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AN OUTSIDE FOR THE INSIDE: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF *The
Book of Margery Kempe*

by

Julia Steele
B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1988

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
ENGLISH

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
January 1993

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ISBN 0-315-91251-0

Canada

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DEGREE: Master of Arts (English)
TITLE OF THESIS: An Outside for the Inside: A Psychoanalytic
Reading of The Book of Margery Kempe

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Abstract

The Book of Margery Kempe dictated to several scribes by its fifteenth century eponymous author narrates the life of a late medieval female mystic whose mysticism is informed by affective spirituality. Conceived of for women and the laity, affective piety invited the devout to imagine themselves present at biblical events. This kind of spirituality valued love for Christ above scriptural accuracy. Because of affective spirituality's emphasis on the familial pathos of holy events like the Passion and Resurrection, this type of devotional practice provided for the mystic an outside for the inside; in other words through speculation of and participation in Christ's and the Virgin's joy and suffering, the mystic could use devotional practice as a container for her own unconscious desires and symptoms that most probably had their origins in early childhood.

The objective of this kind of inquiry is not to psycho-analyze Margery Kempe the individual, but rather this thesis will contextualize the psycho-analytical meaning of Margery's devotional practice with other accounts of female piety and the affective devotional literature that informs it. It is evident in Margery Kempe's visions of holy family life that the Virgin and Christ dyad is an oedipal fantasy of the child who is the father of himself. Through her own participation in the Virgin and Christ's life together, Margery inserts herself into this dyad, effectively triangulating it. As I will show using Freud and Kristeva, this Holy Family Romance of Virgin, Christ and mystic is fecund ground for the articulation of repressed oedipal desires. Additionally, Margery's description of Christ's suffering body on the cross and her own subsequent mystical ecstasy is evocative of Kristeva's notion of the semiotic processes of the archaic mother-infant dyad. Her mystical ecstasy, achieved through her abjection of self whereby she loses inside/outside and

pleasure/pain distinctions, mirrors a phase in infancy known as primary narcissism. This phase is prior to language acquisition, boundary distinctions and the break-up of the mother-infant dyad. As an idealization of primary narcissism, the mystic's fusion with Christ implies that he represents the Phallic Mother or the fictitious possibility of a return to a lost maternal paradise.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sheila Delany for the numerous hours she spent reading version after version of this thesis; her attention to detail and careful editorship contributed greatly to the success of this project. I would also like to thank Jacqueline Larson and Jodey Castricano for their friendship and encouragement throughout the span of my graduate career, Nelia Tierney for helping me to “break on through to the other side,” and Pippin Osborne for witnessing my process of self transformation that was coextensive with the start and finish of this thesis.

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Introduction

The Book of Margery Kempe, discovered in 1934 and written between 1440 and 1450, narrates the life of a fifteenth century English mystic, Margery Kempe. Critical reception of the *Book*, as Sarah Beckwith has recently argued, is largely polarized between two differing "strands" of inquiry: one which seeks to establish Margery as a fraud and the other which seeks to establish Margery's authenticity either as a mystic or as a vibrant personality. Both agendas, Beckwith argues, have in common the ideal of a fully constructed self; in other words they do not view subjectivity, or creation of the self, as an on-going process but rather seek to establish a "bourgeois" or humanistic notion of the self as a unified given. Beckwith argues that this notion of selfhood as "not made" but given at birth is in direct contrast to the major thrust of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and in fact all mystical texts which take as their focus the on-going production of self in order to know and reveal God: "By so obviously negotiating a self in her book, Kempe offends as much against the pieties of bourgeois individualism as she does against those of orthodox Catholicism" ("Problems" 178). Beckwith observes that *The Book of Margery Kempe* is less "idiosyncratic" in its presentation of a "self" than it is representative of the fluidity of subjectivity. Margery's "self-differing" (or the on-going production of self which is inevitably self-contradicting) "is less a function of Kempe's personality, less her own idiosyncratic attribute, than the condition of subjectivity itself" ("Problems" 179). What this thesis seeks to demonstrate in accordance with Beckwith's observation, is how Margery's production of self articulates a variety of psychoanalytic tropes also found in other late medieval affective narratives.

Rather than clinically psychoanalyzing Margery Kempe, the individual--an ultimately impossible and reductive task-- I seek to analyze Margery's deployment of the Holy Family Romance;¹ specifically its connection to Christ's maternal attributes and Margery's feelings and active pursuit of abjection of self within the historical context of late-medieval affective spirituality. Both Beckwith's recent article in *Exemplaria* and Sheila Delany's essay "Sexual Economics" in her book *Writing Woman*, point to the pitfall of a psychoanalytic approach in connection with *The Book of Margery Kempe* as having the tendency to isolate the individual from her socio-historical milieu. This study differs from the psychoanalytic approach Beckwith and Delany warn against in two significant ways. Firstly, this thesis will not clinically diagnose Margery's "symptoms" nor will it speculate on their specific root causes (i.e. events from Margery's childhood). Secondly, by analyzing how Margery's scenario is similar to that of other female mystics and saints, this study will avoid isolating Margery from the historical and social movements of her time. Rather than treating Margery Kempe as a patient, this thesis will contextualize her Holy Family Romance scenarios, abjection of self and Christ's maternal attributes by analyzing these features of Margery's devotional practice for their psychoanalytic import in terms of more general psychological issues concerning subjectivity and suffering as they appear in Margery's *Book* and in the affective devotional literature of late medieval Catholicism. It will do so using Nicholas Love's translation of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* and other devotional texts and accounts of saints and devout lay women mentioned in the *Book*. It is my argument that

¹This is Sarah Beckwith's phrase from her essay "'A Very Material Mysticism': The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe." Beckwith derives family romance from Freud's essays "Family Romances," and "Contributions to the Psychology of Love" I and II.

affective spirituality in fact provides an outside for the inside; or in other words it provides a framework within which a mystic can experience and articulate unconscious desires and symptoms that most probably have their origins in early childhood, however displaced these desires may be in adult life.

Nancy Partner defends her own psychoanalytic reading of *The Book of Margery Kempe* by pointing out that a psychoanalytic reading, like any other inductive reading of a text, "follows the stresses and patterns presented by language or behaviour from the seen to the unseen, deciphers the tropes and replaces the displacements, using the same processes of inference and reasonable argumentation which move most other forms of interpretation forward" (266). Partner deciphers *The Book of Margery Kempe* in terms of its narrative and plot, arguing that "The plot of her story is desire seeking its satisfaction" (259). Partner describes this plot as a "dark plot," that is an unconscious plot, through which "denied desires and repressed knowledge . . . threaten to break through consciousness. . . . This plot is one of desire demanding expression through self-confessing mimetic behaviour, both painful and gratifying at once--the simultaneous enacting of desire and punishment" (255). It is my contention that what saves Margery from this dark plot, which could conceivably push her into madness, is the "Word." As we shall see, Margery's faith provides a containing framework for experimenting with the dissolution of her own subjectivity by conflating inside/outside and pleasure/pain distinctions and thus mimicking the processes of primary narcissism. In so doing, Margery makes sense of her own current suffering within the scope of the Christian narrative of the Nativity and Passion, and provides herself with the promise of future relief in connection with a future self who is without sin. Margery's hallucinations of

Christ are in effect, as Kristeva points out in her analysis of what happens when hallucination meets religion, a "temporary resolution. Less crushing a burden than the suffering due to burning desire or abandonment, hallucination can help the subject re-establish a kind of coherence, eccentric or aberrant though it may be" (*In the Beginning* 13).

According to her narrative, Margery is present during St. Anne's pregnancy, the birth and childhood of the Virgin, the Virgin's pregnancy, the Nativity, Christ's early childhood and the Passion. As Clarissa Atkinson, Sarah Beckwith, Gail Gibson, and Caroline Bynum amongst others have shown, the precedent for Margery's hallucinations of participating in the affairs of the Holy Family is found in the tradition of affective piety, more than four centuries old by Margery's time. According to Atkinson, affective piety is characterized by the absence of a "particular theological stance, except the primacy of love over reason in the knowledge of God . . ." (130). As exemplified by Nicholas Love's translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes*, affective piety encourages the devout to forge "a personal, passionate attachment to the human Jesus" by concentrating on "the aspects of Christ's life which belong to the universal experience: birth and death, Nativity and Passion" (Atkinson 130). In order to stir the devout Christian's imagination, authors of affective narratives like Love's embellish scenes from the gospel and invent "conversations, incidents and relationships in the lives of Jesus, Mary, and the saints . . ." (Atkinson 131). Consistent with Atkinson's claim, Love's translation focuses on constructing sentimental and pathetic scenes between the Virgin and Christ. Significantly, much of Margery's spiritual contemplation centres around concocting intimate scenarios that include her own participation in Christ's life with the Virgin.

While neither Nicholas Love nor the *Meditationes* are mentioned among the books and authors that influence Margery, Gail Gibson argues that *The Book of Margery Kempe* was directly influenced by Love's translation of the *Meditationes* into *The Mirovre of the Blessed Life of ovr Lorde and Saviovre Iesvs Christe*. Gibson describes Margery's life as "an extremely literal and concrete achievement of those very spiritual exercises which the thirteenth-century writer of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* had once urged upon the Franciscan nun for whom the devotional text was first written" (49).

According to Elizabeth Salter, Love's version of the *Meditationes* was "licensed for the reading of the devout by Archbishop Arundel [Canterbury] in 1410, and achieved great popularity, as is proved by the large number of extant manuscript copies and early printed editions" (1). Margery Kempe visits this same Archbishop Arundel in Lambeth; he "grawnt[s] hir auctoryte of chesyng hyr confessowr & to be howselyd euery Sonday . . . vndyr hys lettyr and hys seel thorw al hys prouynce" (36). After receiving his letter and seal, Margery asks the Archbishop to examine "hir maner of leuyng" which he approvingly does. Salter speculates that Love's text was produced for Arundel as a shrewd political manoeuvre for improving the situation of Mount Grace, the monastery which Love belonged to and directed as prior, by finding favour with Arundel and his current campaign against Lollardy, "false doctrines of the Sacraments, and . . . unauthorized translations of the Bible into English" (29-30). If Love's translation was produced with Arundel in mind, the approval Margery receives from Arundel for her way of living suggests that her devotional practices are consonant with Love's directives and, possibly, influenced by them.

Margery's stated influences are "the Bybyl wyth doctowrys ther-up-on, Seynt Brydys boke, Hyltons boke, Bone-ventur, Stimulus Amoris,² Incendium Amoris, & swech other" (143). Hope Emily Allen points out in her introduction and extensive notes to the EETS edition of the *Book* that Margery's mysticism is representative of a continental and explicitly female piety. While Margery includes Hilton in her list of influences, this thesis will not consider Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* due to time and space constraints.³ For similar reasons I do not consider Richard Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*.⁴ Because my inquiry into *The Book of Margery Kempe* is concerned with analyzing Margery's place within late-medieval female piety and the psychological import of her affective scenarios of Christ and the Virgin's life together, I contextualize these scenarios with legendary accounts of Christ's life, such as Love's *Meditationes* and Caxton's *The Golden Legend*, and additionally contextualize Margery's devotional practices with those of the other saints and lay mystics mentioned in her *Book*. Specifically I consult accounts of St. Bridget of Sweden (c. 1391) and her *Revelations* ("Brydys Boke"), Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* (b. 1342 and alive in 1416⁵), Jacques de Vitry's account of Maria D'Oignies (d. 1213), and both

²"Bone-ventur, Stimulus Amoris" appearing in this line would appear to contradict my previous affirmation that the *Meditationes* are not among Margery's stated influences. However, the notes to the Allen and Meech edition of the *Book* point out "It is hardly likely that two works are referred to here—namely, some other work ascribed to Bonaventura and designated simply 'Bone-ventur' and the *Stimulus Amoris*. There is no instance in the *Book* of the designation of a writing by the name of its author standing alone" (*The Book of Margery Kempe* 320 n.143/28). Thus Allen and Meech read "Bone-ventur, Stimulus Amoris" as "Bonaventura's *Stimulus Amoris*."

³Additionally Allen states the Margery "profoundly violated the principles of contemplation laid down by Hilton..." (276 n.39/23) and because I am concerned with the specifics of Margery's contemplative practice, Hilton's work is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁴For further information concerning Rolle's work see Hope Emily Allen's *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle Hermit of Hampole and Materials for his Biography*. Also see Clarissa Atkinson's *Mystic and Pilgrim* pages for her comparison of the similarities between Rolle's and Margery's experience of mystical ecstasy.

Osbern Bokenham's and William Caxton's accounts of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (c. 1235) translated from Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth century *Legenda Aurea*.

Caroline Bynum takes as her area of study in *Holy Feast Holy Fast* female mysticism of the late Middle Ages. She points not only to "the creation of new types of religious life for women but also an increase in the number of female saints" (20). Statistically, "[t]he era of the female saint began in the thirteenth century" and rose to its height in the fifteenth century "when 23 of 83 saints (27.7 percent) were female" (Weinstein 220). Bynum argues that coextensive with the rise in female saints was a growth in opportunities for women to participate in religious life; the canonization of women reflected "the growing prominence of women both in reflecting and creating piety" (20). Weinstein and Bell's study *Saints and Society* also confirms this connection: "there were not only more female saints but more women pioneering new forms of piety" (Weinstein 224). The focus of Bynum's study is this new type of female devotional piety which differs from male piety particularly in its practice of penitential asceticism.⁶

Women's devotion was . . . characterized by penitential asceticism, particularly self-inflicted suffering. Women's writing was, in general, more affective [than men's], although male writing too brims over with tears and sensibility; erotic, nuptial themes, which were first articulated by men, were most fully elaborated in women's poetry. And certain devotional emphases, particularly devotion to Christ's suffering humanity and to the eucharist . . . were characteristic of women's practices and women's words. (*Holy Feast* 26)

Bynum argues that issues surrounding women's production of food, both in the kitchen and when lactating, and their suffering were paralleled in

⁵Her actual date of death is unknown; see Frances Beer's Introduction to *Julian of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love: the Shorter Version*, p. 7.

⁶Weinstein and Bell also acknowledge this difference, see p. 233.

multiple ways by Christ's suffering and nourishing body on the cross. As we shall see, the same emphasis on Eucharistic devotion and the Passion is also present in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, as are self-inflicted suffering and abasement, the primary characteristics of this type of asceticism. For instance, both Julian of Norwich and Maria D'Oignies desire illness; Maria D'Oignies also systematically starves herself, wears scant clothing in cold weather, and cuts off a piece of her own flesh; St. Elizabeth "though a great princess, delighted in nothing so much as in abasing herself" (*Powers of Horror* 5); St. Bridget likens herself to an ass. Likewise in Canterbury Margery is charged with Lollardy and comes close to being burnt at the stake. In the narrative episode after the incident Margery describes herself as enjoying and desiring public humiliation:

Than thys creatur thowt it was ful mery to be reprevyd for Goddys lofe; it was to hir gret solas & cownfort whan sche was chedyn & fletyn for the lofe of Ihesu for reprevyng of synne, for spekyng of vertu, for comownyng in Scriptur which sche lernyd in sermownys & be comownyng wyth clerkys. (*The Book of Margery Kempe* 29)⁷

This self-abasement, or abjection of self, before Christ and her community is how Margery approaches Christ. Based upon the devotional practice of *imitatio christi*, Margery parallels her own suffering with that of Christ on the cross. As a devotional means through which one communes with Christ, the practice of *imitatio christi* inspires Margery paradoxically to enjoy suffering and actively to abject herself.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva takes as her area of study the abject and abjection. According to Kristeva, the experience of abjection is a revulsion that represses an underlying attraction. Abjection is the prohibition that is

⁷In citations from Middle English texts I have substituted modern orthographic counterparts for thorn and yogh.

coextensive with the phase in an infant's development known as primary narcissism. Primary narcissism is, as first defined by Freud, the phase just before an infant enters into object relations, where an infant has no other object than its own "fragile" ego. In order to preserve its own ego the infant must guard against fusional impulses and as a line of defence abjects the archaic dyad of mother and "pre-self" without actually "ex-isting" outside the dyad. Like incest dread, which Kristeva states is produced by abjection, abjection is a dual movement of revulsion and unconscious (or pre-conscious) attraction. The abject is all that must be ejected as filthy and differentiated from the self as "not me"; thus the abject consists of excrement, urine, vomit, blood, mucus, pus, cadavers, etc. Abjection begins the process that produces boundaries for the newly emerging self. The emotional state that a newly emerging subject endures during the phase of primary narcissism is a state where pleasure/pain and inside/outside divisions are not yet made. As we shall see, these distinctions depend upon the infant's entry into a triangulated oedipal complex, which occurs after the infant leaves the archaic dyad, and is coextensive with the infant's entry into object relations and active language use. Thus, when a mystic abjects herself through self-loathing, or the desire for public humiliation, or the incorporation of abject flows, or corporeal punishment, she rejects the usual inside/outside and pleasure/pain boundaries that establish identity. Abjection of self involves the violation of the self and serves to dissolve the borders of subjectivity. By removing basic distinctions between inside and outside, pleasure and pain, through abjection of self the mystic mimics the infantile state of primary narcissism. This state of idealized primary narcissism, reached through the partial dissolution of subjectivity, is created by the mystic as a means through which she communes with Christ. Because the state of primary narcissism

belongs to a phase in a pre-subject's development when she is still fused with the archaic mother, underlying the mystic's desire to fuse with Christ is the mystic's desire to return to a maternal paradise.

