary Texts”, in *Opening up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary*

owing to the notation designating ownership at the top of the verso of the binding leaf (f.iv-v) which states “Liber Montis Gracie. This boke is of Mountegrace”.⁶⁶ While this notation is, like the recipe, written in a late fifteenth-century hand, upon my inspection of the manuscript it does not appear to be the hand of the same annotator. It is possible that another resident at Mount Grace supplied the recipe, especially since there were extensive monastic herb gardens in use at the time, which have recently been partially recreated.⁶⁷ Anthony Bale has persuasively argued that manuscript’s scribe was Richard Salthouse of Norwich (d. before 1487), which has other implications for its location at this time. The final words of the *Book’s* only surviving manuscript are “Jhesu mercy quod Salthows”, and Bale has revealed that Richard Salthouse was a monk at Norwich’s Benedictine cathedral priory, “one of the country’s most important, powerful, and wealthy ecclesiastical institutions”.⁶⁸ Bale states that “We cannot rule out the possibility that Salthouse wrote the Kempe manuscript in Lynn, as a novice monk, although the fact that he had entered the priory at Norwich in 1443 favors a Norwich context based on the usual dating of the Kempe manuscript to the second half of the

and Visual Approaches, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo and Linda Olson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 207-44. Also, Pamela Robinson, “The Manuscript of the Book of Margery Kempe”, in *Recording Medieval Lives: Proceedings of the 2005 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Julia Boffey and Virginia Davis (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2005), 130-40.

⁶⁶ See James Hogg, “Mount Grace Charterhouse and Late Medieval Spirituality”, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 82 (1980), 1-43.

⁶⁷ See Susan Eberly, “A Restored Medieval Herb Garden at Mount Grace Priory”, unpublished paper at <https://www.academia.edu/3368024/A_Restored_Medieval_Herb_Garden_at_Mount_Grace_Priory> [accessed 27th February 2017].

⁶⁸ Anthony Bale, “Richard Salthouse of Norwich and the scribe of *The Book of Margery Kempe*”, *The Chaucer Review*, 52 (2017), 173-87 (177).

1440s”.⁶⁹ The Benedictines are known to have been considerably less austere than the Carthusians, and the added affluence of the Norwich priory adds to this context of plenty.⁷⁰ Notably, *Pimpinella anisum*, the aniseed plant, is notoriously difficult to cultivate in England apart from in East Anglia, and its inclusion in the recipe in Kempe’s *Book* might, then, corroborate Bale’s work.⁷¹ Certainly, his research enables us to place the manuscript more confidently in Norwich, and not only that, but in one of the most wealthy and prestigious religious houses of Europe. While the *Book*’s historical transmission is not my main concern here, that the recipe might have been added by a monk at Norwich adds richness to a reading that foregrounds the medico-religious significations at play.

The hermeneutics of spiritual health in the *Book*, enhanced by the recipe, are also evident from the medicalization of divine intervention in Kempe’s life-course. The Proem states “how charytefully [God] *meued & stered* a synful caytyf vn-to hys *love*, which synful caytyf many 3erys was in wyl and in purpose thorw steryng of þe Holy Gost to folwyn [oure]

⁶⁹ Bale, *ibid.*, 179. Julie Chappell has posited that the manuscript could have been held at the houses of Syon or Sheen in the late fifteenth century owing to their proximity to London, from where de Worde was printing redactions of the *Book*, suggesting that Kempe’s manuscript may have been acquired by de Worde from the Carthusians at Sheen after Margery Kempe visited the nuns at Syon Abbey in 1434. While her book is a thorough and interesting traverse through the *Book*’s history, I do not find these speculations fully persuasive. See Julie Chappell, *Perilous Passages: The Book of Margery Kempe, 1534-1934* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 25-7.

⁷⁰ It is recorded, for example, that the harvest workers of the priory received 2oz of cheese as part of their allowance: twice the daily quantity they might have had in a household of four that possessed one cow. See C.M. Woolgar, “Meat and Dairy Products in Late Medieval England”, in *Food in Medieval England*, 88-101 (97). See also Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in Later Medieval England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1995), 149-150.

⁷¹ Teresa McLean, *Medieval English Gardens*, (New York: Courier Corporation, 2014), 180.

Savyowr...” (my emphases, 1). Over her life, she is moved and steered towards divine love and spiritual health, guided on a trajectory from sin to salvation. To *steren* means primarily to guide, set in motion, or steer (including spiritually), but also to burn or offer incense, or to treat a sick person with the smoke or fume of a burning medicinal substance or preparation.⁷² Implicit in the opening section of the text, then, is the multivalence of spiritual and physical health in the Christian Middle Ages.⁷³ In fact, Kempe’s journey begins with the subversion of health and happiness, evidencing a reversal of fortune that culminates in her great bodily sickness and thus the paradoxical opportunity for transformation:

[God] *turnyd helth in-to sekenesse*, prosperyte in-to aduersyte, worship in-to repref, & love in-to hatered. Thus *alle þis thyngys turning vp-so-down*, þis creatur which many 3erys had gon wyl & euyr ben vnstable was parfythly drawen & steryd to entren þe way of hy perfeccyon, which parfyth wey Cryst ower Savyowr in hys propyr persoone examplyd. Sadly he trad it & dewly he went it befor. Than þis creatur, of whom thys tretys thorw þe mercy of Ihesu schal schewen in party þe leuyng, towched be þe hand of owyr Lord wyth grett bodyly sekenesse, wher-thorw sche lost reson &

⁷² MED s.v. *steren* (v.1 & v.2).

⁷³ On the tradition of *Christus medicus*, see *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture* ed. Naöe Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), especially Yoshikawa, “Introduction”, 1-24. Also, Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital, St. Giles’s, Norwich, c.1249-1550* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999); *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2001); John Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); and Daniel McCann, “Heaven and Health: Middle English Devotion to Christ in its Therapeutic Contexts”, in *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe: Diverse Imaginations of Christ’s Life*, ed. Ryan Perry and Stephen Kelly (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 335-362.

her wyttes a long tyme tyl ower Lord be grace restoryd her a-geyn, as it schal mor openly be shewed aftyrward (my emphases, 1-2).