Through abjection of self the mystic puts at risk unified subjectivity, and as Karma Lochrie points out in *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, also culture: "Through excess of desire, the transgression [of self] which leads to knowledge and union is produced, but it requires defilement and risks culture" (41). Lochrie subsequently argues that in abjecting herself a female mystic's transgression of her body by exploiting its very materiality produces "subversive" speech: "[w]ithout the sealed body, the borders between flesh and spirit and letter and spirit are lost. Angela's vision of the Word which touches and embraces her anticipates Helene Cixous's vision of the subversive potential of women's language . . ." (46). Lochrie points out that

The female mystic who speaks from the place of abjection seeks to return language--and words in particular--to Aristotle's definition of words as "symbols of that which suffers in the soul." She does so by implicating the flesh and the medieval construction of woman in that suffering, and thus, in language itself From the fissured flesh comes the female mystic's language of suffering, words derived from the wounds of the soul, utterance both intractable and marvellous. (*Translations* 46-47)

By "fissured flesh" Lochrie is referring to the medieval construction of woman as flesh: that is, as neither body nor soul but a heterogeneous amalgam of both that is stabilized by sealing off the body's flows and sexuality through both figurative and literal methods. By exploiting this notion of body as flesh and by transgressing the ideal of the sealed body through abjection of self, the mystic, Lochrie claims, seeks to establish in language her own material experience that is otherwise excluded from dominant discourse. All of this has a rather utopian ring to it, especially when one considers that

mystic speech is after all contained by the church. Lochrie claims that "[s]uch abjection [as practised by female mystics] exploits by overturning the medieval effort to exclude abjection and with it, the feminine, from religious experience" (39). This statement is problematic in three ways: firstly, Lochrie contradicts herself as elsewhere she points to Christ's suffering body on the cross as the "model for such abjection"(41) that is particular to female mysticism. Secondly, Lochrie appears to be claiming that female mysticism is exclusive in its exploitation of abjection, whereas Kristeva states that abjection "accompanies all religious structurings." Furthermore, hagiography is full of instances of male abjection. Most significant to *The Book of Margery Kempe* is the example of St. Francis who kisses lepers, seeks public shame and castigates himself for "overindulgence."⁸ And thirdly, Lochrie needs to define or qualify what she means by "the feminine" because as Caroline Bynum has shown in *Jesus as Mother*, the church exploits notions of the feminine, particularly issues surrounding motherhood and the flows of the female body.

My reading of *The Book of Margery Kempe* and of Lochrie's claim that Margery seeks to include in language what language excludes, namely "the feminine," is that *The Book of Margery Kempe* as a mystical text demonstrates a subject's desire to articulate and possess the unnameable. Unlike Lochrie (who excludes any mention of the psychoanalytic thrust of Kristeva's theory), I read "the unnameable" or the "feminine" psychoanalytically and suggest that Margery's mystical experiences have as their unconscious motivation a desire to return to an always already "lost"

⁸Clarissa Atkinson points to the example of St. Francis's public nakedness and humility in *Mystic and Pilgrim* as a possible source for one of Margery's more spectacularly abject fantasies: namely her fantasy of being strapped naked to a hurdle, pulled through town and pelted with filth (142).

maternal paradise that is outside of language and symbolization. What is evident in Margery's imagined scenarios of the holy family and her subsequent loud cries and feelings of communion with Christ is what Sarah Beckwith has dubbed the Holy Family Romance. Clearly, the relationship of Jesus and the Virgin is dyadic: due to their conflation of marital, parental and infantile roles, they represent a self-sustaining unit uninterrupted by a third party or father. As the father of himself, Christ's relationship with his mother-wife is obviously an oedipal fantasy.⁹ It is into this oedipal configuration that Margery Kempe inserts herself in a way that is typical of Freud's description of the Family Romance:¹⁰ in order to gain exclusive access to Christ, Margery imagines scenarios where she helps or rescues the Virgin. Additionally, Margery imitates the Virgin's numerous roles, and actually competes with and re-infantilizes the Virgin by claiming authority over her.

As we shall see, the usual object of desire in Family Romance scenarios is the mother. Significantly, as Caroline Bynum has shown in *Jesus as Mother*, late-medieval Catholicism sometimes conceives of Christ as mother. Christ's broken and bleeding body on the cross signifies his maternal and semiotic attributes: bleeding, nourishing, suffering flesh. Kristeva defines the semiotic as pre-verbal communication and/or signifiers that are contained by the

⁹This claim raises the question of authorship and intentionality concerning the creation of the Christ myth, i.e., who produced this fantasy. I suggest that the early author/s of the Christ myth tuned into a repressed collective desire. Whether or not the oedipal configuration of Virgin and Son was intentionally produced is impossible to know; however, I propose that the subsequent mobilization of the Virgin-Christ dyad and the Holy Family Romance in the devotional literature of the Middle Ages is consciously exploitative of people's secret fears and fantasies.

¹⁰Freud's Family Romance scenario concerns a son's oedipal wish to have exclusive access to his mother. The scenario goes as follows: the son fantasizes about rescuing his father from a life-threatening situation, thus re-infantilizing his father. Consequently, the son usurps his father's position of authority in an effort, at least in fantasy, to rid his relationship with his mother of all rivals. All the while the son unconsciously emulates his father.

archaic maternal body. Thus the semiotic flows of Christ's body are suggestive of the archaic mother who is outside signification. Any desire for this "lost" mother is phallicized simply because desire for something is what separates a child from this archaic paradise. Christ as such functions for Margery both paternally and maternally; he is literally the phallic mother. In Lacanian terms the phallic mother is the Other: the hallucinated Other who possesses the "privilege" of satiating a subject's desires. It is my argument that Margery's Holy Family Romance scenarios which establish her own dyadic relationship with Christ have as their basis her unconscious desire for the "lost" mother.

As every infant must separate from this archaic mother in order to enter the world, Margery's devotional practices would appear to have as their goal the dissolution of subjectivity. Paradoxically, through her mobilization of abjection, her idealized primary narcissism and her oedipal fantasies, Margery Kempe does in fact "negotiate a self" as Sarah Beckwith claims. Beckwith in fact states that her argument in "A Very Material Mysticism" is "that mysticism is very often the site of self-making, rather than self-dissolution as it is often represented as being" ("Problems" 175). As Beckwith suggests, Margery's production of self is far from stable and closed; rather it is characterized by its sheer repetition. According to Kristeva, instability, fluidity and repetition are all characteristic of a person "by whom the abject exists," or, in other words, a person who mobilizes the abject and abjection in order to "be":

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), *situates* (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, belonging, or refusing A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines--for they are constituted of a non-object, the

abject--constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder (*Powers of Horror* 8)

As "a tireless builder" Margery marks the fluid confines of her selfhood through her own words framed as they are by the Christian narrative of the birth and death of Christ. The Christian narrative's emphasis on Christ's infancy, his relationship with his mother, his death and maternal attributes coupled with affective spirituality's invitation to embellish the gospel provide ample room for Margery to release repressed desires, however condensed and displaced, and make sense of the suffering, feelings of nostalgia, and the impotence of language that are ubiquitous to the processes of subjectivity.

CHAPTER ONE

Margery Kempe and the Holy Family Romance

Freud formulates the Family Romance in the first two essays from "Contributions to the Psychology of Love" and in "Family Romances." In these three essays Freud analyzes a son's fantasy of rescuing his father as revealing the son's desire to rid his relationship with his mother of an intrusive third party. The son in his bid to remove all rivals for the attention of his mother in fantasy rescues his father from a dangerous situation thereby claiming his father's authority and power. The consequence of such a fantasy is that the child becomes the father of himself and a husband to his mother.¹ Christ is the only son--at least before artificial insemination-- who has never had to share his mother at the moment of conception. In effect, Christ is the father of himself according to the unity of the Trinity. In addition to being her son's wife, the Virgin is also her son's daughter (if one takes the doctrine of the Trinity to its logical extreme): this point will be taken up shortly. Kristeva explains why the holy family of mother and son is so desirable a relationship:

A Virgin Mother? We all want our mothers to be virgins, so that we can love them better or allow ourselves to be loved by them without fear of a rival. (*In The Beginning* 42)

Due to the conflation of their marital, parental and infantile roles, together the Virgin and Christ form a self-sustaining unit uninterrupted by a third party or father. Because this relationship lacks a third party or rival that would triangulate it,

¹Freud also describes in "Family Romances" sons' fantasies of their mothers' infidelity and even prostitution. Freud points out in "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love" that the objectives of this fantasy are "efforts to bridge the gulf between the two currents [sacred and profane] in love, at any rate in phantasy, and by debasing the mother to acquire her as an object of sensuality" (183). This essay is primarily about male sexual fantasies and desire and is not applicable to Margery Kempe's fantasies concerning Christ except in reversal: Margery debases herself in order to acquire Christ as her love object.

clearly, the relationship of Christ and the Virgin is a dyadic representation of a mother-son oedipal fantasy. For Margery Kempe the Virgin-Christ dyad is an extremely potent relationship because it represents an all-encompassing fusion that covers the spectrum of love from infancy to adulthood. It is this oedipal configuration of mother/wife and son/husband that Margery Kempe inserts herself into by imitating the Virgin's roles and imagining scenarios in which she helps or rescues the Virgin. While Margery in effect triangulates the Holy dyad, her motivation for asserting her authority over the Virgin by emulating and rescuing her is to usurp the Virgin's exclusive position in relation to Christ. Thus Margery seeks to establish her own dyad, that of mystic and Christ.

Freud's description of the rescue motif that accompanies the Family Romance scenario focuses upon father-son rivalry. He mentions only in passing that the rescue fantasy and the Family Romance apply to girls also. He analyzes this motif when it concerns the son rescuing the father as signifying an attempt by the son to pay back the debt of birth. The fantasized scenario goes as follows: the son usurps his father's authority by placing him in a dangerous situation from which only the son can save him. The effect of this fantasized usurpation of power is that the father is re-infantilized; thus, in so doing the son eliminates the father as a rival for the mother/wife's attention. When this rescue motif concerns a son's mother,

... rescuing the mother takes on the significance of giving her a child or making a child for her--needless to say one like himself . . . in the rescue phantasy he is completely identifying himself with his father. All his instincts, those of tenderness, gratitude, lustfulness, defiance and independence, find satisfaction in the single wish *to be his own father*. ("Contributions to the Psychology of Love" I 173)

As the Virgin and Christ form a dyad, Christ has no rival for his mother's attention and hence no need to usurp his father since Christ is one and the same person. As such the Virgin-Christ dyad is a realization or depiction of the oedipal

fantasy that motivates Family Romance scenarios. For instance, Christ gives his mother a baby, one that is himself; thus he blurs the distinction between mother and child or husband and wife. Additionally, as his wife's father he insures that no other man can lay claim to his mother/daughter's affections on any emotional level. What is emphasized in the devotional literature of the late Middle Ages is the oedipal aspect of the Virgin-Christ dyad--that is the son who marries his mother, and the mother whose infant is her "little husband." However, for Margery Kempe who seeks to insert herself into the Holy dyad, father-daughter incest is clearly an issue by virtue of Margery's status as the daughter of Christ. However, the incestuous implications of Margery's liaison with God as father is beyond the scope of this thesis.² This thesis will instead argue that the *jouissance*³ of Margery's mystical experience lies in her emulation of the Virgin as mother and wife of Christ and, as I will seek to demonstrate in the following chapters, her attempted re-creation of the archaic mother-infant dyad through abjection of self and Christ's role as the phallic (m)Other.

Margery's insertion into the Holy family dyad on one level signifies Christ as father and the Virgin as the third party whom Margery clearly admires but also

²Nancy Partner suggests that Margery's *Book* is likely an unconscious testimonial to her repressed incestuous desire for her father. Partner points out that at the beginning of the *Book* Margery makes it very clear that she is John Brunham's daughter and later in life when travelling around England and her identity questioned, she declares herself to be John Brunham's daughter first and John Kempe's wife second. Partner also points out that Margery does not mention the death of her father in her narrative and notes that the year of his death coincides with the beginning of Margery's screaming seizures. Partner suggests that this textual absence and Margery's hysterical cries are related: "The death of her father is the underlying cause, the life event which triggered the rising toward consciousness of her incompletely repressed desire for him. . . . Margery's apparent indifference to the death of her father, which she never mentions in her *Book*, was the kind of self-deceiving numbness of feeling at the death of the loved object often observed by Freud in cases of incestuous love in hysterics" (264).

³According to Jacqueline Rose, *jouissance* means "literally 'orgasm,' but [it is] used by Lacan to refer to something more than pleasure which can easily tip into its opposite" (*Female Sexuality* 34). By "something more than pleasure," Rose is referring to "the drive outside any register of need, and beyond an economy of pleasure" where "[t]he drive touches an area of excess"(34). Because *jouissance* is "beyond an economy of pleasure", the experience of *jouissance* exceeds language or the exchange of signifiers and objects and thus it is ineffable.

rivals. This is the exact opposite of Freud's Family Romance where the father is the third and excluded party, but, as we shall see later in the chapter, Christ is also mother. Margery's emulation of the Virgin is characterized by a conflation of roles implicit in the Family Romance, that is Margery is the daughter who becomes the mother of her mother and the wife of her father. However, because Margery seeks to insert herself into an oedipal dyad where the mother is also the father's mother, likewise Margery sees herself as Christ's mother:

Therfor I preue that thou art a very dowtyr to me & a modyr also, a syster, a wyfe, and a spowse, wytnessyng the Gospel wher owyr Lord seyth to hys dyscyples, "He that doth the wyl of my Fadyr in Heuyn he is bothyn modyr, brothyr, & syster vn-to me." Whan thou stodyst to plesse me, than art thou a very dowtyr; whan thou wepyst & mornyst for my peyn & for my Passyon, than art thou a very modyr to haue compassyon of hyr chyld; whan thou wepyst for other mennys synnes and for aduersytes, than art thou a very syster; and, whan thou sorwyst for thou art so long fro the blysse of Heuyn, than art thou a very spowse & a wyfe, for it longyth to the wyfe to be wyth hir husbond & no very joy to han tyl sche come to hys presens. (31)

Margery in her visions actively portrays herself as spouse and mother to Christ, and surrogate mother to the Virgin in the Virgin's infancy and adulthood. Margery is present at the Nativity where she begs food for the Virgin and provides diapers for the infant Christ, hence mothering them both. The above is the only place in the *Book* where Christ calls Margery sister and in fact Margery never portrays herself as Christ's sister. The inclusion of sister appears to me to be rhetorical in that it serves to amplify the absolute emotional satisfaction Margery receives from Christ.

Like the Family Romances of Freud's description, Margery both emulates and helps her rival. For instance, in a section near the end of Margery's *Book* Christ catalogues Margery's good works and thanks her for them, and particularly for directing his mother to breast-feed him:

For in no-thing, dowtyr, that thou myghtyst do in erth thou myghtyst no bettyr plesyn me than suffyrn me speke to the in thi sowle, for that tyme thou vndirstondyst my wyl & I vndirstond thi wyl. And also, dowtyr, thou clepist

my Modyr for to comyn in-to thi sowle & takyn me in hir armys & leyn me to
hir brestys & geuyn me sokyn.(210)

Margery's fantasy of alerting the Virgin to her infant son's needs appears to be a helpful gesture. But because Margery considers Christ and the Virgin to be her spiritual parents, her direction of the Virgin suggests that she is asserting authority over her mother. Implicitly Margery here is usurping the Virgin's ability to know what her child needs and her freedom to act upon those needs as she sees fit. Consequently, Margery's vision, in the context of Freud's Family Romance, implies that she is re-infantilizing the Virgin. By virtue of Margery's assertion of her own power and authority over the Virgin, she takes the Virgin's maternal position in the Holy dyad. Through this usurpation, Margery secures Christ as her son, husband and father.

It would appear then, that the multiple roles and the rescue motif that appear in *The Book of Margery Kempe* are a repetition of a girl's oedipal phase when she changes her object of love from her mother to her father by unconsciously identifying with and imitating her mother. Nancy Chodorow points out, in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, that the oedipal phase for girls is not a complete turning away from the mother; nor does the daughter give up her mother as a love object:

Every step of the way, as the analysts describe it, a girl develops her relationship to her father while looking back at her mother to see if her mother is envious, to make sure she is in fact separate, to see if she can in this way win her mother, to see if she is really independent. (126)

While a girl appears to be repudiating her mother during her oedipal phase and again in adolescence in fact,

[p]sychoanalytic accounts make it clear that a girl's libidinal turning to her father is not at the expense of, or a substitute for, her attachment to her mother. Nor does a girl give up the internal relationship to her mother which is a product of her earlier development. (127)

If the oedipal phase for girls is a displaced expression of love and desire for the mother then the significance of Margery's rescuing or helping the Virgin becomes more complicated. Rescuing the Virgin or one's mother or father is about having power over her or him. In fantasy the child stages a *coup d'état* and usurps the place of the unwelcome third party who interferes with her access to the mother--logically the father. If Margery Kempe is the spiritual child of Christ and the Virgin--both call her daughter--then when Margery rescues the Virgin she re-infantilizes the Virgin and becomes the mother of herself. Margery's appropriation of the Virgin's maternal position means that Margery now has exclusive access to Christ as the father.

In accordance with Chodorow's findings, Margery's emulation of the Virgin would appear to signify an unconscious desire for the Virgin as mother if it were not so obvious that Christ is the object of Margery's desire. If Margery's insertion into the Virgin-Christ dyad signifies oedipally then it apparently follows Freud's earlier and later refuted description of the oedipal phase for girls as a complete turning away from the mother. But, as Caroline Bynum has argued in *Holy Feast Holy Fast and Fragmentation and Redemption*, Christ is also mother. (Significantly Margery does in fact imitate Christ's suffering--a devotional practice called *imitatio Christi*.) Bynum has written at great length upon Christ's maternal role but she has shied away from interpreting his maternal function psychoanalytically.⁴ As previously stated, it is my contention that Christ in part represents a particular kind of mother, whom both Freud and Kristeva would call the phallic mother. The phallic mother is the nostalgic fantasy of a mother who does not "lack" or who is not castrated. She is omnipotent and her body is replete in possessing all that a

⁴One of Bynum's more striking observations concerning the motif of Christ as mother is the frequent depiction in late medieval art of the infant Christ with engorged breasts which suggest that it is he who nurtures his mother. This dramatic reversal of roles will be explored further on in the chapter.

subject desires. The phallic mother, according to Kristeva, is whom or what we construct retroactively in the "lost" or archaic mother's stead (*Desire in Language* 238). The archaic mother is the mother who belongs to the pre-subjective phase in an infant's development, the archaic dyad. As such the archaic mother is outside of symbolization and language and is hence "lost." It is the archaic dyad which the infant must separate from in order to enter subjectivity and language (*Powers of Horror* 13). An infant first achieves separation through abjecting the archaic dyad according to Kristeva. Like incest dread, abjection, which according to Kristeva motivates incest dread, is a dual movement of both conscious revulsion and unconscious attraction. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the archaic dyad through abjection is both rejected and unconsciously yearned for. The phallic mother both represents, and through her "phallacy" shields us from, the unspeakable and unsignifiable desire for a fusion that if achieved would destroy our subjectivity.

Christ's maternal and paternal attributes make Margery Kempe's Family Romance scenarios more complex because they suggest that beneath the more obvious oedipal issues of Margery's fantasized insertion into the holy dyad are Margery's nostalgia and veiled desire for her pre-oedipal relationship with the archaic mother. Because the archaic dyad is subject to a primary repression that is prior to language learning, it is impossible to ever articulate it directly. As Kristeva points out in *Revolution in Poetic Language* even the theoretical construction of the archaic dyad (or semiotic chora) must always be relativized. It is my argument that Margery's production of, and insertion of herself into, scenario after scenario of the Nativity and Passion is a means of bringing repressed material to the surface and giving it meaning within the scope of the Christian narrative. Margery's desire for mystical fusion or communion with Christ can be read as her displaced desire for a return to a "lost" maternal paradise. That Margery is not aberrant in her devotional

practice of imagining her own participation at the Nativity and Passion is attested by a number of scholars. For instance, Gail Gibson argues that Margery's visions of the holy family during and after Christ's Passion and her own participation in the visions are "all manifestations of her determined effort to live out a series of homely and affective meditations which were originally addressed to a Poor Clare in Italy more than a century before her birth" (49). Thus Gibson maintains that Margery's devotional practices are modelled directly on Love's adaptation of the *Meditationes* translated into English as *The Mirovre of the Blessed Life of Ovr Lorde and Savioure Jesvs Christe*. Whatever the historical difficulties are in actually proving Gibson's point, Margery's devotional practices are, at the very least, resonant with Love's book. As Gail Gibson has shown, Love's book explicitly directs the devout to insert themselves into specific narrative accounts of the holy dyad's life.⁵ Thus it is my contention that affective narratives, by encouraging the devout to hallucinate their own participation in Christ's and the Virgin's lives, actually inspire the devout to produce Family Romance scenarios and other fantasies that fill a psychological need. The focus of this chapter is to analyze Margery's literal construction of the Holy Family Romance and then to suggest in the following chapters that underlying Margery's superficially straightforward desire for Christ as father, husband and son is her desire for Christ as mother.

As Gibson argues, many of Margery's scenarios appear to be responses to directives from Love's and other affective narratives that call on the devout to imagine themselves at events and phases in holy family life. For instance, Margery actively participates in the birth and childhood of the Virgin Mary, the Virgin's

⁵Sarah Beckwith claims that the devotional literature of affective piety was concerned with more than just spiritual matters. Beckwith argues that it was "concerned with the sanctifying and absolutising of social roles, a function that is clearly seen in its deployment of what may be termed the Holy Family Romance. The absolute is domesticated. In particular the female mystic is encouraged to see herself as mother to the infant Jesus, as his wife, and sometimes his daughter in ways which clearly solidify her in these roles" (46).

pregnancy and childbirth, Christ's Passion and Resurrection. Significant to my claim that these fantasies represent presumably unexamined psychological needs and/or desires, is Margery's insertion of herself into a scenario depicting Saint Anne's pregnancy and the Virgin's infancy and childhood. In this scenario there occurs on a stylistic level a telling and problematic blurring of pronouns and their antecedents:

And than a-noon sche saw Seynt Anne gret wyth chylde, and than sche preyd Seynt Anne to be hir mayden & hir seruawnt. & anon ower Lady was born, & than sche besyde hir to take the chylde to hir & kepe it tyl it wer twelve yer of age wyth good mete & drynke, wyth fayr whyte clothys & whyte kerchys. And than sche seyde to the blyssed chylde, "Lady, ye schal be the Modyr of God." The blyssed chylde answeyrd & seyde, "I wold I wer worthy to be the handmayden of hir that xuld conseive the sone of God." (18)

While there are serious questions concerning authorship and authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe* it is plausible to suggest that the indeterminacy of the pronouns "hir" and "sche" indicate a fusion or a compression of identities between Margery, the Virgin and St. Anne that may relate back to childhood mother-daughter fusion (see Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering*) or possibly even further back to mother-infant fusion. In any case Margery does not adequately differentiate herself from the Virgin and St. Anne; this suggests that she may have trouble establishing her own boundaries of identity. On the narrative level of this passage Margery is producing a Family Romance scenario by establishing herself as the surrogate mother of the Virgin. Like Freud's description of the Family Romance, Margery's scenario is typified by an undercurrent of rivalry which she veils as generosity. Margery rivals the Virgin implicitly in her exchange with the Virgin-child in which Margery is more deserving and holier than the Virgin because it is more humble to be a handmaiden to the Virgin than to be the Virgin herself.⁶ If, as I have argued, Margery considers the Virgin to be her mother in some capacity, this literal

⁶Gail Gibson also makes this point in *The Theatre of Devotion*: "Margery has been chosen worthy handmaiden by St. Anne herself; it is *she* who has fulfilled the longing of Mary to be handmaiden of

re-infantilization of the Virgin and Margery's responsibilities to the infant Virgin signify that Margery is paying back the debt of birth to the Virgin and thus the Virgin in fantasy becomes Margery's "derworthy dawghtyr." By extension it is Margery who becomes the mother of Christ and his respective spouse, bride and daughter.

In Margery's Holy Family Romance scenarios even the adult Virgin is looked after or rescued by Margery, as in this fantasy that occurs when Margery is invited by the now adult Virgin to be her handmaiden:

And than went the creatur forth wyth owyr Lady to Bedlem & purchasyd hir herborwe euery nyght wyth gret reuerens, & owyr Lady was receyued wyth glad cher. Also sche beggyd owyr Lady fayr whyte clothys & kerchys for to swathyn in hir Sone whan he wer born, and whan Ihesu was born, sche ordeyned beddyng for owyr Lady to lyg in wyth hir blyssed Sone. And sythen sche beggyd mete for owyr Lady & hir blyssyd chyld. (19)

In this scenario Margery provides for the holy dyad the most basic of care: food, diapers and bedding. Margery also attends the Virgin at the Passion and afterwards makes her a hot "cawdel"--"a hot fortified drink" or a "pudding" (MED). Christ even directs Margery to look after his mother during his Passion:

"Be stille, dowtyr, & rest wyth my Modyr her & comfort the in hir, for sche that is myn owyn Modyr must suffyr this sorwe. But I xal come a-geyn, dowtyr, to my Modyr & comfortyn hir & the bothyn" (189)

Margery mothers both Christ and the Virgin and subsequently inserts herself into the holy dyad. By doing all that belongs to the Virgin, Margery creates a Virgin-Christ-Mystic triangle.

David Aers claims that the re-infantilization of Christ (he does not mention the Virgin) is a means for Margery to "identify with the 'good' mother in a way that her

God's handmaiden. Indeed, since exaltation comes from service, Margery has, in a sense, out-humbled and out-performed the Virgin Mary herself" (50).

experience in the earthly family had denied" and is a means that "offers an image of the one sphere in which the woman obviously controls the males" (105). Certainly this re-infantilization is about power but Margery's motivation appears to be more complex than Aers would have us believe. While on her way to Rome Margery travels with some women who do not speak English; nonetheless she knows them to be spiritual women by the Christ doll one of them carries in a box:

And the woman the which had the ymage in the chist, whan thei comyn in good citeys, sche toke owt the ymage owt of hir chist & sett it in worshepful wyfys lappys. & thei wold puttyn schirtys [shirts] therup-on & kyssyn it as thei it had ben God hym-selfe. &, whan the creatur sey the worshep & the reuerens that thei dedyn to the ymage, sche was takyn wyth swet deuocyon & swet meditacyons that sche wept wyth gret sobbyng & lowde crying. & sche was meuyd in so mych the mor as, whil sche was in Inghond, sche had hy meditacyons in the byrth & the childhode of Crist(77-78)

Interestingly, Margery's description of the "worshepful wyfys" devotion moves from dressing the infant Christ to kissing the infant "as thei it had ben God hymself." Worshipping an effigy of the infant Christ as God, who is implicitly the father, suggests that the Christ doll, although representing an infant, is on an emotional and conceptual level perceived as an adult. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has documented the use of devotional dolls in late medieval Florence but she points out that these dolls were used by "[n]uns all over Europe" who by "identifying with the mother of God, gently tended an effigy of Jesus at liturgical feasts" (324).

Klapisch-Zuber also partially explains the psychological impetus behind these dolls:

The language of these mystics when they speak of their visions also shows that the husband so desperately absent was hidden in the baby of their dreams. Later the child dolls brought by nuns in Germanic countries to their convents were to be called sponserl, "little husbands." In dreaming of themselves as the servants and nurses of the Christ child, these "brides of Christ" attempted to see and to feel their spiritual husband physically, to bear him and to "embrace" him, to "find joy in his embraces." (326-27)

Although the effigy portrays Christ as an infant, the appellation of "little husband"⁷ suggests that the Christ doll is capable of affording its owner a degree of emotional comfort unbefitting its portrayed age. Theologically it is the Trinity that impregnates the Virgin. As the incarnation of God, Christ is literally the Virgin's "little husband."⁸ If, as Klapisch-Zuber points out, these nuns identified with the Virgin by mimicking the care she provides for her son, then the appellation of "little husband" further emphasizes that the Virgin-Christ dyad is an oedipal constellation containing hybridized maternal and marital love. Thus this incest scenario is mimicked in the devotional practices of holy women including Margery Kempe.

Perhaps nowhere is this hybridized love more eloquently described than in Bernard of Clairvaux's sermon on the Virgin's Assumption into heaven:

With what a tranquil face, with what an unclouded expression, with what joyous embraces was she taken up by her son!...Happy indeed were the kisses he pressed on her lips when she was nursing and as a mother delighted in the child in her Virgin's lap. But surely will we not deem much happier those kisses which in blessed greeting she receives today from the mouth of him who sits on the right hand of the Father, when she ascends to the throne of glory, singing a nuptial hymn and saying: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth."? (Warner 130)

⁷In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow describes a similar phenomenon in modern society of women sexing their infant sons. Chodorow's book is in part a reformulation of a number of Freud's theories concerning the development of sexuality and subjectivity. One of Chodorow's more striking departures from Freud is her argument that parents participate in the Oedipus complex. She cites Benedek and Gregory Zilboorg's suggestion "that incestuous libidinal fantasies may arise initially in parents rather than children" (161) and Benedek's observation that it is "not the child but the parent [who] is in possession of the mental and physiological equipment which stimulates sexual impulses and the fear of its consequences" (161). It is plausible that the inscription of sexual love onto the Virgin-Christ dyad through devotional dolls etc., indicates an adult parent's (Benedek's findings pertain to both men and women) participation in a child's oedipal fantasies.

⁸Nicholas Love's adaptation of the *Meditationes* includes the following description of God directing Gabriel to inform Mary that she has been chosen by her future son to become his mother: "Goe you to oure deare daughter Marie the spouse of Iosephe, who aboue all the creatures vpon earth is moste deare vnto vs, and say vnto hir that my blessed sonne hath coueted hir shape and beautie and chosen hir to be his mother, and therfore pray hir that she accept and receiue him willinglie" (Love 42). That Christ chooses his mother and prays that she "accept and receiue him willinglie" suggests that he is courting her. Thus implicitly he is asking her to become both his wife and mother.

The parallel between and comparison of maternal and erotic kissing (as indicated by the reference to "nuptial hymn" and to the Song of Songs: "Let him kiss me . . .") explicitly interweaves marital and infant-mother love. The erotic kisses appear to be the culmination of a desire long present but never entirely satisfied. The kisses that the Virgin will give to her son on their nuptial day are deemed "much happier" and by implication much more satisfying than the kisses they exchanged when Christ was a nursing babe. Scholars speculate that St. Bernard's grafting of the Song of Songs onto the Virgin's Assumption is an attempt to rid the Song of its erotic content. From my secular perspective the effect of the operation is the opposite: to graft the Song onto the Assumption emphasizes that the Virgin-Christ dyad is in some sense an erotic dyad. While this dyad is physically chaste, it is emotionally incestuous, for the Virgin in this passage sings a nuptial hymn to "him who sits on the right hand of the father," implying that she is marrying her son with the blessing of her father.

Nicholas Love's translation divides the Virgin's roles among the persons of the Trinity in keeping with official church theology of the Trinity: God is one in substance and three in person:

This also is a special feaste of our Ladie Saint Marie the which as this day was chosen of God the Father to be his most deare beloued daughter, and of God the Sonne to be his milde and blessed mother, and of God the holie Ghoste to be his amiable and tender spouse. (57)

While technically unified, the three personalities of the Trinity are treated separately. However, in the biographical accounts of Christ's life, including instances in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Christ performs both his proper role as son and the Holy Ghost's role of spouse to the Virgin. The devotional practices of Margery Kempe and those described in *The Mirovve of the Blessed life of Ovr Lorde and Saviovre Jesus Christe* all emphasize the manhood of Christ and his relationship

with the Virgin. Margery Kempe in fact is afraid of the father whom she clearly identifies as someone separate from Christ. At Margery's marriage to the Godhead she explicitly distinguishes between father and son:

Also the Fadyr seyde to this creatur, "Dowtyr, I wil han the weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn the my preuyteys & my counselys, for thu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende." Than the creatur kept sylens in hir sowle & answeyde not therto, for sche was ful sor aferd of the Godhede... al hir lofe & al hir affeccyon was set in the manhode of Crist & therof cowde sche good skylle & sche wold for no-thing a partyd therfro Than seyde the Secunde Persone, Crist Ihesu, whoys manhode sche louyd so meche, to hir, "What seyst thu, Margery, dowtyr, to my Fadyr of thes wordys that he spekyth to the? Art thu wel plesyd that it be so?" And than sche wold not answeyn the Secunde Persone but wept wondir sor, desiryng to haue stille hym-selfe & in no wyse to be departyd fro hym. (86-87)⁹

Margery does go on to marry the Godhead, but she obviously fears that this marriage means separation from Christ. For Margery Kempe the doctrine of the Trinity--the three that are one in substance--has very little meaning. She worships Christ as God and places a secondary emphasis on the Holy Ghost. The Father, excepting in this instance, is not mentioned. The doctrine of the Trinity (and its "mystery") leads to a suggestive blurring. While the three personalities are ostensibly separate, in practice their boundaries are indistinct. The result of this conflation is that Christ is the father of himself and son and spouse to his mother.

⁹There is a dual meaning to "preuyteys" that Laura Kendrick analyzes in connection with Chaucer's "Miller's Prologue." According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, "privete" means "privacy, secrecy", "the external genital or excretory organs". The MED cites the meaning of "mannes privetes" as "penis; testicles" and "goddes private(s)" as "a sacred mystery, divine secret; revelation." Kendrick argues that "Goddes pryvetee" in the context of the "Miller's Prologue" is meant as a pun, referring to both God's private thoughts or intentions and also to his private parts. Kendrick points out that the psychological and symbolic correlation between the phallus, power and Godhead in the devotional paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of Christ and the Virgin is evident in the sudden appearance of Christ's "private parts" (11) and argues that medieval artists consciously used the analogy of "the phallos to represent the logos (hundreds of years before Freudian analysis)" (12). Kendrick's claim that the "late-fourteenth-century denudation of God the Son was a pan-European phenomenon" (11) moreover emphasizes that this correlation was widespread. Thus, for Margery God's "preuyteys" plausibly refers to both a divine secret and God's private parts that will be revealed to Margery at the consummation of their marriage.