As this extract makes clear, this “schort tretys and a comfortably” is intended to be understood as an account of Margery Kempe’s journey from sickness to health, with God as her physician. In reaching the depths of such an illness that “sche lost reson & her wyttes a long tym”, Kempe herself is *remade* and “restoryd” – mixed into his love, like a therapeutic recipe – by God’s redemptive medicine.

Furthermore, the oxymoronic concept of sickness and affliction as a sweet sign of spiritual privilege enriches Kempe’s depictions of her activities of care and cure. Chaucer’s Parson, for example, asserts that “peyne is sent by the rightwys sonde of God, and by his sufferance, be it meselrie, or mayhem, or maladie”.⁷⁴ St. Anselm (d. 1109) counselled the dying bishop of Rochester that “the progress of the soul grows out of the failure of the flesh”.⁷⁵ And *The Manere of Good Lyvyng*, addressing a community of nuns, states that “Suche as be strong and hool it ys profitable for them to be seke, les by the strength of bodely helth they rejoyse more in transitory and worldly thyngys than they ouzt to doo”. Addressing a “Reverent suster”, it advises “be ye not hevvy in your seknes but thanke God. Wysche ye to have the helth of the soule rather than of the bodye. The diseasis of the bodye be remedyes

⁷⁴ “The Parson’s Tale”, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 308, ll. 622-5.

⁷⁵ W. Frölich, ed., *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury I*, no. 53. From Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 55.

and medicyns of the soule”.⁷⁶ In a similar way the female, anchoritic audience of the *Ancrene Wisse* is advised that

Secnesse is a brune hat forte þolien, ah na þing ne clenseð gold as hit deð þe sawle.
Secnesse þet Godd send – nawt þet sum leched þurh hire ahne dusischiþe – deð þeose
six þinges: (i) wesheð þe sunnen þe beoð ear iwrahte, (ii) wardeð toþein þeo þe weren
towardses, (iii) pruuēð paciēce, (iii[i]) halt in eadmodnesse, (v) muchleð þe mede,
[(vi)] eueneð to martir þene þolemode. Þus is secnesse sawlene heale, salue of hire
wunden, schelde þat ha ne kecche ma, as Godd sið þet ha schulde ʒef secnesse hit ne
lette.⁷⁷

[Illness is a hot fire to bear, but nothing purifies gold as it does the soul. Illness that
God sends – not what a woman may come down with through her own foolishness –
does these six things: (i) washes away the sins that have already been committed, (ii)
protects against those that were about to be, (iii) tests patience, (iv) maintains
humility, (v) increases the reward, (vi) makes whoever bears it patiently equal to a

⁷⁶ The XLIII exhortation in *The Manere of Good Lyvyng: A Middle English Translation of Pseudo-Bernard's Liber de mono bene vivendi ad sororem*, ed. Anne E. Mouron (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 125-7. The text is a Middle English translation of the late-twelfth or early-thirteenth century treatise the *Liber de modo bene vivendi ad sororem* which was often attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1175) and which instructs a community of nuns (probably those at Syon Abbey) that sickness should be embraced as a divine gift. It was known as a favourite contemplative text by Bridget of Sweden, who played an important role in diffusing its popularity elsewhere. See “Introduction”, in *The Manere of Good Lyvyng*, 1-40.

⁷⁷ *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with variants from other Manuscripts*, Bella Millett, EETS o.s. 325 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Part 4, section 7, 69.

martyr. In this way illness is the soul's salvation, an ointment for its wounds, a shield against its receiving more, as God sees that it would if illness did not prevent it.]⁷⁸

Illness is therefore, paradoxically, *medicine* for the soul. It cleanses sin, provides a moral prophelactic, paves the route towards martyrdom and *increases the reward*. In other words, the union with Christ that is inherent to the divine 'gift' of affliction also promises enhanced sweetness in the afterlife. The following examples from Margery Kempe's *Book* will illustrate how she also achieves spiritual enhancement by tending to the sick in an act of medical and spiritual confection.

Towards a Christic Confection

The prolonged agony of Kempe's separation from God is cause for her to ask, "how long xal I thus wepyn & mornyn for thy lofe & for desyr of thy presens?" (176). When she is answered, "Al þis xv 3er", she is anguished, since fifteen years of earthly life seem to her to be a thousand years. But the ensuing mystical event that sees her *drawn in* to Christ, experiencing at once his love and his Passion, marks a critical turning point in her spiritual development:

Thus owr mercyful Lord Crist Ihesu *drow hys creatur vn-to hys lofe* & to mynde of hys Passyon þat sche myth not duryn to beheldyn a la3er er an-oþer seke man, specially 3yf he had any wowndys aperyng on hym. So sche cryid & so sche wept as 3yf sche had sen owr Lord Ihesu Crist wyth hys wowndys bledyng. & so sche dede in

⁷⁸ *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses: A Translation*, Bella Millett (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), Part 4, section 7, 69.

þe syght of hir sowle, for thorw þe beheldyng of þe seke man *hir mende was al takyn in-to* owr Lord Ihesu Crist (my emphases, 176).