The practice of the mystic is to see Christ in all these possible roles specifically associated with the Virgin and then to misrecognize¹⁰ herself as the Virgin in these same roles. Margery imagines the following scenario:

"Therefore most I nedys be homly wyth the & lyn in thi bed wyth the. Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, & thu mayst boldly, whan thu art in thi bed, take me to the as for thi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, & as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be louyd as a sone schuld be louyd wyth the modyr & wil that thu loue me, dowtyr, as a good<wife> owyth to loue hir husbonde. & therfor thu mayst boldly take me in the armys of thi sowle & kyssen my mowth, my hed, & my fete as swetly as thow wylt."(90)

Most striking about this passage is the extent to which Christ's roles are compressed and maternal and sexual love are blurred. Margery takes her son, husband and father to bed. Once again this compression of emotional roles echoes that of the Virgin-Christ dyad. Mentioned in *The Book of Margery Kempe* in conjunction with authenticating Margery's tears, Maria D'Oignies, an early thirteenth century French mystic "whose life was written by her confessor Jacques de Vitry" (322 n.153/1), also appears to worship Christ through a conflation of roles:

Also vpon a tyme whanne she hadde liggen three dayes in hir bedde and restyd esely with her spouse . . . her semed atte she hadde liggen vnnethes a momente . . . Sumtyme thre dayes to-gadir or more, as hir semyd, she clypped oure lorde as a litil babbe dwellynge bitwix hir pappys, <&> hidde hym-selfe, that othere shulde not se hym; sumtyme she kyssynge played with hym as with a childe. (*Anglia* 172)

¹⁰I use the term "misrecognize" because it connotes a suspension of reality or an element of fantasy that does not recognize itself as such. Juliet Mitchell uses the term when discussing Lacan's mirror stage and his claim that "[t]he image in which we first recognize ourselves is a misrecognition" (*Female Sexuality* 30). We first misrecognize ourselves as whole, independent, and unified before we are in fact so. We anticipate our future mastery. Conceivably, because Margery wishes to occupy the Virgin's position, in the fulfillment of her wish through fantasy Margery cannot consciously understand herself to be fantasizing. Margery is apparently unconscious of her imitation of the Virgin; thus, Margery's image of herself in relation to Christ is a misrecognition.

Maria associates Christ with erotic love and maternal love as both her husband and her nursing babe. Both Maria and Margery replicate the roles of the Virgin in each of their homely visions of their interactions with Christ.¹¹

Coextensive with her emulation of the Virgin's numerous roles is Margery's emulation of the Virgin's suffering. Significant to the Family Romance scenario, Margery often offers to relieve the Virgin of her suffering. While superficially a magnanimous gesture, Margery's devotion to her own tears and crying fits, as we shall see, suggests that Margery is competing with the Virgin. The focus of much of Margery's suffering is, like that of Maria D'Oignies and St. Bridget,¹² Christ's Passion. Hope Emily Allen, in her extensive notes and introduction to the EETS edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, speculates that the source for some of Margery's mystical experiences is St. Bridget.¹³ Allen partly bases her speculation on the economic history of Lynn as a "port by which the English went to Sweden" (280 n.47/26). Accounts of St. Bridget were brought back to England along with Orders of Brigettine Nuns and thus "Margery [would] have been aware of St. Bridget from infancy" (280 n.47/26). Allen believes that Margery like St. Bridget belongs to a "long continued" mystical tradition of "foreign women writers" (liii). The tradition of late

¹¹Julian of Norwich also describes herself as a spouse to Christ: "... he is oure very tru spouse and we his lovyd wyfe and his feyer meydeyn, with whych wyfe he was nevyr displesyd; for he seyth: I loue the and thou louyst me, and oure loue shall nevyr parte in two" (*Revelations* longer 583).

¹²Where *The Book of Margery Kempe* makes explicit mention of St. Bridget and her "boke," Christ directly parallels his manner of speaking to Margery with his manner of speaking to St. Bridget: "[f]or I telle the forsothe ryght as I spak to Seynt Bryde ryte so I speke to the, dowtyr, & I telle the trewly it is trewe euery word that is wretyn in Brides boke, & be the it xal be knowyn for very trewth" (47). Not only is Margery likened to St. Bridget in this passage, she is also responsible for advocating the verity of St. Bridget's book. Just prior to this passage Margery sees the sacrament moving in the priest's hands like a dove beating its wings. Christ tells Margery that "[m]y dowtyr, Bryde, say me neuyr in this wyse" (47). There is the suggestion in this comparison that Margery not only rivals and emulates the Virgin, but also St. Bridget.

¹³For instance, when Margery approaches Jerusalem "rydyng on an asse" (67), she thanks Christ for her safe passage, and he answers her so sweetly that she nearly falls off the ass. Allen glosses this incident with the following: "[e]cstasy when riding on horseback was reported of St. Bridget and St. Colette" (289 n.26). Allen's gloss serves to demonstrate that many details of Margery's mystical experiences, even the most trivial, are resonant with accounts of saints, specifically female saints.

medieval female piety which Allen refers to is Caroline Bynum's object of inquiry in *Holy Feast Holy Fast* where Bynum proves that women's piety in particular emphasized suffering--both in their own ascetical practices and in contemplation of Christ's Passion. *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, written for the sisters of the Brigittine Monastery of Sion at Isleworth in the early to mid-fifteenth century, gives an account of St. Bridget's life which emphasizes her tears. According to this account St. Bridget becomes the bride¹⁴ of Christ when she is crowned by the Virgin at age seven. The significance of this coronation is a fusion-marriage with Christ which is symbolically consummated when Bridget has her first vision of Christ's Passion. From this day forward Christ's pain becomes her pain:

And fro that daye euer after she hadde suche affeccyon to the Passyon of oure Lorde that she syl dome refreyned hir from wepyng whenne she remembred it seruyng our Lord as the Appostell techyth with mekenes and terys. (*The Myroure of Oure Ladye* xlviij)

As we shall see, St. Bridget's role as the suffering spouse of Christ is clearly evocative of the suffering Virgin's vigil at the cross.

The precedent for Margery Kempe's devotional practice of crying and suffering is found in Love's translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*. In this text the devout are instructed not only to think upon and insert themselves into the events surrounding the holy dyad's life, but also to identify with the Virgin's suffering. After describing in graphic detail Christ's wounds, Nicholas Love's translation describes the Virgin's suffering at the Passion:

¹⁴In *The Myroure of Oure Ladye* St. Bridget is described as the spouse of Christ: "the sayd blessyd woman Seynt Birget was so adourned & fulfilled with all vertues that oure lorde receyued hir to be his spouse and vysyted hir many tymes with merueylous consolacyons and dyuyne graces & shewyd hir many heuynly reuelacyons saynge vnto hir I haue chosen the to my spouse that I maye shew to the my secrets for it pleasyth me so to do" (lvi). Christ's revelation of his "secrets" to his spouse St. Bridget may have an unconscious sexual connotation for it suggests that like Margery, what is revealed to St. Bridget is "goddess private(s)" (see footnote 9, p. 28).

And here especially let vs note, that all these aforesaid wronges and horrible abuses were done in the sighte and hearinge of his moste sorrowful mother, standing vnder the Crosse; whose compassion and teares caused hir Sonne to haue more bitter paines. (516-517)

By asking the reader to take special note of the Virgin's suffering, the narrator emphasizes her pain. In this account, Christ's pain becomes fused with his mother's and her ensuing sorrow becomes part of her son's torture. The narrator describes in great detail not only the Virgin's sorrows during the Passion, but also the weeping that occurs at the Virgin's home the day after the crucifixion:

And thou allso by deuoute imagination as if thou wert bodilie present haue compassion on our Ladie and the rest of that sorrowfull company who haue continued all that day fastinge, and full of affliction and heauines And Peter entringe with great weeping and sobbinge saluted our Ladie & other but could not speake he was so much oppressed with grieve. And there with they began all meekely to weepe. And alitle while after came other of the disciples one after an other, and in the same maner at the beginnunge, make much sorrowe & weeping. (555-57)

According to the behaviour of the Virgin and the disciples, weeping is exemplary. The Poor Clare to whom the pseudo-Bonaventure ostensibly addresses the book and the lay and clerical audience to whom Love addresses his translation, are encouraged to imagine themselves at Christ's Passion, to identify with his pain and the pain and loss his disciples experienced at his death. At every step of this maudlin spiritual journey, the Virgin serves as a point or frame of reference for Christ's and his disciples' suffering.

Significant to my claim that the late medieval affective narrative's amplification of the Virgin's suffering has a psychological meaning, especially for female mystics like Margery Kempe,¹⁵ is the fact that the legendary accounts of the Virgin's presence at

¹⁵Julian of Norwich also emphasizes the Virgin's suffering at Christ's Passion: "Hereyn I sawe in partye the compassyon of oure ladye saynte Marye, for criste & scho ware so anede in loove that the gretnesse of hir loove was the cause of the mykillehede of hir payne. For so mykille as scho lovyd hym mare than alle othere, her payne passey alle othere, and so all his disciples & alle his trewe lovers

the Passion and Resurrection are not scriptural. Marina Warner points out that "[o]nly the Fourth Gospel mentions [Mary's] vigil at the cross (John 19:2)" (211). However, as the narrator of *The Mirovre of the Blessed Life of our Lorde and Savioure Iesus Christe* claims, not all is contained in the Bible:

Saint Iohn saith that all those thinges that Iesus did were not write in the gospel: wherefore we beinge stirred to deuotion, imagine, and thinke diuers wordes & deedes of him and other the which we finde not expresly written, so that it be not against our faith: And as the holy man S. Gregory and many othere greate & notable doctoures saith, that holy scripture may be expoundded, declared, & vnderstoode in many & diuers maners and vnto diuers purposes, so that it be not either against faith or good manners. (7-8)

So potent is the figure of the suffering Virgin that she appears in Love's translation of the *Meditationes* at all the significant events preceding and following Christ's Passion. Gail Gibson points out that Love's version of the *Meditationes* "leave[s] the Virgin Mary out of no crucial moment of Incarnation history" (49) and that "it might be argued that the primary devotional model offered by the *Meditationes vitae Christi* is *imitatio Mariae* instead of *imitatio Christi*" (49-50). The motifs of Christ's love for his mother and her suffering are also present in William Caxton's *Golden Legend*. The Caxton text, like Love's *Meditationes*, also defies the gospel, and maintains that Christ appeared to his mother first at his resurrection. In the Caxton text, the narrator rationalizes the inclusion of Christ's visitation to his mother by pointing out that

. . . suche a sone shold not leue his moder without vysytyng and doo her so lytl honour. . . . And though the euangelistes haue not wreton it, yet they knewewel for certayn that it is right that first he shold enhaunce & comforte her that had most payne and sorowe for his deth. (58)

suffyrde paynes mare than thare awne bodelye dying. For I am sekyr be myn awne felynge that the leste of thame luffed [hym] mare than thaye dyd thamselke" (shorter 55).

By stipulating that the Virgin suffers the most at Christ's Passion, the narrator highlights the importance of the Virgin's vigil at the cross. According to Warner, the Virgin's "sorrows became a commonplace of medieval preoccupations" (216). Furthermore, Warner points out that the Virgin is not only included in her son's resurrection but that Christ's Calvary became the Virgin's Calvary and her suffering "the nodal point of his Passion" (211). As the "nodal point" of her son's Passion, the Virgin's suffering occasionally eclipses her son's suffering.

Marina Warner claims that it is through the Virgin as suffering mother that "the Crucifixion, the Deposition, and the Entombment [come] to life. Through her sorrow, the man or woman in prayer [can] feel the stab of loss and agony" (211). Furthermore, Warner describes tears as one of the few "human activities" the Virgin is allowed:

. . . apart from her milk . . . [there is] another source of physical effluvia that expressed her motherhood of men: she wept. For at the same time as her maternal love of the infant Christ was celebrated in poetry and art, her grief at the grown Christ's death inspired a passionate cult of the *Mater Dolorosa*. (205)

Tears, the Virgin mother's tears in particular, are important to medieval spirituality because they symbolize and express the sorrow that a true lover of Christ feels over His Passion. Seen in the context of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the motif of tears and crying in *The Book of Margery Kempe* is emblematic of Margery's devotion to Christ and her emulation of and identification with the Virgin. As we shall see Margery Kempe's Holy Family Romance scenarios in part depend upon the tradition of the *Mater Dolorosa*.

Karma Lochrie points out that the alternate tradition of *Mater Dolorosa* imported from the East depicts the Virgin as "noisy, boisterous, [and] hysterical" with sorrow (*Translations* 180). Certainly this description of the greiving Virgin is consistent with Margery Kempe's devotional sorrowing. As Christ's grieving spouse and

mother, Margery is often physically overcome by her sorrow in public places during public events, particularly during sermons on the Passion. When a Franciscan Grey Friar, famous for his preaching, comes to Lynn he is warned in advance about Margery's crying:

"Ser, I prey yow, beth not displesyd. Her xal comyn a woman to yowr sermown the whech oftyntymes, whan sche herith of the Passyon of owr Lord er of any hy deuocyon, sche wepith, sobbith, & cryeth, but it lestith not longe. & therfor, good ser, yyf sche make any noyse at yowr sermown, suffyr it paciently & beth not a-baschyd therof." (149)

The Grey Friar suffers Margery's loud crying twice and then insists that either Margery admit to a physical disability, "a cardiakyl" (151), or refrain from sobbing so loudly. Margery's loud cries are eventually taken away by Christ expressly so that she can attend the sermon. Consequently, she is charged with hypocrisy "& so slawndir & bodily angwisch fel to hir on euery syde, & al was encresyng of hir gostly comfort" (156). From this it is clear that Margery's spiritual comfort in Christ is directly correlated to her suffering, both through her tears and the contempt of her community. In fact Julian of Norwich, Margery's contemporary and author of the *Revelations of Divine Love* (shorter and longer versions), lauds both Margery's tears and the consequent censure Margery endures:

Seynt Powyl seyth that the Holy Gost askyth for vs wyth mornynngys & wepyngys vnspekable, that is to seyn, he makyth vs to askyn & preyn wyth mornynngys & wepyngys so plentyvowsly that the terys may not be nowmeryd. Ther may non euyl spyrit yeuyn thes tokenys, for Ierom seyth that terys turmentyn mor the Devylle than don the peynes of Helle....for the mor despyte, schame, & repref that ye haue in the world the mor is yowr meryte in the sygth of God. (*Margery Kempe* 43)

Like Margery Kempe, Maria D'Oignies also has a "gift of tears." Her cries are so loud that they resemble the cries of a "womman trauelynge of childe" (138). As previously mentioned, Maria D'Oignies appears in *The Book of Margery Kempe* to prove that Margery's tears are authentic:

. . . he red of a woman clepyd Maria de Oegines & of hir maner of leuyng, of the wondirful sweetnesse that sche had in the word of God heryng, of the wondirful compassyon that sche had in hys Passyon thynkyng, & of the plentyuows teerys that sche wept, the whech made hir so febyl & so weyke that sche myth not endur to beheldyn the Crosse, ne heryn owr Lordys Passyon rehersyd, so sche was resoluyd in-to terys of pyte & compassyon. (152-53)

In order to demonstrate that Margery's tears are neither controllable nor feigned, the narrator tells the story of the priest who does not believe in Maria's tears and who is then overcome by uncontrollable sobbing while he is giving a service. His lack of control is so great that ". . . whan he xulde redyn the Holy Gospel that he wept wondirly so that he wett hys vestiment & ornamentys of the awter & myth not mesuryn hys wepyng ne hys sobbyng, it was so habundawnt, ne he myth not restreyn it ne wel stande therwyth at the awter" (153). This story also appears in *An Alphabet of Tales*, a fifteenth century translation of the *Alphabetum Narrationum* formerly attributed to Étienne Basançon (in fact the work was composed some years after his death in 1294) and now tentatively attributed to Arnoldus of Liège. What is emphasized in this anecdote about Maria in both her *Life*, *The Book of Margery Kempe* and *An Alphabet of Tales* is lack of control, inability to contain oneself and the ensuing physical and mental anguish Maria feels at any mention of the Passion. The moral of the tale as it is told in *An Alphabet of Tales* is that tears should not be restrained and indeed cannot be restrained by virtue of their heavenly source. Maria is quoted:

"Now ye hafe lernyd be experiens that a man may not with-draw hym fro wepyng for the passyon of Almighty God, when he thynkys theron & is movid therto be the Holie Gaste." (Banks 294)

What is significant about these tears of Margery's and Maria's is their great abundance and loudness, their desirability and their connection to Christ's

Passion.¹⁶ Any attempt to withstand them is impossible. When Maria tries to "tempir hir sorowe and to withholde aboundauns of teerys" by contemplating the godhead instead of the manhood of Christ, she cries harder:

But where as she enforced hir to restreyne hir wepynge, there encresed meruelously teerys moor and moor. for whan she toke hede how grete he was that suffred for vs so mykel dispite, hir sorowe was efte renewyd, and hir soule with newe teerys was refreshed by a swete compunxione. (*Anglia* 137)

Both Maria's inability to control her sobbing and the subsequent feeling of "swete compunxione" that she experiences "prove" that Christ is moving through her soul. A mystic's feelings of course can never be accurately authenticated or examined, but they are one of the only ways of verifying mystical experiences. A mystic, as Karma Lochrie points out, must be taken on her word which is only an inaccurate translation of her feeling. Consequently, Margery's devotional fathers feel compelled to test Margery's loud cries for authenticity; they consider both the loudness of her cries where there is no audience present and her evident lack of control as proof that she is not "faking." Despite convincing some of the clergy that her cries are authentic, Margery is still persecuted by her community:

Thus was sche slawnderyd, etyn, & knawyn of the pepil for the grace that God wrowt in hir of contricyon, of deuocyon, & of compassyon, thorw the yyft of wech gracys sche wept, sobbyd, & cryid ful sor a-geyn hir wil, sche myth not chesyn, for sche had leuar a wept softly & preuily than opynly yyf it had ben in hyr power. (154)

This passage in fact demonstrates that Margery necessarily cries loudly in public because the loudness of her cries signifies her lack of control which thereby authenticates her crying. While Margery claims to be reluctant to cry loudly, she

¹⁶Similarly St. Elizabeth's biographer describes her as rejoicing in her sorrow, which implies that like Margery and Maria, St. Elizabeth's tears connote her communion with Christ: "And by cause she wold rendre good sacrefyse to god of hir prayers, she wette ofte hyr body with habundaunce of teris, and lete them flowe out of hyr eyen gladly wythout chaungyng of semblaunte, soo that often she wepte wyth grete sorow and she yet enioyed in god" (Caxion 1060). The narrator of *The Book of Margery Kempe* explicitly uses St. Elizabeth to authenticate Margery's tears: "Also, Elizabeth of Hungry cryed wyth lowde voys, as is wretyn in hir tretys" (154).

explicitly desires to weep: "yyf thu wilt, Lord, that I sese of wepyng, I prey the take me owt of this world" (142). She asks Christ for a "welle of teerys" (141) so that she can cry for the people and save their souls from "euyr-lestyng dampnacyon" (142). Through her tears Margery mimics two aspects of the Virgin Mary: the suffering mother and the advocate for humankind.¹⁷

Consistent with Freud's observations concerning the rivalry inherent in Family Romance scenarios is Margery's emulation of the tradition of the Mater Dolorosa, through which, in the following passage, she paradoxically differentiates herself from the Virgin. Here, Margery's comparison of her own lack of restraint with the Virgin's comparably more stoic suffering implicitly questions the quality of the Virgin's suffering:

Whan sche was ther, sche had so gret mende of the Passyon of our Lord Ihesu Crist & of hys precyows wowndys & how dere he bowt hir that sche cryed & roryd wondirfully so that sche myth be herd a gret wey & myth not restreyne hyr-self therfro. Than had sche gret wondyr how owr Lady myth suffyr er dur to see hys precyows body ben scorgyd & hangyd on the Crosse. Also it cam to hir mende how men had seyde to hir-self be-forn that owr Lady, Cristys owyn Modyr, cryed not as sche dede, & that cawsyd hir to seyn in hir crying, "Lord, I am not thi modir. Take a-wey this peyn fro me, for I may not beryn it. Thi Passyon wil sle me." (164)

Margery's countrymen's observation that Margery cries "not as sche dede" implies that either the Virgin does not cry at all or that she cries with much more restraint than Margery does. In the context of depictions of the Virgin stoically suffering her son's Crucifixion, Margery's imitation of the Virgin's sorrow through loud and boisterous cries appears exaggerated. However, when Margery's loud and theatrical sobs are contextualized with the late medieval devotional preoccupation with the

¹⁷ Christ says to Margery: "Dowtyr, yyf thu sey the wikkydnes that is wrowt in the werld as I do, thu schuldist haue gret wondyr that I take not vttyr veniawns on hem. But, dowtyr, I spar for thy lofe" (158).

theme of the *mater dolorosa* and the example of Maria D'Oignies' practice thereof,¹⁸ Margery's stated wonderment at the Virgin's control appears to be a subtle criticism of the Virgin's behaviour. Margery appears to be playing these two traditions against one another. Additionally, while Margery claims not to be the mother of Christ, it is Margery whom Christ's Passion will slay. Ostensibly she is renouncing this burden but implicitly this passage affirms that Margery suffers more, at least more dramatically, over the death of Christ than the Virgin Mary does. According to the underlying logic of the passage, Margery is a demonstratively more worthy lover or mother of Christ than the Virgin. That the issue of motherhood is at question here is made clear by Margery's paratactic statements: "Lord, I am not thi modir" followed by "Take a-wey this peyn fro me." These paralleled statements suggest that Margery is suffering as if she is Christ's mother or instead of Christ's mother.

Besides the quality and quantity of her cries, Margery further rivals the Virgin over a question of endurance. Margery goes as far as to suggest that the Virgin can "dur" (endure) to see her son crucified. Similarly, during one of Margery's visions of the Passion she again brings up the question of how might the Virgin "dur" to witness her son's torture:

"A, blissyd Lady, risith vp & late vs folwe yowr blissyd Sone as long as we may se hym that I may lokyn j-now up-on hym er he deye. A der Lady, how may yowr hert lestyn & se yowr blisful Sone se al this wo? Lady, I may not dur it, & yyt am I not hys Modyr." (189)

The implied meaning of the Virgin's endurance during Margery's visions of the Passion is ambiguous: either she is being exemplary or unnatural in her restraint. Margery's very inclusion of a comparison of the way she cries with the way the Virgin does hints at Margery's competitive feelings towards, and possible criticism

¹⁸Susan Dickman cites further examples of holy women, specifically Angela of Foligno and Dorothea of Montau, who cry "loudly at every verbal or symbolic reminder of Christ's Passion" (160).

of, the Virgin. Both passages raise the question of how a mother should suffer over her son's death and compare Margery's suffering with that of the Mother of God's. By doing this, both passages imply that the Virgin's way of suffering in these particular instances is unnatural. For instance, in the first passage, by the very amplification of the obvious: the Virgin is "Cristys owyn Modyr" and Margery is not, Margery's apparent wonderment at how the Virgin can "dur" to see her son tortured compared with Margery's own extreme suffering at the same event, contains the suggestion that the Virgin's behaviour is not motherly. In the second passage, Margery again raises the question of how a mother should suffer by comparing her own suffering with that of Christ's Mother. In effect by explicitly joining the Virgin's suffering to the issue of motherhood, Margery's lack of endurance suggests that the Virgin's endurance signifies the Virgin's failure as a mother.

Not only does Margery rival the Virgin's suffering but she explicitly appropriates it in the following passage:

Than sche thowt sche saw owyr Lady in hir sowle, how sche mornyd & how sche wept hir Sonys deth, & than was owyr Ladijs sorwe hir sorwe. & so ouyr all wher-that-euyr the frerys led hem in that holy place sche alwey wept & sobbyd wondyrfully, and specially whan sche cam ther owyr Lord was nayled on the cros. Ther cryed sche & wept wyth-owtyn mesur that sche myth not restreyn hir-self. (71)

In *The Book of Margery Kempe's* longest and most vivid description of Margery's participation at Passion, Margery once again obviously and dramatically appropriates the Virgin's suffering:

Than hir thowt sche sey owr Lady swownyn & fallyn down & lyn stille as sche had ben ded. Than the creatur thowt that sche ran al a-bowte the place as it had ben a mad woman, crying & roryng. & sithyn sche cam to owr Lady & fel down on hir knees be-forn hir, seying to hir, "I prey yow, Lady, cesyth of yowr sorwyng, for yowr Sone is ded & owt of peyne, for me thynkyth ye han sorwyd a-now. &, Lady, I wil sorwe for yow, for yowr sorwe is my sorwe." (193)

Clearly Margery wishes to, and does, emulate the Virgin's suffering.¹⁹ As in Freud's typical Family Romance scenario where a child's unconscious emulation and fantasies of helping or rescuing the father signify the child's desire to usurp the father's position in relation to the child's mother, it would appear in the above that by emulating, and subsequently appropriating the Virgin's grief, Margery is seeking to efface her rival. By effacing her rival, Margery can constellate her relationship with Christ as a dyad.

Margery's mysticism takes on a competitive tone in her effort to fuse with Christ through the Virgin as evidenced by her emulation of the Virgin, her visions of nurturing and protecting her rival, and her acts of sorrow that surpass those of the Virgin. The stated aim of Family Romance scenarios is to remove the third party from a child's relationship with her mother in order to re-establish the dyadic quality of the mother-infant relationship previous to its triangulation. As we shall see in Chapter 2 and 3, what is prior to the triangulation of the mother-infant relationship is the archaic dyad. The oedipal complex, like abjection and incest dread, while necessary for subjectivity, contains a regressive desire. In fact the oedipal complex may be thought of as articulating a subject's desire for a return to a maternal paradise and in effect by signifying this desire through fantasies and language, the act of signification cuts short the possibility of a return to a "place" that is outside of symbolization and instead produces a utopic fantasy. Thus Margery's attempt to inscribe herself into a dyadic relationship with Christ is not only an imitation of the Virgin's dyadic relationship with her son, but her desire to occupy

¹⁹Karma Lochrie also makes this point in *Margery Kempe and The Translations of the Flesh*: "Kempe is not merely commiserating with the Virgin in this speech to her: she is actively assuming the Virgin's sorrow. This sorrow is, in turn, the sign of the Virgin's reading of Christ's suffering. She is the primary reader at the Crucifixion and the model for all subsequent mystical readings of the Christic body" (177).

this dyad also signifies her desire for a return to an always already "lost" maternal paradise.

This desire for a return to a maternal paradise is especially evident in scenarios of Margery's anticipated ascent to heaven and her longings for heaven. Margery cries at the beginning of her *Book*:

"Alas, that euyr I dede synne, it is ful mery in Hevyn." Thys melody was so swete that it passyd alle the melodye that euyr myght be herd in this world wyth-owtyn ony comparyson, & caused this creatur whan sche herd ony myrth or melodye aftyrward for to haue ful plentyuows & habundawnt teerys of hy deuocyon wyth greet sobbyngys & syhyngys aftyr the blysse of Heuen, not dredyng the schamys & the spytys of the wretchyd world. (11)

After Margery's experience of heavenly mirth and melody, worldly mirth and melodies, clearly lacking in comparison, trigger in Margery an intense longing for the "blysse of Heuen." Kaja Silverman in her study of the female voice in film translates and quotes Guy Rosolato's argument that the

maternal voice helps to constitute for the infant the pleasurable milieu which surrounds, sustains and cherishes him. . . . One could argue that it is the first model of auditory pleasure and that music finds its roots and its nostalgia in [this] original atmosphere, which might be called a sonorous womb, a murmuring house--or *music of the spheres*. ("La voix: entre corps et langage" 85)

Rosolato's theory of music as ultimately based upon the speaking subject's nostalgia for a "sonorous womb" when applied to Margery's auditory hallucination of the sweetest of all melodies emanating from heaven, suggests that Margery's experience of this melody and her subsequent "syhyngys" can be read as her nostalgic yearning for a "lost" maternal paradise. Margery's sobbings and sighings for heaven triggered by the melody additionally serve to establish the desirability of heaven and its remoteness. Significantly Christ's following description of heaven as unseeable, unhearable, ineffable, and unimaginable further suggests that heaven is

representative of the archaic dyad (or maternal paradise) in that like the archaic dyad, heaven is outside of conscious reach and/or symbolization:

&, for-as-mech as thu art a mayden in thi sowle, i xal take the be the on hand in hevyn & my Modyr be the other hand, & so xalt thu dawnsyn in Hevyn wyth other holy maydens & virgynes, for I may clepyn the dere a-bowte & myn owyn derworthy derlyng. I xal sey to the, myn owyn blyssed spowse, "Welcome to me wyth al maner of joye & gladnes, her to dwellyn wyth me & neuyr to departyn fro me wyth-owtyn ende, but euyr to dwellyn wyth me in joy & blysse, wech non eye may se, ne eer heryn, ne tunge telle, ne non hert thynkyn, that I haue ordeynd for the & for alle my seruawntys the wech desyrin to lofe me & plesyn me as thu dost." (*Margery Kempe* 52-53)

In addition to the sweet music and the ineffable joy associated with heaven and/or a maternal paradise, is the leitmotif of plenitude which is also essential to utopic fantasies of childhood and infancy. During one of Margery's dialogues with Christ concerning her own death, he promises her that he will "gawnte [hir] al [hir] desyr." Margery will suffer no want in heaven:

Thu hast be despysed for my lofe, & therfor thu xalt be worshepyd for my lofe. Dowtyr, whan thu art in Heuyn, thu xalt mown askyn what thu wylt, & I xal gawnte the al thi desyr. I haue telde the be-for-tyme that thu art a synguler loue, & therfor thu xalt haue a synguler loue in Heuyn, a synguler reward, & a synguler worshep. (52)

The repetition of the word "synguler" further implies that in heaven Margery will be singularly gratified. *The Middle English Dictionary* cites part of the passage from *The Book of Margery Kempe* quoted on the following page and accords "synguler" the following definition: "[u]nique; sole, exclusive, special; unusual, exceptional . . . unsurpassed; uniquely great; extraordinary; excellent." By virtue of the plenitude and the exclusiveness of Margery's reward, she in effect excludes the Virgin from the Mystic-Christ-Virgin triangle and constructs a mystic-Christ dyad that is an idealization of the mother-infant dyad.

In keeping with Freud's observation concerning Family Romances that the child emulates the parent he or she wishes to usurp, Margery's vision of her own death

echoes the legendary stories surrounding the Virgin's death. According to Warner, the story of the Virgin's Assumption became firmly entrenched in Church doctrine by the fourteenth century (89) even though "nowhere in the Bible is the death of the Virgin mentioned" (81). Just as it is impossible for the Virgin not to be visited by her resurrected son in affective accounts of Christ's life, it is equally impossible for so great a son to forget his mother on her death bed. In *The Golden Legend's* version of the Virgin's Assumption a great audience assembles at the Virgin's death bed, similar to the audience that will be present at Margery's death:

At about the third hour of the night, Jesus came with the ranks of the angels, the troop of the patriarchs, the host of the martyrs, the army of the confessors, and the choir of the virgins; and all took their places before the throne of the Virgin, and their voices mounted in sweet and solemn song. . . . And thus in the mornynge, the sowle ysued oute of the body, and fled vp in the armes of her sone. And she was as fer enstraunged fro the payne of the flesshe, as she was fro corrupcion of her body. (Caxton 451)

Likewise, Margery's death will be attended by the ranks of heaven, including important saints. Similarly, Margery will be spared from the physical pain of dying, instead she will "haue mor mynde of [Christ's] Passyon";

Thu art to me a synguler lofe, dowtyr, & therfor I behote the thu schalt haue a synguler grace in Hevyn, dowtyr, & I be-hest the <that I shal> come to thin ende at thi deyng wyth my blyssed Modyr & myn holy awngelys & twelve apostelys, Seynt Kateryne, Seynte Margarete, Seynt Mary Mawdelyn, & many other seyntys that ben in Hevyn, which yevyn gret worship to me for the grace that I yeue to the, God, thi Lord Ihesu. Thow thart drede no grevows peynes in thi deyng, for thu xalt haue thy desyre, that is to haue mor mynde of my Passyon than on thin owyn peyne. Thu xalt not dredyn the Devyl of Helle for he hath no powyr in the. (50-51)

Furthermore, in direct emulation of the Virgin, Margery fantasizes that Christ will personally descend from heaven and assume her soul into heaven:

Therfor drede the nowt, dowtyr, for wyth myn owyn handys, which wer nayled to the Crosse, I xal take thi sowle fro thi bodd wyth gret myrthe & melodye, wyth swet smellys & good odowrys, & offyr it to my Fadyr in Heuyn (51)

So far we have observed the Virgin as her son's mother and wife and discussed the consequences of this oedipal fantasy in context of Margery Kempe's Holy Family Romance scenarios. Evident in Margery's scenarios of her anticipated life in heaven and implicit in her desire to insert herself into a dyad, is the idea that Christ functions for Margery as the fantasy of a phallic mother. As we shall see, it is also plausible that Christ mothers his mother. Evidently when the Virgin dies she is looked after by her son, ostensibly as her bridegroom and future husband. Because of his direct intervention, not only does she escape bodily and spiritual corruption, she dies without pain. During accounts of Christ's life-time, according to both Love's narrative and Margery's *Book*, Christ cares for the Virgin in ways which imply his responsibility for containing her suffering. Nicholas Love explicitly accuses Christ of allowing the Virgin to suffer too much during and after the Passion:

O sweete Lorde Iesus Christe, how is it that thou sufferest thy moste deere mother chosen before all others, who is the miror of the worlde and thy especial resting place, so much to be tormented and troubled, that scarce she hath any spirite to liue, and time it were that she had some maner of rest, and releasinge of hir sorrows, after so many vexations. (533-534)

After cataloguing it in graphic detail, Love appears to suspend the brutality of Christ's crucifixion and instead focuses on the suffering of Christ's mother. At one point in the narrative, as previously quoted (Love 516-17), the reader is asked to consider the effect Christ's crucifixion is having on his mother. Not only does the Virgin's pain heighten the pathos of Christ's Passion, but Christ's witnessing his mother cry is paralleled in the narrative to the abuses he receives, which suggests that his mother's tears are just as painful to Christ as his actual torture if not more so. Christ appears rather more capable of bearing his crucifixion than his mother does her suffering.