This example serves to illustrate the paradigm through which Kempe finds spiritual ecstasy via compassion, care, and mystical confection. Christ's medicine *draws* her *into* him to receive such love that she can no longer separate the sight of afflicted or wounded people from his own tortured and crucified body. Unable to now endure the sight of a leper or other "seke man", she weeps *as if* she had seen Christ's own bleeding wounds; the sick now incorporated into her paradigmatic union as she mixes, like a recipe, their suffering with Christ's and with her own. While she perceives the sick through the bodily sense of sight, this perception is transposed into the spiritual site – or sight – of her *sowle*, where an internal process conflates them with Christ. Though the leprous had been "abhomynabyll" to her during her "ȝerys of worldly prosperite", she now desires to kiss and embrace them for the "lofe of Ihesu" in a compelling need to transfer the visual to the tactile: to touch, *feel*, and envelop the sick bodies who offer a substitutional *onyng*, or fusion, with God (176).⁷⁹ The paradoxical status of leprosy in the Middle Ages as indicative of sin or, conversely, a divine gift, is a further signification of its edifying potentiality. As the French surgeon, Guy de Chauliac (d. 1368) noted, physicians should stress to their leprous patients that their affliction was a mark of election – a *swetenesse*, even – as opposed to a curse: "Firste, in clepyng

⁷⁹ 'Leprousness', per se, is not the determiner in this example, but rather the lesions and wounds which trigger the connection with Christ's Passion. In fact, the term 'leper' became slippery after Jerome's translation of the Bible into the Vulgate in AD 383. The Hebrew word *sāra'ath* (understood in Mosaic Law to indicate imprecise skin conditions such as scaly, scabrous and raw skin), translated into the Greek *lepra*, and then into the Latin *leprosy*. Jerome's description of Christ as a leper was intended to convey the image of Christ's bruises, lesions and damaged flesh. See Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 73.

Goddess help, he shall comforte ham and saie that this passioun or sekenesse is saluacioun of the soule”.⁸⁰ Kempe’s preoccupation with lepers is thus multi-layered. She is affectively-stirred by the visual identification with the Christic wounds, by the substitute integration that she desires with his body, and by a compulsion to utilise that confection in emulation of *Christus medicus* through a ministry which proposed affliction as divinely ordained. Redolent with the metaphor of the recipe, the mixing and compounding of the sweet ingredients mirrors the sweet and irrevocable combining with Christ that Kempe yearns for in her soul, lined for him, as we have seen, with “swete spicys”. It is a nexus, however, which can only reach its ultimate conclusion at the moment of her “long delayd” death when the “presens” of God will finally endure. Longing to kiss, taste, and therefore access Christ through the mouths of leper women, she first persuades her confessor to agree and then embarks on a visit to the hospital:⁸¹

Pan was sche glad, for sche had leue to kyssyn þe seke women & went to a place wher seke women dwellyd which wer ryth ful of þe sekenes & fel down on hir kneys be-forn hem, preyng hem þat sche myth kyssyn her mowth *for þe lofe of Ihesu*. & so sche kyssyd þer ij seke women with many an holy thowt & many a deuowt teer, & whan sche had kyssyd hem & telde hem ful many good wordys & steryd hem to mekenes & pacyens þat þei xulde not grutchyn wyth her sekenes but hyly thankyn

⁸⁰ *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac*, “þe secounde chapitle, of the lepre”, ed. Margaret S. Ogden, EETS o.s. 265 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 381.

⁸¹ This was probably the hospital of St. Mary Magdalen, founded on the causeway leading to Gaywood in 1145, although it could have been one of four others mentioned by Stephen Guybord of North Lynn in his will of 1432. See *BMK*, 332, n. 177/9-10. Lazar hospitals were frequently named after St. Mary Magdalen because of the biblical association of sexual promiscuity with leprosy.

God þerfor & þei xulde han gret blysse in Heuyn thorw þe mercy of owr Lord Ihesu
Crist... (my emphasis, 177)

That she is permitted this visit directly after experiencing “gret mornynge & sorwynge for sche
myth not kyssyn þe lazars” (176) illustrates how some of these “seke women” must have had
leprosy. Perhaps inspired by the encounters of other female mystics who sought abjection by
drinking the pus or scabs from lepers’ sores, as Caroline Walker Bynum has demonstrated,
Kempe finds joy in the intimate encounter.⁸² Elizabeth of Hungary was reported to have
taken a leprosy beggar into her bed, and spent much of her life nursing the diseased outcasts
of her community. She is described as overcoming the body’s natural mechanisms of
repulsion to achieve transcendence when she “gathered many lepers, washed their feet and
hands, and then, after prostrating herself most humbly at their feet, kissed them in the most
ulcerous and disgusting places”.⁸³ Thomas Gascoigne (d. 1458) recounts Bridget of Sweden’s
sober nursing of leprosy lesions: “Of hir owne substaunce she repayred in hir countre many

⁸² See, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 208-18. On the literary topos of kissing lepers, see Catherine Peyroux, “The Leper’s Kiss”, in S. Farmer and B. H. Rosenwein, eds., *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society. Essays in Honor of Lester K. Little* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). Also S. Farmer, “The Leper in the Master Bedroom: Thinking Through a Thirteenth-Century Exemplum”, in R. Voaden and D. Wolfthal, eds., *Framing the Family: Narrative and Representation in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 79-84.

⁸³ *Dicta quatuor ancillarum* (1235), 29, in *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth of Hungary: Testimony from her Canonisation Hearings*, trans. with commentary by Kenneth Baxter Wolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 58-9. Angela of Foligno (1248-1309) was said to have drunk the bathwater of lepers after having washed their feet, experiencing a great ‘sweetness’. See Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 43.

desolate hospytalles & as a busy administratrice merciful & pytuous she visited the nedy syke men that were ther & handeled and wasshyd theyr sores without horror or lothsomnes”.⁸⁴ And Marie d’Oignes (b.1177) was also known to have cared for lepers: “they [Marie and her husband, now living chaste] serued sumwhile to summe mesellis [lepers] bisyde Niuelle, in a place that is named Villambrote”.⁸⁵ Kempe was of course familiar with the *vitae* of Elizabeth, Birgitta and Marie through her priestly amanuensis, and it is probable that she wishes to identify with other holy women who nursed the leprous.⁸⁶ But her communing with the sick is not couched in terms of the excess foulness or abjection that is foregrounded in other women’s accounts. Instead, I argue, it is a *swete* union, for “þe lofe of Ihesu”. She is *takyn in-to* the quasi-wounds of Christ, *consuming* them. The sick women, and what they represent, are a type of medicine like the remedial dragges, mixed into her soul. Her “many good wordys” – emerging from that same, edified, kissing mouth – are transformational, turning the despairing female patients who “grutchyn” into joyful receivers of God’s grace.⁸⁷ As she kneels at their feet in humble union, embracing them and crying “many a deuowt teer”, the soft, moist sweetness of her *medica* is “for þe lofe of Ihesu”. Indeed, just as the Proem tells us that Kempe is *stered* towards divine love, so she “steryd hem to mekenes & pacyens”, literalizing the sweetness of the union. This same *steryng* can also be seen during an episode on Corpus Christi day when she is overwhelmed by the sight