Earlier on in Love's biography, the narrator describes Christ's circumcision: the first blood Christ sheds, foreshadowing his Passion. This event serves to further

emphasize the tight bond between mother and son and the infant Christ's extraordinary sensitivity to his mother's needs:

Wherefore let vs here take compassion on him & also-of his deere mother. For well may we suppose that when she sawe hir louelie childe to weepe, hir tender harte likewise burste into teares, and she could not withhould from weeping. And then may we imagin and thinke, how that litle babe beinge in his mothers armes and seeinge hir to weepe, put his hand to hir face as he would not that she should weepe. (92-93)

And therefore she saied: deere Sonne, if thou wilt that I cease weeping & hold my peace, doe thou also bestill and hould thy peace I beseeche thee, for I cannot choose but weepe so lo<n>ge as I see thee weepe: and so thorough the pittie & moaninge of the mother, the blessed childe ceased of his sobinge. (93)

Once again the narrator suspends an acknowledgement of the pain Christ has suffered and instead highlights the Virgin's sorrow. Upon closer inspection, the Virgin's tears suggest that she is unable to contain and bear her infant's pain. The Virgin cannot "choose but weepe so lo<n>g as" she sees her son weep. According to the logic of this passage, Christ must deny his own pain or else risk hurting his mother.

Echoing Love, Margery imagines a more extreme example of the Virgin's inability to suffer her child's pain and Christ's subsequent comforting of his mother while bearing his cross:

. . . the Iewys losyd hym fro the peler & tokyn hym hys crosse for to beryn on hys schuldyr. . . . thei sey hym beryn the heuy crosse wyth gret peyne, it was so heuy & so boystows that vnethe he myth bere it. And than owr Lady seyde vnto hym, "A, my swete Sone, late me help to ber that heuy crosse." & sche was so weke that sche myth not but fel down & swownyd & lay stille as it had ben a ded woman. Than the creatur say owr Lord fallyn down by hys Modyr & comfortyn hir as he myth wyth many swete wordys. (191)

Because the Virgin apparently cannot tolerate her son's suffering, her son must contain his own pain and additionally the pain that he perceives he is causing his mother. Christ is thus crucified doubly: his pain is killing his mother. Christ's

attempt to comfort his mother while bearing a heavy cross is heroic; even under the most extreme conditions he does not forsake her. Because of the medieval preoccupation with the infancy of Christ, one can hardly conceive of his crucifixion without thinking of his mother's anguish; there'by one thinks of Christ, although an adult, as the Virgin's child. Therefore, Christ's comforting of his mother during his crucifixion and circumcision imply that the roles of mother and child have been switched. Both Margery's mystical identification with the Virgin Mary and the very real circumstances of her life as the mother of fourteen children lend a poignancy to her crucifixion scenario for her scenario suggests that she is in need of this kind of care and attention herself. The Virgin's failure to contain her son's pain can be read as a metaphorical representation of what Firestone would call an "inadequate mother"; the "good mother" being a mother, who among other things, can relieve her child's anxiety (39). Clearly, in both Christ's circumcision and his crucifixion he is called upon by Love's and Margery's respective dramatizations to relieve the anxiety of his mother. In this sense it is Christ who performs the role of the "good mother" for the Virgin while he is under considerable duress. The precedent for Christ's maternal aspect in the context of late-medieval affective piety and its relevance to *The Book of Margery Kempe* will be further examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Christ as Phallic Mother

This our lady is oure moder, in whome we be all beclosyd and of hyr borne in Crist, for she that is moder of oure savyoure is mother of all that ben savyd in our savyoure; and oure savyoure is oure very moder, in whome we be endlesly borne and nevyr shall come out of hym.
(Julian of Norwich *Revelations of Divine Love: the Longer Version* 580)

Julian of Norwich's description of humanity's endless gestation in the womb of Christ, who is also "beclosyd" in the womb of his mother, suggests the possibility of a radical multi-level fusion between mother, son and the devout laity. Mystical union with Christ, according to Julian's amplification of Christ's maternal attributes, appears to be constructed on a desire for re-entering the womb and/or endless fusion. Having established in Chapter 1 the dyadic quality of the relationship of Mary and Jesus and describing as a Holy Family Romance Margery's attempts to insert herself into this dyad, I have also argued in Chapter 1 that Christ functions for Margery as both father, lover, son and mother. Because Margery imitates the oedipal characteristics of the Virgin-Christ dyad, and we know from psychoanalytic accounts that the object of desire for both male and female children during this phase is their mother,¹ Christ as the object of Margery's desire within the confines of the mystic-Christ dyad indicates that he in part represents the mother. This is the concept to be explored in the present Chapter. As we shall see, Christ's maternal attributes are present in Margery's Eucharistic devotion,

¹Nini Herman bases her book *Too Long a Child* on the strength and persistence of daughter-mother love and fusion: "That the one of her own sex, in the person of her mother, may, from the very first to the last and final breath, marriage and childbearing notwithstanding, remain the object of her deepest passion, is still one of our best-kept secrets and constantly subverted truths"(35). Herman's claim that a woman's emotional attachment to her mother is one of society's "best-kept secrets and constantly subverted truths" lends weight to my investigation of how Christ figures as a mother for Margery for it suggests that this desire is repressed and thus, like all repressed desire, this desire is displaced.

contemplation of the Passion, and ineffable experiences of mystical union with Christ. Unlike the triangulation that occurs between Margery, Christ, and the Virgin in her Holy Family Romance scenarios, in Margery's ecstatic moments she leaves behind scenarios of the Nativity and the public events surrounding the Passion, and enters into a dyadic relationship or fusion with Christ where she loses language. Thus Margery moves from a "public" oedipal triangle to a "private" oedipal dyad--the fantasy of the child within the oedipal triangle--that mimics mother-infant fusion.

In order to fuse with Christ, Margery contemplates Christ's broken and bleeding body on the cross. It is his suffering, bleeding and nourishing flesh that signifies his maternal and semiotic attributes. The semiotic is communication that pre-dates and anticipates language. Coextensive with semiotic flows or processes is the archaic mother who is outside symbolization. Any desire for the "lost" mother or a fusional maternal paradise is phallicized simply because desire for something--i.e., object relations--is what separates a child from the archaic dyad. In fact desire signifies an infant's separation from the archaic dyad and its entry into language. As such a subject's veiled desire for the archaic dyad can be said to be phallicized because the archaic dyad is outside of representation. Margery's re-construction of mother-infant fusion is clearly retroactive and as such in mystical ecstasy Margery constructs Christ as the phallic mother or Other. While Margery does not directly call Jesus mother, as we shall see, the implication of Margery's devotional practices is that Christ functions for Margery on an unconscious level as mother. That Margery is not alone or even original in constructing Christ as her mother is most obvious when, as we have just seen, the account of her devotion to Christ, especially concerning the Passion, is compared to that outlined in *Revelations of Divine*

Love (both the longer and shorter versions) by her fourteenth century contemporary Julian of Norwich. Julian in fact parallels a mother's love for and service to her child with Christ's love:

The moders servyce is nerest, rediest and suerest: nerest for it is most of kynd, redyest for it is most of loue, and sekerest for it is most of trewth. This office ne myght nor coulde nevyr done to the full but he allone. We wytt that alle oure moders bere vs to payne and to dyeng. A, what is that? But oure very moder Jhesu, he alone beryth vs to joye and to endlesse levying, blessyd mot he be. (*Revelations* longer 595)

Julian directly contrasts earthly mothers, who bear their children into pain and mortality, with "oure" mother Jesus, who bears the Christian mystic into the endless bliss of immortality. In reality and as stated by Julian, earthly mothers do not possess the power to satisfy their children to the full. The underlying meaning of Julian's comparison, if we assume that power is phallic, is that earthly mothers are castrated. In direct contrast to earthly mothers, Christ's unfailing ability to satiate his children additionally suggests that as a mother he represents the fantasy of the phallic mother (as discussed in Chapter 1, p. 21).

Caroline Bynum in *Jesus as Mother* cites Julian of Norwich's conception of Christ as mother in association "with the rise, from the eleventh century on, of a lyrical, emotional piety that focuses increasingly on the humanity of Christ" (129). Bynum places Julian of Norwich within a clerical tradition of affective piety or spirituality that includes, among others, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, Gueric of Igny and Anselm of Canterbury. In fact the precedent for constructing Christ as mother goes back as far as and presumably earlier than St. Augustine who wrote in the fifth century: "What

am I even at the best but an infant sucking the milk Thou givest, and feeding upon Thee, the food that perisheth not."²

Milk issuing from a breast is clearly a semiotic³ process and further suggests that in their depictions of themselves suckling from his breast the devout are constructing Christ as capable of providing a maternal paradise. Julian of Norwich parallels a mother leading her child to her breast with Christ leading the devout to his wound from which issues forth the nourishing and semiotic flow of his Passion. By virtue of this parallel, Christ's wound and blood metaphorically become breast and milk:

The moder may ley hyr chylde tenderly to hyr brest, but oure tender mother Jhesu, he may homely lede vs in to his blessyd brest by his swet opyn syde, and shewe vs there in perty of the godhed and the joyes of hevyn, wyth gostely suernesse of endlesse blysse. (*Revelations* longer 598)

The parallel images of a mother "tenderly" taking her child to her breast and "tender" Jesus leading the devout to his side to suckle from (and presumably enter into) his wound are at once "homely" and grotesque. The metaphor of Christ's wound as a mother's breast is obviously highly cathected because of the emotional power of a milk-filled breast that symbolizes mother, love, and food, and the pain and violence associated with a blood-filled wound.

Julian's conflation of breast and wound is suggestive of an unstable boundary between pleasure and pain. Additionally, suckling from the wound/breast of Christ is also an obvious transgression of inside/outside

²Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, E.B. Pusey, tr. (New York: Dutton, 1951), IV, I.I.

³Kaja Silverman in *The Acoustic Mirror* points out that Kristeva "has consistently associated the semiotic with the maternal, and thereby conflated the latter with whatever muddies the clear waters of rational discourse" (106). By this I mean to demonstrate that in accordance with Kristeva's "conflation" I conceive of the semiotic as connoting a maternal territory that is specifically prior and in some sense antithetical to language learning.

boundaries. Irigaray⁴ points out that it is through the transgression of inside/outside boundaries that a mystic experiences ecstasy:

The "soul" escapes outside herself, opening up a crack in the cave (une autr'ouverture) so that she may penetrate herself once more. The walls of her prison are broken, the distinction between inside/outside transgressed. In such ex-stasies, she risks losing herself or at least seeing the assurance of her self-identity-as-same fade away. (192)

Mystical ecstasy involves paradoxically the willed loss of subjectivity or at least the willed de-stabilization of subjectivity by the mystic's transgression of the primary distinctions between inside and outside and pleasure and pain. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, this lack of distinction between inside and outside, pleasure and pain, is characteristic of the phase in infancy known as primary narcissism. Through abjection of self, processes characteristic of primary narcissism are mimicked or perhaps re-experienced in mystical ecstasy. Kristeva, using Freud's formulation of narcissism from *Totem and Taboo*, describes primary narcissism as "predicated on the existence of the ego but not of an external object. . . . The ego of primary narcissism is thus uncertain, fragile, threatened, subjected just as much as its non-object to spatial ambivalence (inside/outside uncertainty) and to ambiguity of perception (pleasure/pain)" (*Powers of Horror* 62). Thus primary narcissism precludes object relations and the ability to distinguish between inside and outside, pleasure and pain. It refers to the phase just before the infant leaves the archaic dyad and enters into object relations and a triangulated oedipal complex. Irigaray's description of mystical ecstasy dissolving inside/outside

⁴According to Irigaray subjectivity is based upon a masculine or phallogocentric notion of self that relegates whatever the feminine may "be" to the site of the repressed. Thus for Irigaray, this "willed dissolution of self" has the liberating quality of rejecting a "self-as-same"--that is same as a man--ontology. Aside from the political implications of Irigaray's theory, her description of ecstasy suggests to me that the psychological meaning of this experience is a re-creation of mother-infant fusion in that it is characterized by the dissolution of boundaries and the loss of unified subjectivity.

boundaries which are as Kristeva points out crucial to establishing subjectivity, implies that the experience is evocative of semiotic or pre-symbolic processes that are incompatible with and disruptive of the mystic's adult and presumably "phallicized" subjectivity. Furthermore, Irigaray describes Christ as "[t]hat most female of men, the Son" (199), which suggests that by his combined masculine and maternal attributes Christ represents the phallic mother. The mystic's mimicked or idealized primary narcissism appears to have as its objective--an objective that paradoxically separates it from a "real" return--a return to an always already "lost" and "phallacious" maternal paradise.

The phallic mother is according to Kristeva,

the addressee of every demand, [she] occupies the place of alterity. Her replete body, the receptacle and guarantor of demands, takes the place of all narcissistic, hence imaginary, effects and gratifications; she is, in other words, the phallus. (*Revolution* 47)

By her use of "alterity" Kristeva's text implies that the phallic mother⁵ occupies the place of the Other. According to Lacan the Other, like Christ,⁶ is

⁵The phallic mother like the Other does not materially exist. However, Kristeva points to the importance of her role in the construction of subjectivity: "Through a body, destined to insure reproduction of the species, the woman-subject, although under the sway of the paternal function (as a symbolizing, speaking subject and like all others), more of a filter than anyone else--a thoroughfare, a threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture.' To imagine that there is someone in that filter--such is the source of religious mystifications, the font that nourishes them: the fantasy of the so-called 'Phallic' mother. Because if, on the contrary, there were no one on this threshold, if the mother were not, that is, if she were not phallic, then every speaker would be led to conceive of its Being in relation to some void, a nothingness asymmetrically opposed to this Being, a permanent threat against, first its mastery, and ultimately, its stability" (*Desire in Language* p.238).

Kristeva rarely mentions the phallic mother in her understanding of the pre-oedipal phase of development. In "Freud and Love" she in fact claims that whom an infant constructs him or herself as "like" is not the phallic mother but the "father of individual pre-history." Kristeva states that "empirically, the first affections, the first imitations, and the first vocalizations as well are directed toward the mother," but identification or idealization "is always already within the symbolic orbit, under the sway of language" (*Tales of Love* 27). It is the mother's inscription into language and her desire for something other than her child--her love for an

constructed by the subject "as possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive [him or her] of the one thing by which [he or she is] satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus sketches out the radical form of the gift of something which it does not have, namely, what is called its love" (*Female Sexuality* 80). In other words, Christ or the phallic (m)Other, constructed by the transference of the subject, possesses the power to satisfy the subject's desire.

The phallic mother belongs to Melanie Klein's formulation of the pre-oedipal and early⁷ oedipal phases concerning an infant's perception of his or her mother as omnipotent and possessing "all that is desirable, especially [his or her] father's penis" (*Revolution* 241 n. 21). Klein conceives of the phallic mother as a defensive combination of both parents that protects an infant from its own "emerging awareness of the independence and differentiation of the parents as sharing a gratification which exclude[s] the child" (Weininger 73). In fact, according to the Kleinian scenario, the infant "refuses to recognize the father" (74). However, Kristeva differentiates between the archaic mother who is unrepresentable (i.e., outside signification) and the phallic mother who, according to John Lechte's understanding of Kristevan thought, "is a denial of the pre-symbolic, semiotic dimension of society and culture" (152).

other—that Kristeva qualifies Melanie Klein's conception of the phallic mother with. Kristeva in "Freud and Love" clearly conceives of the phallic mother as a fantasy and writes: "[t]he archaic inscription of the father seems to me a way of modifying the fantasy of a phallic mother playing at the phallus game all by herself, alone and complete, in the back room of Kleinism and post-Kleinism" (*Tales of Love* 44). Of course the mother who plays at this game all by herself is according to Freud's family romance precisely the fantasy of every child. Theoretical constructions of the phallic mother apparently run the risk of falling into Her matrix. By her use of Freud's conception of "the father of individual pre-history," Kristeva insists that a child's development hinges upon the intervention of a third party between itself and its mother.

⁶Jacqueline Rose writes: "the place of the Other is also the place of God..." (*Female Sexuality* 50).

⁷O. Weininger in *The Clinical Psychology of Melanie Klein* stipulates that the phallic mother also belongs to the early oedipal phase (72).

This would seem to indicate that the infant, by constructing the mother as phallic, is, at least on a metaphoric level, recognizing the father by repudiating the archaic dyad and beginning to enter into symbolization. If this is so, then the construction of the phallic mother protects the newly emerging subject from its own repulsion and attraction for the archaic dyad. Thus the phallic mother veils an unspeakable and unsignifiable nostalgia for and horror of the archaic mother.

In *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi points out that a speaking subject is a "lacking" subject: "The speaking subject that says 'I am' is in fact saying 'I am he (she) who has lost something'--and the loss suffered is the loss of the imaginary identity with the mother and the world" (99). The phallic mother is whom we would have--a "fantasy" for whom or what we have lost at our entry into language, namely the unrepresentable archaic mother and dyad. Jane Gallop describes the phallic mother as a "fraud, yet one to which we are infantilely susceptible" (*Daughter's Seduction* 117). Loss of the archaic mother and veiled⁸ or "phallicized" desire for her conditions our subjectivity:

Paradoxically, then, this very wish to return is dependent on the separation having taken place; the very notion of desire cannot come into being before there is something missing, *desire . . . is never satisfiable as it relates to this absence or lack of object and what it would have must be a phantasy. The original lack of the object (the mother's breast) evokes the desire for unity and is thus the structure on which identifications will build.* (*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* 386-87)

Desire, according to Mitchell's reading of Freud and Lacan, is based on lack; therefore, the aim of a subject's desire by its very definition is paradoxically not its satisfaction. Desire is what in fact separates the subject from the archaic

⁸Lacan stipulates in "The Meaning of the Phallus" "that the phallus can only play its role as veiled" (*Female Sexuality* 82). As such, it is our desire that signifies us as separate, and our faith in the truth of the phallic mother's ability to satiate our desire that veils the archaic dyad of mother/child. It is our belief in the phallus that prevents us from knowing its "phallacy."

dyad of mother and infant. But it is this dyad that as speaking subjects we have necessarily lost and which we unconsciously yearn for. If the Virgin-Christ dyad represents for Margery an unconscious desire for mother-infant fusion, then the construction of this dyad attempts to inscribe in language an otherwise meaningless and nostalgic want.