⁸⁴ Thomas Gascoigne’s “Lyfe of seynt Birgette”, in *The Mirror of Our Ladye*, ed. John Henry Blunt, EETS e.s. 19 (London: N. Trübner, 1873), xlvi-lx (p.lxiii).

⁸⁵ Jacques of Vitry, “The Middle English Life of Marie d’Oignes”, Book I, in Jennifer Brown, ed., *Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie D’Oignes*, ed. Jennifer N. Brown (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 85-119 (90).

⁸⁶ See *BMK*, 143, 153, 154, 322, n. 153/1.

⁸⁷ MED s.v. grucchen: To murmur, grumble; complain.

of the Sacrament being carried through the town, and collapses in spiritual excess. Crying out, “I dey, I dey”, she roars and weeps so vociferously that her onlookers “gret merueyl what hir eyled” (107). A man from Newcastle, one Thomas Marshall, looks on and is so “drawyn to þe good wordys þat God put in hir to sey of contricyon & compuncyon, of *swetnes & of deuocyon* þat he was al meuyd as he had ben a newe man wyth terys of contricyon & compuncyon, boþe days & nyghtys” (108). He, too, is transformed; steered by Kempe’s spiritual exemplum.

Margery Kempe’s yearning for and demonstration of Christ’s *swete* love can be further illustrated by the episode of labourous care that she undertakes for her ageing husband, John. Having secured a vow of chastity in her middle age, she is nevertheless still beset by the worldly ties of marital duty. However, as I will suggest, the caring activities that she enacts signify not only an *imitatio Christi* – or *Maria medica* – but terminate with the type of “increased reward” that the *Ancrene Wisse* propounds in her eventual widowhood, seen here as a final remedy and conduit for mystical confection and divine marriage. The widespread medieval belief in Mary the Physician, which validated the role of the woman as healer, is suggested by Diane Watt to be an important model for Margery Kempe’s healing practices.⁸⁸ I argue here that those praxes also facilitate the “euel sweetness” of inordinate love, and the “sensory oxymoron” of sweetness that Carruthers identifies.

When John Kempe fell down the stairs and sustained life-threatening injuries to his head, he was so “greuowsly brokyn & bresyd”, and the period of his sickness so protracted, that “men wend þat he xulde a be deed” (179). The neighbours who discover him “half on lyfe” and covered in blood, demand that Kempe should be hanged if he dies; for she has

⁸⁸ Diane Watt, “Mary the Physician: Women, Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages”, in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, 41-69.

reneged her wifely duties because she has not “kept hym” (179) and should therefore be sent to death with the man to whom she is matrimonially tied. Such a shared terminus is testament not only to the social expectation that a wife must care for her husband without fail, but also that her life holds an interchangeability with his to the ultimate degree. It is repeated, in terrifying emphasis, “þe pepil seyde, 3yf he deyde, it was worthy þat sche xulde answeryn for hys deth” (180). Institutionally- and theologically-bound in marriage, therefore, Margery Kempe’s nursing obligations are an inherent duty, and her proficiency as a physician is required in order to recover not one life but two. It is an edifying duty, however, since when confessing her concern to God that the nursing will detract her energies from prayer and contemplation, she is assured that her care for John is for the love of God: “Dowtyr, þu xalt haue þi bone, for he xal leuyn & I haue wrowt a gret myrakyl for þe þat he was not ded. And I bydde þe take hym hom & kepe hym *for my lofe*... þu xalt haue as meche mede [reward] for to kepyn hym & helpyn hym in hys need at hom as 3yf þu wer in chirche to makyn þi preyerys” (my emphasis, 180).⁸⁹ The holy value of tending to her husband in his infirmity is thus reinforced by its value as divine labour, upholding the Augustinian rule that “marriage provides a natural society between the sexes that is not dissolved by sterility or when the couple is past their reproductive years”.⁹⁰ Christ repeats how Kempe’s nursing pledge will hypostatize “þe lofe of me”, equating her forthcoming sacrifice as a gift to John that is correlative with his gift to her of a chaste vow: “... for he hath sumtyme fulfillyd þi wil & my wil boþe and he hath mad þi body fre to me þat þu xuldist seruyn me & leuyn chast & clene, and þerfor I wil þat þu be fre to helpyn hym at hys nede in my name” (180). The provision

⁸⁹ MED s.v. mede (n.4): 1a.) a gift; 2a.) moral consequence or spiritual reward.

⁹⁰ Augustine stipulated that even after a vow of chastity, a dutiful tie between the couple remains: “the order of charity still flourishes between husband and wife”. See Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 47.

for John's bodily health therefore has equivocal value for Margery Kempe's spiritual health; her chaste body is free to care in the *name* of God, on the paradoxical cusp of liberating widowhood.