In *In the Beginning was Love* Kristeva claims that the "means" Catholics use to commune with God are "semiotic" rather than "symbolic." The semiotic and the symbolic domains figure in Kristevan thought as a dialectic, in that the semiotic is antithetical to and disruptive of what it anticipates and paradoxically what it is contained by, the symbolic. The semiotic concerns pre-linguistic communication; it describes a phase that is prior to subjectivity. The maternal body regulates this phase in an infant's development; thus semiotic signifiers or "means" evoke the archaic mother-infant dyad and the "destructive" drives associated with this stage. However antithetical the semiotic appears to be to the symbolic, the semiotic is always already inscribed by language and as such its "signified" remains illusive. Kristeva asserts that the Catholic "semiotic" is not "substantial and maternal but symbolic and paternal" (24). By qualifying the semiotic as it appears in Catholicism as "symbolic and paternal" Kristeva further emphasizes the impossibility of a "real" return to a maternal paradise, or the possession of the illusive signified of the semiotic. She points out that the nourishment a Christian mystic experiences is with a "breast that is, to be sure, succoring, nourishing, loving, and protective, but transposed from the mother's body to an invisible agency located in another [metaphysical] world" (24). The symbolic therefore regulates the semiotic. It prevents a subject's dissolution; it cuts off the possibility of a return to the archaic dyad by inscribing the semiotic nature of a subject's desire into language. (Of course this process is never complete in its

translation of the untranslatable, and perhaps herein lies the mystery of Catholicism.) When this transposed breast either explicitly or implicitly belongs to Christ, he signifies both maternally and paternally; he is literally the phallic mother.

However, Kristeva claims that Christ represents the Freudian concept of the "father of individual prehistory." This figure, echoing Klein's phallic mother, is a combination of both sexes. Unlike the phallic mother, the "father of individual prehistory" is, according to Kristeva, the crucial idealized figure or third party through whom a child separates from its "jubilant but destructive relationship with its mother" (*In the Beginning* 40). This idealized relationship--idealized because this father is "a form, a structure, or an agency (rather than a person)" (*In the Beginning* 25)--is characterized by a transference love that the subject assumes emanates from the father first. This echoes Christian agape--it is God who loves you first.⁹ Freud calls this transference love "primary identification." Through primary identification with the "father of individual prehistory" a subject begins to stabilize and construct itself in language. Once established:

This fusion with God, which to repeat myself, is more semiotic than symbolic, repairs the wounds of Narcissus, which are scarcely hidden by the triumphs and failures of our desires and enmities. Once our narcissistic needs are met, we can find images of our desires in stories recounting the experience of faith: the story of the Virgin birth, for instance-- that secret dream of every childhood (*In The Beginning* 40)

⁹Christ says to Margery Kempe: "And therfor beleue wel, dowtyr, that my lofe is not so swet to the as thy lofe is to me. Dowtyr, thu knowist not how meche I lofe the, for it may not be knowyn in this world how meche it is, ne be felt as it is, for thu schuldist faylyn & brestyn & neuyr endurnyn it for the joye that thu schuldist fele. & therfor I mesur it as I wil to thi most ese & comfort" (157). Besides the obvious destructive power of Christ's love for Margery, his love is implicitly prior because of its power and greatness and his control over how much of it he deems is fit for Margery. In this instance Christ could be read as representing the "father of individual prehistory" for Margery as indicated by her transference onto him as an external and prior agency.

Like the "father of individual prehistory," the phallic mother is also an idealized agency, constructed through a transference relationship. But because mysticism blurs boundaries and risks losing subjectivity instead of embracing the symbolic, it is my contention that for the mystic Christ represents the phallic (m)Other.

Clearly in *The Book of Margery Kempe* Christ performs paternal functions, as Kristeva conceives of them, for Margery. In the beginning of the book when Margery is suffering from postpartum psychosis it is her vision of Christ that brings her back into the social world or (to use Kristeva's term) symbolization. Christ says to her:

"Dowtyr, why hast thou forsakyn me, and I forsoke neuyr the?" And a-noon, as he had seyde thes wordys, sche saw veryly how the eyr openyd as brygth as ony levyn, & he stey up in-to the eyr, not ryght hastyli & qwykly, but fayr & esly that sche mygth wel be-holdyn hym in the eyr tyl it was cloyd a-geyn. And a-noon the creature was stablyd in hir wyttys & in hir reson as wel as euyr sche was be-forn, and preyde hir husbond as so soon as he cam to hir that sche mygth haue the keys of the botery to takyn hir mete & drynke as sche had don be-forn. (8)

In psychosis Margery has to be physically bound to prevent her from harming herself; she hallucinates devils that incite her to forsake her Christian faith and to slander her husband, her friends and herself. But after this vision she is able to function normally. Margery's return from psychosis can be read, psychoanalytically, as primary identification with an external metaphysical agency--the "father of individual prehistory"--that loves her and escorts her back into "proper" language or the "proper" exchange of words. Through the love of Christ Margery finds a more socially acceptable means of articulating the same forces or conflicts that were previously manifested in her psychosis as illustrated by the regressive qualities of the rest of Margery's mystical experiences: her loss of language, loud cries, and convulsions. Margery no

longer needs to be bound to her bed, but it is significant that in her subsequent career as a mystic she is often threatened with incarceration and is in fact incarcerated twice.

Margery's mystical experiences are more characteristic of semiotic processes than of symbolic ones. Her loud cries and violent convulsions are most obviously outside of language and arguably the symbolic, because while they belong to a tradition of the Mater Dolorosa and *imitatio Christi*, they disrupt church services and isolate Margery even from the clergy. Margery's hunger for Christ also suggests semiotic rather than symbolic processes because its backdrop is Eucharistic devotion. Caroline Bynum draws a direct parallel between Christ's nourishing body and woman's body:

Women's bodies, in the acts of lactation and of giving birth, were analogous both to ordinary food and to the body of Christ, as it died on the cross and gave birth to salvation. (*Holy Feast* 30)

I would like to reverse the direction of Bynum's analogy, and instead suggest that Christ's body on the cross is analogous to a woman's body in the act of lactation, nurturing and giving birth. Significantly, all of these processes are semiotic and coextensive with the archaic mother or the mother who nurtures the pre-self. Thus it is my argument that Margery's hunger for Christ and his ability to nurture and/or nourish her signifies him as the phallic mother or the mother created by the subject in possession of language retroactively in the archaic mother's stead.

Christ's ability to nurture Margery is emphatically constructed by the narrative through Margery's marked hunger for Christ:

On a tyme, as the forseyd creatur was in hir contemplacyon, sche hungryd ryth sor after Goddys word & seyde, "Alas, Lord, as many clerkys as thu hast in this world, that thu ne woldyst sendyn me on of hem that myght fulfillyn my sowle wyth thi word & wyth redyng of Holy Scriptur, for alle the clerkys that prechyn may not fulfillyn, for me

thynkyth that my sowle is euyr a-lych hungry. Yyf I had gold j-now, I wolde yeuyn euery day a nobyl for to haue euery day a sermown, for thi word is mor worthy to me than alle pe good in this werld." (142)

Margery's hunger signifies her as a desiring subject; in turn her desire signifies Christ as the Other or phallic mother, powerful in his potential ability to satiate her hunger with his word. Doctrine, food and love are explicitly and implicitly interwoven in Margery's address to Christ. Similarly, Nicholas Love describes doctrine as food and the devout as hungering and needing to be fed:

The whiche as chyldren haue neede to be fedde with mylke of lyght doctryne and not with sadde meate of great & hyghe conte[m]playcon, therfore at the inflaunce and prayer of some deuoute soules, and to the edifycacyon of such men or women is this drawn out of the forsaide boke, specyfyenge & declarynge the blyssed lyfe of our sauour and redemer Jesu Chryst writen in our English and vulgare tonge, and put into such order and method as semeth to the wryter therof most meete & edyfienge vnderstandyng and frayle entendement. Vnto the whiche symple soules as saynt Bernarde sayth, contemplacyon of the manhode of Christ is more expedient & more suer than is the hyghe conte[m]playo[n] of the God head. And therfore to hym is princypaly to be set in mynde the image of Christes Incarnacyon, passion, & resurrection, so that a symple soul who cannot thynke but on bodyes & bodyly thynges, may haue somewhat accordyng to his affection wherwith he may moue & styre vp his deuocyon. (6)

"[L]yght doctryne" according to Love is doctrine that is easily learnt by reading or listening to affective narratives of Christ's life; these are the narratives that inspire Margery's spiritual contemplations. Thus, the "words" Margery desires to hear, as evident from the spiritual concerns she addresses in her book, are not the "meate of great & hyghe contemplacyon" but rather the "lyght doctrine" of "bodyes & bodyly thynges." The conflation of doctrine with love and food establishes a materiality and emotionality to devotional understanding of the Incarnation, Nativity and Passion that is especially emphasized in affective narratives and Margery's *Book*.

Robert Firestone draws a connection between food and the love that a mother gives to her infant. For an infant food and love are intimately connected, so much so that Firestone conceives of maternal love as "love-food" (37). According to Firestone, when deprived of "love-food", presumably because of the unavoidable absence of the mother or inadequate care, "an infant experiences considerable anxiety and pain and attempts to compensate At this point in its development, a baby is able to create the illusion of the breast. An infant who feels empty and starved emotionally relies increasingly on this fantasy for gratification" (37). Because doctrine for Margery is explicitly Christ's word, her hallucination of the nourishing and implicitly loving potential of Christ's words or her conflation of food, love and word is consistent with Firestone's description of "love-food" and further establishes Christ as phallic mother through his possession of all that a subject desires. Love's distinction concerning exactly what kind of food/doctrine is necessary for "symple soules," namely milk rather than meat, suggests that the devout although adult, need nourishment from a priest that does not require them to chew. As such milk has infantile connotations and as a metaphor describing doctrine it is suggestive of the Augustinian conceit of the suckling infant quoted at the beginning of this Chapter. Resonant with Julian of Norwich's description of nursing from Christ's wounds and further establishing the conceit (or possible hallucination) of Christ feeding the devout from his wound/breast is the following incident from *The Book of Margery Kempe*. After Margery shows her revelations to an anchorite, he says to her: "'Dowtyr, ye sowkyn euyn on Crystys brest, and ye han an ernest-peny of Heuyn" (18).

Margery does not describe herself in the narrative as literally nursing at Christ's breast; however, she does describe herself as being fed and comforted

by Christ, specifically through thoughts and, presumably, visions of his Passion. Near the beginning of her book Margery discloses her revelations to the Vicar of St. Stephen's:

Sythen sche schewyd hym al hyr maner of levyng fro hyr chylhod as ny as it wolde come to hir mende,--how . . . whan it plesyd owyr Lord Crist Ihesu, how sche was chastysed wyth many tribulacyons & horrybyl temptacyons, & aftyrward how sche was fed and comfortyd wyth holy medytacyons & specyal in the mende of owyr Lordys Passyon. (38-39)

Apparently, in this instance, Margery must be punished before she is fed and, paradoxically, comforted by thoughts of Christ's sorrow and suffering.

Emphatically physical in Margery's own account, Christ's Passion signifies humankind's redemption accomplished by Christ's suffering body. According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, it is his suffering body on the cross that the devout swallow during communion. Thus it is hardly surprising that Margery equates the "love-food" she receives from Christ with both suffering and salvation. That she joys in and is nourished by Christ's suffering, which she in turn misrecognizes as her own, is the paradox of mysticism.

When Margery receives nourishing words from Christ, even without having mind of his Passion, she apparently joys and suffers simultaneously:

"I xal preche the & teche the my-selfe, for thi wyl & thy desyr is acceptabyll vnto me." Than was hir sowle so delectably fed wyth the swet dalyawns of owr Lorde & so fulfilled of hys lofe that as a drunkyn man sche turnyd hir fyrst on the o syde & sithyn on the other wyth gret wepyng & gret sobbyng, vn-mythy to kepyn hir-selfe in stabilnes for the unqwenchabyll fyer of lofe which brent ful sor in hir sowle. (98)

The food and/or drink Margery receives from Christ is so sweet and tasty that she is made drunk by it. Her drunkenness implies an abundance of nourishing food or drink and abandon to a powerful and nourishing Other or mother. Her hunger echoes Nicholas Love's account of how the disciples experienced thirst and hunger after Christ's death: "for they remained euer in

his absence hongrie and thirstie after the presence of their moste sweete Lorde, of whom before they were wonte to haue so great aboundance of comforte" (608). The observation made by the narrator of Love's text concerning the lost abundance and sweetness of Christ's physical presence and the physiological symptoms that his disciples suffered through their mourning, is dramatically opposite to the fullness that Margery experiences. Margery is so overwhelmed by the sweetness and amour.^t of food she receives from Christ (and one could speculate, the kind of food, namely love-food) that she appears to lose language. In Margery's experience of fullness, her body is wracked with "gret wepyng & gret sobbyng". Margery's pleasurable suffering so moves her that she appears to have trouble maintaining a sense of herself: "vn-mythy to kepyn hir-selfe in stabilnes".

Karma Lochrie describes *imitatio christi* as a "semiotics of suffering," that is, suffering articulated through the body and transgressing symbolic boundaries (*Translations* 36). Lochrie's usage of "semiotics" implies Kristeva's understanding of the semiotic as being disruptive of the symbolic; however, Lochrie does not mention that the archaic mother is also coextensive with Kristeva's formulation of the semiotic. As previously noted in the preceding Chapter, Margery's mysticism is defined by her tears and suffering. Additionally, Margery's mystical experiences are frequently described in her book as ineffable or only partly translatable: "[s]he was so ful of holy thowtys & medytacyons & holy contemplacyons in the Passyon of owyr Lord Ihesu Crist & holy dalyawns that owyr Lord Ihesu Crist dalyed to hir sowle that sche cowde neuyr expressyn hem aftyr, so hy & so holy thei weryn" (71-72). Lochrie points out that "[t]he failed human utterance is, in fact, what mystic texts practise as a rule" (*Translations* 126). Additionally, Irigaray stipulates that loss of speech is essential to entering mystical ecstasy:

But she cannot specify exactly what she wants. Words begin to fail her. She senses something *remains to be said* that resists all speech, that can at best be stammered out. All words are weak, worn out, unfit to translate anything sensibly. . . . So the best plan is to abstain from all discourse, to keep quiet, or else utter only a sound so inarticulate that it barely forms a *song*. (193)

Margery's inability to articulate her mystical experiences, bracketed as they are by her extremely loud and uncontrollable crying, suggests that, in losing language and perhaps the consciousness that belongs to it, she appears to slip from symbolization into what Lacan would call the "imaginary" and Kristeva the "semiotic."¹⁰

Tears, milk, food and blood figure prominently in medieval Catholicism and are the signifiers of the semiotic maternal body and its attributes. It is my contention that desire or want for this lost and then phallicized mother is articulated through Christ's body on the cross and the semiotic flow of nourishing fluids that emanate from his body. As will be shown in the following Chapter, these fluids--particularly blood and pus--are normally abject flows, that is, flows considered taboo or unclean. To refuse to "abject" these flows is a refusal of inside/outside boundaries that separate a child from its mother and also constitute its own subjectivity.

If Margery refuses to avoid abject flows and in fact desires to incorporate them (for instance, by kissing lepers) or contemplate them (for example, by seeing the rivers of blood that belong to Christ's Passion), her refusal suggests

¹⁰Jane Gallop, in *The Daughter's Seduction*, differentiates between these two contradictory theories concerning what is prior to the symbolic: "Both are associated with the pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic maternal. But whereas the imaginary is conservative and comforting, tends toward closure, and is disrupted by the symbolic, the semiotic is revolutionary, breaks closure, and disrupts the symbolic" (124). While both theoreticians agree that what is prior to language or the father is the mother and her attributes, Kristeva's theory concerning the semiotic's disruptive qualities is crucial to her understanding of abjection and the functions of the archaic mother and the "father of Individual pre-history" in the development of subjectivity.

that she is attempting to re-establish the semiotic processes of the archaic dyad--or, more specifically, primary narcissism--that are prior to language acquisition. As previously shown, a mother's milk and Christ's blood shed during his passion are frequently conflated in late medieval spirituality.¹¹ Bynum points out that "in medieval medical theory breast milk is processed blood. According to medieval understanding of physiology, the loving mother, like the pelican who is also a symbol for Christ, feeds her child with her own blood" (*Jesus as Mother* 132). The conflation of bleeding wounded flesh with the nourishing maternal implicit in Eucharistic devotion and the Passion is the semiotic "means" through which Margery experiences communion with Christ. In fact Julian of Norwich makes a startling parallel between a mother breast-feeding her infant and Christ feeding the devout:

The moder may geue her chylde sucke hyr mylke, but oure precyous moder Jhesu, he may fed vs wyth hym selfe, and doth full curtesly and full tendyrly with the blessyd sacrament, that is precyous fode of very lyfe (*Revelations* longer 596-97)

Julian's parallel between nourishing breast milk and the blessed sacrament further suggests that the eucharist is a form of "love-food."