Though John's life has been saved, his condition is grim and Kempe's *medica* is correspondingly arduous. Yet his accedence to a vow of chastity, which alleviated her distress at enacting the marriage debt, now demands her reciprocal suffering, reproducing the debt that she must withstand until the closure of that union in death. Unlike the lepers whose affliction she embraced in an active identification with other holy women who sought similarly *swete* encounters, this undertaking is conceptualised as a punishment, albeit one which she gladly accepts for spiritual profit. Kempe feels the heavy penalty of her wifhood, both through the therapeutic payment for John's vow of chastity and the recollection of the fleshly lust (a "dowcet ille") which precipitated the vow in the first place:

Pan sche toke hom hir husbond to hir & kept hym 3erys aftyr as long as he leuyd & had ful mech labowr wyth hym, for in hys last days he turnyd childisch a-3en & lakkyd reson þat he cowd not don hys owyn esement to gon to a sege, er ellys he wolde not, but as a childe voydyd his natural digestyon in hys lynyn clothys þer he sat be þe fyre er at þe tabil, wheþyr it wer, he wolde sparyn no place. And þerfor was hir labowr meche þe mor in waschyng & wryngyng & hir costage in fyryng & lettyd hir ful meche fro hir contemplacyon þat many tymys sche xuld an yrkyd hir labowr saf sche bethowt hir how sche in hir 3ong age had ful many delectabyl thowtys, fleschly lustys, & inordinate louys to hys persone. & þerfor sche was glad to be ponischyd wyth þe same persone & toke it mech þe mor esily & seruyd hym & helpyd hym, as hir thowt, as sche wolde a don Crist hym-self (180-1).

In an account that is punctuated much more with the details of domestic work than her narrative usually allows, Kempe juxtaposes fetching and carrying, washing and cleaning, with the anamnestic horror of the sexuality of her younger years. She positions the mundanity of her carer's role not only as suitable penance for her lustful marriage but as a symbol of the menial female-centric housework that she, as a bourgeois citizen and emerging holy woman of God, has hitherto escaped. Beyond the practicalities of her caregiving, John's condition worsens and his mental deterioration and digestive incontinence manifest as symptoms of a growing "childisch[ness]": a penitential act of therapy for Kempe, indeed.

The 'good wife' was, however, *expected* to perform several services within the household, including "car[ing] for the sick", as David Herlihy has documented.⁹¹ Felicity Riddy has illustrated how "domesticity [was] a means of identifying the good woman", and wives were expected to look after elderly or infirm husbands.⁹² The poet Marbode, bishop of Rennes, wrote in the late eleventh century "For who would assume the care of a nurse, if not a woman? Without her no one born could prolong his life".⁹³ Such ideas persisted into the fourteenth century and beyond, as a lyric entitled, "In Praise of Women", similarly extols the virtues of the dutiful wife: "A woman is a worthy wyght, / she seruyth a man both daye and

⁹¹ David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 116.

⁹² Felicity Riddy, "'Burgeis' domesticity in late-medieval England", in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 259-76, (15). See also Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe c.1300-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 182.

⁹³ Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, 116.

nyght, / therto she puttyth all her mygth, / And yet she hathe bot care and woo”.⁹⁴ The latter example illustrates what Sue Niebrzydowski sees as a movement towards “the acknowledgement that [women] excelled in nursing, healing, and running households”.⁹⁵ However, it also exemplifies a perpetuity – “both daye and nyght” – of the wife’s duty to her husband and the relentlessness of that endeavour in spite of the woman’s own tribulations. Niebrzydowski remarks that Kempe “remained John’s wife, in all ways except sexual, until his death in c.1431”.⁹⁶ Sarah Salih suggests that she is interested only in housewifery, including the care of her infirm husband, “when it can be shown to have spiritual significance”.⁹⁷ Certainly, Kempe engineers domestic-removal to secure a modified wifhood of chastity and contemplation, and acquiesces to domestic *reunion* partly because of her neighbours’ coercion, but primarily because of the divine assurance of the holy value of her nursing.

This domestic nursing endeavour is antithetical to her experience on pilgrimage in Rome in 1414. Having secured a vow of chastity with John in 1413, she is mystically married to the Godhead in the Apostle’s Church on Saint John Lateran’s Day. On perceiving the word of God, she is semi-paralysed in terror, and “ful sor aferd of þe Godhede” (86):

⁹⁴ R. H. Robbins, ed., *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952, reprint 1961), no. 34, 31. Cited from Sue Niebrzydowski, *Bonoure and Buxom: A Study of Wives in Late Medieval English Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 22.

⁹⁵ Niebrzydowski, *Bonoure and Buxom*, 22.

⁹⁶ Niebrzydowski, *Bonoure and Buxom*, 129.

⁹⁷ Sarah Salih, “At home; out of the house”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 124-40 (124).

“Dowtyr, I wil han þe weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn þe my preuyteys & my counselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende”. Pan þe creatur kept sylens in hir sowle & answeyrd not þerto, for sche was ful sor aferd of þe Godhede & sche cowde no skylle of þe *dalyawns* of þe Godhede, for al hir lofe & al hir affeccyon was set in þe manhode of Crist & þerof cowde sche good skylle & sche wolde for nothyng a partyd þerfro (my emphasis, 86).

Unable to engage in mystical discourse, so afraid is she of the awesome prospect of confection with the Godhead, and without the spiritual toolkit with which to undertake such *dalyawns*, Kempe nevertheless participates in a heavenly wedding. Couched in the semantics of earthly relationships, the liturgy of the Christian marriage ceremony makes effable the other-worldly as she is joined in union, in her soul, with the trinity, saints and apostles:

And þan þe Fadyr toke hir be þe hand in hir sowle be-for þe Sone & þe Holy Gost & þe Modyr of Ihesu and alle þe xij apostelys & Seint Kateryn & Seint Margarete & many oþer seyntyngs & holy virgynes wyth gret multitude of awngelys, seying to hir sowle, “I take þe, Margery, for my weddyd wife, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so þat þu be buxom & bonyr to do what I byd þe do. For, dowtyr, þer was neuyr childe so buxom to þe modyr as I xal be to þe boþe in wel & in wo, - to help þe & comfort þe. And þerto I make þe suyrt” (87).

It is this mystical marriage that stimulates the intense sensory perception that we saw above; the great “gostly comfortys & bodily comfortys”, the *swete* and synaesthetic amalgamation of smell, touch and taste. So sweet and consuming are these smells that Kempe perceives they could sustain her very existence had they continued: “hir thowt sche myth a leuyd þerby 3yf they wolde a lestyd”. Intoxicated with the sweetness of love, like the bridegroom of the *Song of Songs*, Kempe’s new understanding of marriage supplants the domestic with the spiritual,

as the wedding takes place “in hir sowle” (87). The mystical confection marks the onset of twenty-five subsequent years of sweet, extra-sensory experience and is thus a prerequisite for her elevated spiritual and sensory perception.

Yet, in the following chapter, Kempe returns to the familiar realm of domesticity when she reveals a different revelation. The marriage to the Manhood marks the replacement of John for Christ in the marriage bed and which positions the Christic body as her new spouse, using semiotics of physical conjugality and union that are often read in terms of the erotic rapture of ecstasy:⁹⁸

For it is conuenient þe wyf to be homly wyth hir husbond... Ryght so mot it be twyx þe & me, for I take non hed what þu hast be but what þu woldist be. And oftyntymes haue I telde þe þat I haue clene foʒoue þe alle thy synnes. Perfor most I nedys be homly wyth þe & lyn in þi bed wyth þe. Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, & þu mayst boldly, whan þu art in þi bed, take me to þe as for þi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, & as for thy *swete* sone, for I wyl be louyd as a sone schuld be louyd wyth þe modyr & wil þat þu loue me, dowtyr, as a *good [wife]* owyth to loue hir husbonde. & þerfor þu mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi sowle & kyssen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete *as sweetly* as thow wylt (my emphasis, 90).

That Christ tells Kempe that she should take him in “þe arms of [her] sowle” is a declaration of their mystical union, but one which is simultaneously located in the physical site of the

⁹⁸ For an interrogation of such interpretations see Amy Hollywood, “Ventriloquising Hysteria: Fetishism, Trauma, and Sexual Difference”, in *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 236-73.

marriage bed. It marks also the hypostatization of Kempe's concept of wifhood as in her spiritual wedlock John is replaced in the marriage bed by her divine spouse, whose language of the "homly" intertwines a mystical encounter with a conflation – or confection – of various familial bonds. Here, she is a wife, a mother and a daughter to Christ, evidencing what Barbara Newman terms the "incest taboo" of the holy family, where mother-bride and father-husband become amalgamated in late medieval iconography, to fantastical ends.⁹⁹ Kempe thus imagines herself as part of that holy family in an ontological leap, but also as a corporeal 'good wife', lying with Christ in *swete* union and replacing in her marriage bed one husband for another.

She continues, however, in her care of the infirm John, since that care has been divinely sanctioned as a direct substitution for the love of her new, divine bridegroom, the heavenly rewards of which are of equal measure to those that she might enact towards Christ's own body: "And also, dowtyr, whan þu dost any seruyse to þe & to þin husbond in mete or drynke er any oþer thyng þat is nedful to 3ow, to þi gostly fadirs, er to any oþer þat þu receyuyst in my name, þu xalt han þe same mede in Heuyn as thow þu dedist it to myn owyn persone er to my blissyd Modyr, & I xal thankyn þe þerfor" (203). We thus witness first the replacement of John for Christ, and then of Christ for John, in a substitutional placing and re-placing of the husband-subject according to physical need and spiritual necessity. Margery Kempe's wifeliness, therefore, is predicated on divine ordination and not on the edicts of the conduct book or cultural expectation. Though Christ has replaced John in the marriage bed, John is now replaced into her care, in God's place. Kempe performs her duties as physician and palliative care-giver with the same adaptability in wifhood with which she

⁹⁹ See Barbara Newman, "Intimate Pieties: Holy Trinity and Holy Family in the late Middle Ages", *Religion and Literature*, 31, 1 (1999), 77-101, esp. 78-80.

approaches all of the other female-centric roles that she simultaneously embraces and rejects, and which enable her trajectory towards eschatological perfection.

John is thought to have died in the summer or early autumn of 1431, when Kempe is approximately fifty-eight years old. For her palliative sacrifice, then, is the gift of widowhood, a dichotomous event that brings to a close a seemingly companionate marriage and yet heralds a new – and, we assume, silently longed-for – phase in Kempe’s life journey. Widowhood is a state for which Kempe has been preparing, and has been prepared for, over many years of contemplation. She is told by God that “þe state of maydenhode be mor parfyte & mor holy þan þe state of wedehode, & þe state of wedehode mor parfyte þan þe state of wedlake” (49), establishing the transition from wife to widow as unambiguously advantageous.¹⁰⁰ In fact, Kempe has been suspended in an existence of quasi-widowhood for some time, despite Augustine’s edict that marital dissolution is an impossibility: Christ tells her that “þu hast þi wil of chastite as þu wer a wedow, thyn husbond leuyng in good hele” (161). This impalpable, or surrogate, widowhood, with all its hopeful essence, is no substitute, however, for the concrete state in which she now rests, as liberated relict, healed of her own domestic scourge, and finally free to forge a singularly spiritual career, returning Christ, for the final time, and in confection, to the marital bedchamber.

Assured of her agency as apostolic witness and bride of Christ, Kempe recounts myriad episodes of spiritual inebriation when intimate dalliances with God are such

¹⁰⁰ On the legal and societal independence accorded to widows, see Barbara Hanawalt, “Widows”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 58-69. See also Joel Rosenthal, “Fifteenth-Century Widows and Widowhood: Bereavement, Reintegration, and Life Choices”, in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: 1993), 33–58, and Marie-Françoise Alamichel, *Widows in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Britain* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

overwhelming moments of union that she collapses in ungovernable and disembodied rapture: “Sche was som comfortyd in þe *swet dalyawns* of owr Lord þat sche *myth not mesuryn hirself ne gouerne hir spirit* aftyr þat owr Lord wolde leydn it & measuryn it hysself in sobbyng ful boistowsly & wepyng ful plenteuowsly, wherefor sche suffyrd ful mech slawndyr & repref...” (my emphasis, 245). These are mystical raptures so sweet that bodily and spiritual borders are lost. Dismantled and ungoverned, she is *immeasurable*, lost of all proprioception and wholly reliant on divine containment. That it is God who must “measuryn” and lead her towards completion signifies a totalization where her perception of self is necessarily imbricated in Christ. Similar intoxications occur on pilgrimage in Jerusalem, when she experiences such “swetnes... in þe dalyawnce of owyr Lord” (67) that she almost falls from the ass on which she is travelling. On Mount Calvary, she falls to the ground in the “evel sweetness” of envisioning Christ’s Passion. And in a church in Rome she hears the “melydiows” voice of God, the

swettest of alle sauowrys softly sowndyng in hir sowle so delectably fed wyth þe swet dalyawns of owr Lord & so fulfilled of hys lofe þat as a drunkyn man sche turnyd hir fyrst on þe o syde & sithyn on þe oþer wyth gret wepyng & gret sobbyng, vn-mythy to kepyn hir-selfe in stabilnes for þe vnqwenchabyl fyer of lofe which brent ful sor in hir sowle (98).

The sound, savour, sweetness and love of God is so delectable that she is as a drunkard, burning with the fire of love and swaying with inebriation. In this divine amalgamation, the very laws of space and time are transcended. Visited by God in holy dalliance so often that its enumeration is impossible, time vanishes – but “Sche had leuar a seruyd God, 3yf sche myght a leuyd so long, an hundryd 3er in þis maner of lyfe þan oo day as sche be-gan fyrst” (215). Dissolving into Christ like the moist tears that flow out of her, purging her very essence, Kempe’s bliss emerges from the way in which “it is so swet to wepyn for þi lofe in erth”

(215). Jeffrey J. Cohen sees her tears as an act of “emptying herself from her own body”, a performance explained by Vincent Gillespie as a process of “*kenosis*”, or “self-emptying”: an act of courage and letting-go in order to achieve God’s grace.¹⁰¹ As she is told, to forbear God causes pain while *swetenesse* is generated from *feeling* him: “wety n what peyn it is for to forbere me, & how swet it is for to fele me” (205). Experiencing Christ through perhaps the most concrete of senses – touch – reveals how the tangibility of God’s *sweetness* is a recipe into which Kempe is intimately mixed.¹⁰² The sweet remedy is, therefore, a perpetual state of oneness with, or *feeling* God, like the homeliness experienced in the marital bed with the bridegroom Christ. Such *oneing* evokes Julian of Norwich’s vision of the Passion, which brings such a sharing of pain that she feels they are as one: “Here I sawe a grete aninge [oneing] betwix Criste and us. For whan he was in paine, we ware in paine, and alle creatures that might suffer paine sufferde with him”.¹⁰³ For Julian, the passage towards a splicing with the Divine is a shared pain that effectively removes the borders of self and other, creating an acute nexus of experience between herself and Christ, and with ‘us’ all: all Christians in the ‘body’ of his church. And Kempe literalizes such union through a sonic eruption of compulsive, intoxicated force.

When visiting Richard Caister, the Vicar of St Stephens in Norwich, “long befor þis tyme”, Kempe was asked, “What coud a woman ocupyn an owyr er tweyn owyrs in þe lofe

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 173. Vincent Gillespie, ‘Dead Still / Still Dead’, *The Mediaeval Journal*, 1 (2011), 53-78 (60-3).

¹⁰² MED s.v. forbēren: 4 (a) To forego, relinquish, give up, part with, or lose (something); to become separated from.

¹⁰³ Julian of Norwich, Section 10, “A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman”, 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 (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 85.

of owyr Lord? I xal neuyr ete mete tyl I wete what ze kan sey of owyr Lord God þe tyme of on owyr” (38). Not only is the vicar dumbfounded that a woman could speak with knowledge, and at length, of God’s love, but his scepticism is implicated in his intake of food. He will eat only when he hears what Kempe has to say. Of course, she proves that she *can* occupy that time in disclosing her “preuytes”, and relays the holy dalliances in which she is frequently immersed with the holy trinity, saints and apostles:

Sche told hym how sum-tyme þe Fadyr of Hevyn dalyd to hir sowle as pleynly and as verily as o frend spekyth to a-noper be bodyly speech; sum-tyme all thre Personys in Trinite & o substawns in Godhede dalyid to hir sowle & informyd hir in hir feyth & in hys lofe how sche xuld lofe hym, worshepyn hym, & dredyn hym, so excellently þat sche herd neuyr boke... Her dalyawns was so swet, so holy, & so devowt þat þis creatur myt not oftyntymes beryn it but fel down & wrestyd wyth hir body & mad wondyrful cher & contenawns wyth boystows sobbyngys & gret plente of terys, sumtyme seyng “Ihesu, mercy”, sum-tyme “I dey” (39-40).

Transforming the vicar’s preconceptions, Kempe reveals how she is overcome by the union in her soul with the ultimate divine confection – the Holy Trinity – a union which leads to the extra-ordinary perception of new sensory phenomena that we saw above. Whilst walking to the White Friar’s Church in Lynn one day, Kempe finds an expression of that heavenly incorporation that reveals her privileged knowledge of God. She “felt a wondyr *swet sauowr* & an heuynly þat hir thowt sche myth a leuyd þerby wyth-owtyn mete or drynke 3yf it wolde a contynuyd” (my emphasis, 171).¹⁰⁴ When she is told by God that this “sauowr” is a sign

¹⁰⁴ MED s.v. savour: 1a) Taste as an inherent property of matter. 1b.(a) The flavor or taste of food. (b) agreeable flavor, *sweetness*; an agreeable taste; also fig.; god (swete, etc.). (c) bitter or sour flavor; also,

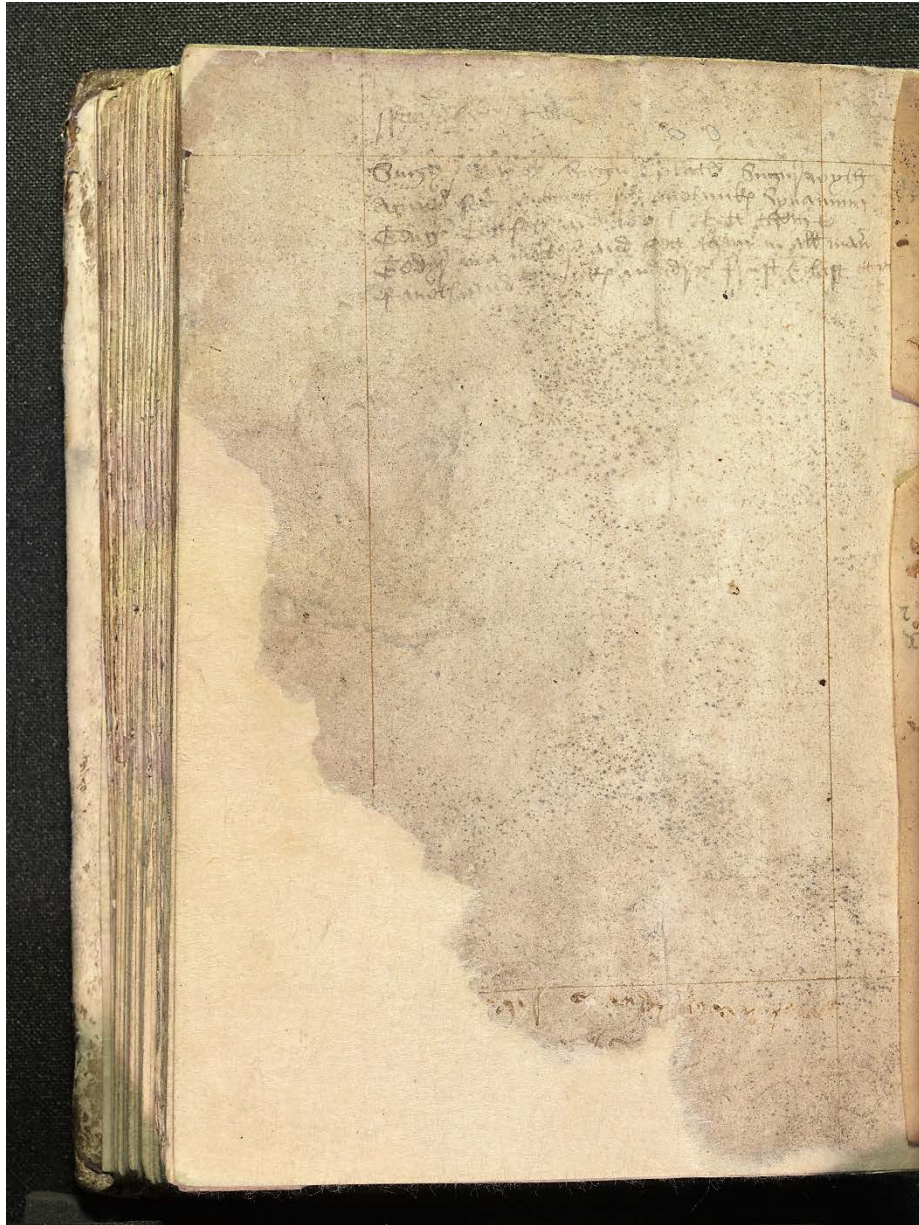
that the previous Prior of Lynn will be returned, and later discovers that “hir felyng was trew”, the fusion of bodily and spiritual perception is confirmed. That *swet savour* (at once gustatory, olfactory and tactile), illustrates both Kempe’s closeness with God and the delectatory texture of the *Book*.

The sweet and medicinal flavours of confections are, as Bartholomaeus Anglicus reminds us, “restoreþ in þe body þinge þat is lost”. The examples explored here show that *swetenesse*, in all its multiplicity, is a consistently crucial determiner of health and spiritual bliss in the *Book*. The burning fire of “inordinate lofe”, with which this essay began, is a sensory and kinetic force fuelled by the heat of the recipe’s spices and a confection of divine potency. As we have seen, it is a confection that inspires the synaesthetic amalgamation of tastes, sounds, smells, sights and feelings – the *savour* that Kempe perceives as paradisaal – which not only intoxicate and transform her but turn her into medicine itself, caring, curing, and steering others towards spiritual perfection. The uniting touch of the leper women being guided to grace, the arduous nursing of John, and the marrying of the domestic, Christic, and Godly: these actions are redolent with the sensory, sweet, burning, crying, and healing spirituality of Margery Kempe.

The recipe can therefore be regarded as the textual manifestation of the “many swete spicys” that Kempe prays will cleanse, line and inflame her soul in order that God “myth restyn þerin” (210). It stands as a climactic remedy for Kempe – and her readers’ – spiritual

offensive flavor; bitter. 2a) Smell as an inherent property of matter. 3(a) The sense or faculty of taste; also, the act of tasting something; (b) the faculty or sense of smell; also, the action of smelling.

and bodily health since it is not only inserted at the end of the manuscript, but it also signifies an end-of-meal medicine that, in turn, signifies the end of Kempe's narrative and the healing of her body and soul. The recipe's inclusion in the manuscript thus gestures towards the curative nature of the *Book* itself, both for Kempe, who *lives* the narrative, and for her readers, who are edified by the healing words of the text. It is, then, an apotheosis: a compound whose healing power is effective not only through its hot, spiced sweetness, but the very dissolving of Kempe into Christ as the most efficacious, and sweet, *confection* of all.



The faded recipe on f.142v, London, BL Add. 61823, with thanks to the Board of the British Library.