Christ's body as food is symbolized by the church most obviously by the host or eucharist. Julia Kristeva theorizes in "God is Love" that for the devout through an identification with the ideal father (father of individual prehistory), Eucharistic devotion is "a relief of oral sadism directed at the archaic maternal body" (*Tales of Love* 149). According to Kristeva, Christianity, by "inserting a Third Party¹² between the self and its destructive hunger, by setting up a distance between that same self and its nurse, offers to

¹¹See chapter IV pp.110-169 of Bynum's *Jesus as Mother* for further examples of this conflation in devotional texts written by male clerics and saints.

¹²The "Third Party" refers to the paternal function or father, not necessarily an actual person. See my discussion of the "father of individual pre-history" pp.58-59.

destructive avidity--a Word. Language" (*Tales of Love* 149). It is possible, especially when one takes into account both Irigaray's claim that mystical ecstasy is outside language and Lochrie's observation that mystical texts practise as a "rule" the failure of language, that the destructive avidity Kristeva describes as the basis for Eucharistic devotion exceeds symbolic appeasement. As pointed out earlier, Kristeva states that Catholicism uses semiotic means to fuse with Christ. It is through the possibility of disruption inherent in Kristeva's conception of semiotics that Eucharistic devotion--hunger for bread that *is* bleeding, nourishing, maternal flesh--transgresses these boundaries instead of maintaining symbolic order and unified subjectivity.

Ideally, Eucharistic devotion is, as Kristeva conceives of it, "orality dedicated to the father" (*Tales of Love* 149); an "orality not satiated as desire but symbolically appeased . . ." (149). But late medieval Catholic mysticism, as evidenced by the texts of this study and the work of Caroline Bynum, is characterized by a literalness and materiality that distinguishes it from modern Catholicism. Bynum writes that "many pious people in the later Middle Ages developed, along with a frenzied hunger for the host, an intense fear of receiving it" as "the moment of consecration became increasingly fraught with meaning, as the power of the priest grew ever more awesome, as the notion of eating God seemed more and more audacious . . ." (*Holy Feast* p.58-59). Thus it is possible that the boundary between the ideal father and the archaic mother created by symbolization in Eucharistic devotion is, for Maria D'Oignies and Margery Kempe, far from stable during their mystical excesses.

For instance, Maria D'Oignies' Eucharistic devotion has a marked cannibalistic tone which according to Bynum's study is not unusual.¹³ During the raising of the sacrament Maria is described as seeing "bytwix the prestys handes the lyknes of a feyre childe and an oost of heuenly spirites doune commynge with mykel lighte" (*Anglia* 165). Maria is in fact described as "thirstynge the blissed blode" and when she "myghte no more do, vmwhile after the masse she asked that she myghte atte lest beholde longe the bare chalys on the auter" (175). Maria's cannibalistic hunger for Christ suggests an insatiable spiritual hunger that is in sharp contrast to Maria's rigorous fasting. In fact Maria systematically starves herself by attempting to live off only consecrated host (apparently Maria can tell the difference between a consecrated and an unconsecrated host). If she eats meat or drinks wine, even after being ill, she punishes herself to the point of self-mutilation:

For with fervour of spirite she, lothing hir flesche, cutte away grete gobettis and for shame hidde hem in the erthe; and for she was enflaumed with houe heet of loue, she sawe on of seraphym, that is a brennyng aungel, standyne by hir in this excesse of mynde. (*Anglia* 140)

While Bynum's premise for *Holy Feast Holy Fast* is that medieval devotional practices were grounded in the body through food and food symbolism, Maria D'Oignies' example would suggest that these practices, especially fasting, signify a marked split between body and spirit that is constellated around food.

¹³Bynum of course does not describe Eucharist devotion or frenzy as cannibalistic or as sublimated behaviour in any way. In fact she directly addresses the question of sublimation in *Holy Feast Holy Fast* by claiming that Medieval mysticism was too literal and material to be sublimated: "Scholars have, of course, suggested that such reactions were sublimated sexual desire, but it seems inappropriate to speak of 'sublimation.' In the eucharist and in ecstasy a male Christ was handled and loved; sexual feelings were . . . not so much translated into another medium as simply set free" (248). Clearly this claim illustrates that Bynum's reading of medieval women's devotional practice is preconditioned by her own Christian belief which thereby closes her argument to a potentially useful way of analyzing late medieval female devotional practices.

Clearly Margery Kempe's asceticism is less extreme than that of Maria D'Oignies. Margery Kempe is not described as cannibalistically thirsting and hungering for the body of Christ in her Eucharistic devotion. But in one of her visions, concerning events surrounding Christ's crucifixion, she is described as hearing the Virgin cry out after the Passion: "'Yeue me no mete but myn owyn childe'" (195). As Margery clearly identifies with the Virgin in her visions, this statement graphically conveys Margery's own conflation of Christ's flesh as food as well as emphasizing the impossible nature of her hunger.

Margery's Eucharistic devotion is characterized by "sor wepyng & boystows sobbyng" (107) rather than bloody feasting. Her cries are so loud that "the pepil wonderyd up-on hir, hauyng gret mereyl what hir eyled" (107). Even the sight of the sacrament being borne around Lynne on Corpus Christi Day triggers one of Margery's violent crying fits:

On Corpus Cristi Day aftyr, as the prestys born the Sacrament a-bowte the town wyth solempne processyon, wyth meche lyth & gret solempnyte, as was worthy to be do, the forseyd creatur folwyd ful of terys & deuocyon, wyth holy thowtys & meditacyon, sor wepyng & boystows sobbyng. & than cam a good woman be this creatur & seyde, "Damsel, God yef us grace to folwyn the steppys of owr Lord Ihesu Crist." Than that worde wrowt so sor in hir herte & in hir mende that she myth not beryn it that sche was fawyn to takyn an hows. & ther sche cryed, "I Jey, I dey," . . . (107)

Another time Margery cries so loudly that it seemed

as yyf hir sowle & hir body xulde a partyd a-sundyr, so that tweyn men heldyn hir in her armys tyl hir cryng was cesyd, for sche myth not beryn the habundawns of lofe that sche felt in the precyous Sacrament, wech sche stedfastly beleuyd was very God & Man in the forme of breed. (138)

Margery collapses apparently from the incredible abundance of love contained in the host. Because of the passage's conflation of abundance, love,

bread and Christ's flesh, it is plausible that the host in this instance is a manifestation of Firestone's conception of "love-food." Margery's description of her body and soul being almost "partyd a-sundyr" by the abundance of love in the host specifies that the host or "love-food" is powerful and possibly dangerous to subjectivity. Elsewhere, the text further suggests that Holy Communion is a highly cathected and possibly frightening experience for Margery in the following description of her devotional routine: when Margery is shriven regularly at Saint Margery's Church her cries are so "lowde that it myth ben herd al a-bowte the Chirche & owte of the Chirche as sche xulde a deyid therwyth that sche myth not receyuyn the Sacrament of the prestys handys, the preyst turnyng hym a-geyn to the awter wyth the preciows Sacrament, til hir crying was cesyd" (139). The text explicitly draws attention to Margery's momentary inability to receive holy communion and stipulates that "thus it happyd many a tyme whan sche xulde ben howselyd" (139). Margery's inability to ingest the food, the love, and implicitly the suffering that she so obviously desires suggests that she fears communion. It is possible that in her ecstatic experience of Holy Communion, Margery risks losing unified subjectivity if the object of her "destructive avidity" slides from the realm of father into a "place" without objects or language. In mystical ecstasy, the semiotic nature of Eucharistic devotion, inherent in its dramatic conflation of love, food, and suffering flesh, poses the possibility of disrupting the symbolic meaning of the host and produces in the mystic a momentary jouissance that threatens her subjectivity.

If Margery's Eucharistic devotion is characterized by both oral avidity and fear, her visions of Christ's crucifixion appear all the more spectacular in their articulation of ambivalent desire directed at the phallic-maternal body of Christ. Because Margery's numerous, violent, and bloody crucifixion

scenarios, filled with abject suffering and awash with abject fluids, presumably reflect her desire, they suggest that Margery feels an ambivalence, more than likely an unconscious ambivalence, towards Christ. That Margery joys in her contemplation of the Passion, is made evident by her graphic description of Christ's mutilated body and her subsequent ecstatic experience:

. . . it was grawntyd this creatur to beholdyn so verily hys precyows tendyr body, alto-rent & toryn wyth scorgys, mor ful of wowndys than euyr was duffehows of holys, hangyng vp-on the cros wyth the corown of thorn up-on hys heuyd, hys blysfyl handys, hys tendyr fete nayled to the hard tre, the reuerys of blood flowyng owt plentevowsly of euery membre, the gresly & grevows wownde in hys precyows syde schedyng owt blood & watyr for hir lofe & hir saluacyon, than she fel down & cryed wyth lowde voys, wondyrfully turnyng & wrestyng hir body on euery syde, spredyng hir armys a-brode as yyf sche xulde a deyde, & not cowde kepyn hir fro crying,--and these bodily mevyngys for the fyer of lofe that brent so feruently in hir sowle wyth pur pyte & compassyon.
(70)

Christ's innumerable wounds and rivers of blood and water can be read as semiotic signifiers that are evocative of the archaic mother.¹⁴ In "Stabat Mater" Kristeva, citing Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex*, points out that the Virgin's milk and tears are "the privileged signs of *Mater Dolorosa* who invaded the West beginning with the eleventh century . . ." (*Tales of Love* 249). Kristeva reads the Virgin's tears and milk as "the metaphors of nonspeech, of a 'semiotics' that linguistic communication does not account

¹⁴Similarly, Julian of Norwich also describes rivers of blood in her visions of the Passion: "And aftyr this I saw behaldande the bodye plenteuouslye bledande, hate & freschlye and lyfelye, rryt as I sawe before in the heede. And this was schewyd me in the semes of scowrgyng, and this ranne so plenteuously to my syght that me thought yyf itt hadde bene so in kynde for that time, itt schulde hafe made the bedde alle on blode & hafe passede on abowte. God has made waterse plenteuouse in erthe to oure sevyce and to owre bodylye eese, for tendyr love that he has to vs; botte yit lykys hym bettyr that we take fullye his blessedde blode to wasche vs with of synne, for thare ys no lykoure that es made that hym lykys so welle to gyffe vs, for it is so plenteuouse and of our kynde" (*Revelations* shorter 50). By virtue of Julian's conception of Christ as mother, blood as "lykoure" and the previously noted connection between blood and breast milk, Julian's description of Christ's abundant bleeding is evocative of a replete maternal body—a body so replete that the devout can wash in its excess fluid.

for. They re-establish what is non-verbal and show up as the receptacle of a signifying disposition that is closer to so-called primary processes" (*Tales of Love* 249). I in turn read the blood and water flowing from Christ's wound/breast as disruptive semiotic signifiers that also connote "a 'return of the repressed' . . ." (*Tales of Love* 249). Unlike narratives or paintings of the Virgin, the primary processes evoked in Margery's narratives of Christ's crucifixion appear to have less to do with a transference directed at a loving and nourishing body than fusion with an abjectly bleeding and suffering body.

While Margery Kempe focuses much of her spiritual energy upon trying to fuse¹⁵ with Christ through the injustice of his crucifixion, it appears as if Margery is punishing Christ by her very concentration on his suffering and her subsequent cataloguing of his injuries:

Sithyn sche went forth in contemplacyon thorw the mercy of owr Lord Ihesu Crist to the place ther he was naylyd to pe Crosse. And than sche sey the Iewys wyth gret violens rendyn of owr Lordys precyows body a cloth of sylke, the which was cleuyn & hardyd so sadly & streitly to owr Lordys body wyth hys precyows blood that it drow a-vey al the hyde & al the skyn of hys blissyd body & renewyd hys preciows wowndys & mad the blod to renne down al a-bowtyn on euery syde. Than that predcyows body aperyd to hir syght as rawe as a thyng that wer newe flayn owt of pe skyn, ful petows & reful to be-holdyn. . . . And a-non after sche beheld how the creul Iewys leydyn hys precyows body to the Crosse & sithyn tokyn a long nayle, a row & boistews, & sett to hys hand & wyth gret violens & cruelnes thei dreuyn it thorw hys hande. Hys blisful Modyr beheldyng & this creatur how hys precyows body schrynkyd & drow to-gedyr wyth alle senwys & veynys in that precyows body for peyne that it suffyrd & felt, thei sorwyd and mornyd & syhyd ful sor. (191-92)

¹⁵Caroline Bynum points out that Margery imitates Christ's suffering on the cross by spreading her arms out by her sides and writhing in pain. She discusses the precedent for *imitatio christi* in *Holy Feast Holy Fast* and points out that *imitatio* or "[i]mitation meant union--fusion--with that ultimate body which is the body of Christ" (246) and, I would argue, the phallicized maternal body.

Margery's attention to detail suggests a sadistic fascination with the mechanics of Christ's crucifixion. Perhaps more dramatically sadistic is Margery's apparent embellishment of the Flagellation by her invention of a scourge that, according to Allen's notes, would have been "impossibly dangerous to use" (*Margery Kempe* 334 n191/5-15). Margery sees "sextene men wyth sextene scorgys, & eche scorge had viij babelys of leed on the ende, & euery babyl was ful of scharp prekelys as it had ben the rowelys of a spor" (191).¹⁶ Allen also points out in her gloss of this incident that "[t]he motive of piling up the agony . . . was doubtless partly the general tendency of the age to develop the horrors of the Passion . . ." (334 n191/5-15).¹⁷ Resonant with the "tendency of the age" and Margery's *Book*, Love's translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes* graphically describes Christ's Passion and in fact

¹⁶Margery's attention to detail in her description of the Passion and Flagellation is similar to the excessive detail Roland Barthes discovers in three apparently antithetical writers in his book *Sade Fourier Loyola*. Barthes claims that all three writers are very similar in that they are "logothetes", that is founders of languages. By this Barthes means that the point of their writing is to exceed mere representation. The value or meaning of these texts lies in their sheer sensuality, regardless of content. Barthes states: "Nothing is more depressing than to imagine the Text as an intellectual object. . . . The text is an object of pleasure" (7). While all three writers vary widely in content, Barthes points to a similarity in their writing: "From Sade to Fourier, sadism is lost; from Loyola to Sade, divine interlocation. Otherwise, the same writing: the same sensual pleasure in classification, the same mania for cutting up (the body of Christ, the body of the victim, the human soul), the same enumerative obsession (accounting for sins, tortures, passions, and even for accounting errors), the same image practice (imitation, tableau, seance), the same erotic, fantasmatic fashioning of the social system" (3). Like Barthes' reading of Sade, in which he points to Sade's excessive description and "enumerative obsession," Margery's enumerative and highly detailed description of the Flagellation and Passion suggests that the language of her text too topples over into an erotic territory and through it "observe[s] a vacancy" (6). By this I mean to suggest that Margery's text is overdetermined and that the object described while perhaps the conscious point of the narrative, is not "the point."

¹⁷Nicholas Love's translation of the *Meditationes* further amplifies Christ's suffering by claiming that he suffers more pain than an average man would faced with the same circumstances: "And allso as diuers doctours doe teache and reason approueth, that he was, concerninge his bodie, of the swetest and moste delicate complexion that euer was, or euer possible coulde be: by reason whereof he was the more choice and tender in his flesh & so the paine which he suffered much more sharpe and bitter vnto him, then it would haue bene to any other man" (472-473).

encourages the devout to contemplate not only the suffering of Christ and his mother but also the mechanical details of Christ's crucifixion:

. . . make thy selfe as present in minde thereat, behouldinge all that shall be inflicted vpon thy Lorde Iesu. And so with the inner eie of thy soule behoulde, some preparinge the Crosse, some makinge readie the ropes and cordes to binde him, some the nayles and hammers to nayle him, and some diginge the hole in the earth to fix the Crosse in, and others busie aboute him and drawing of his cloathes from him. (513)

According to the practice of affective piety, as it is illustrated in Love's text, by imagining the Passion the devout can commune with Christ by sympathetically feeling his suffering. Ultimately, because Margery attempts to fuse with Christ through his suffering, her visions of Christ's Passion imply that her aggressive impulses are in some sense directed against herself.

According to Kristeva, Christ on the cross represents the period of suffering that is prior to "the glory that comes of identification with the father" (*In the Beginning* 12). As such, Christ's crucifixion metaphorically represents the pain and anguish suffered by all infants just before they acquire language: "this is when they must renounce forever the maternal paradise in which every demand is immediately gratified" (*In the Beginning* 41). Thus Christ's death and Ascension represent the acquisition of subjectivity and mastery. As such, Margery's desire to fuse with Christ's suffering during his Passion and her sadistic "punishment" of Christ may be a displaced projection of her own anguish and suffering that she experienced as an infant just before coming into language. This is the state of primary narcissism which Kristeva describes as far from paradisaical and fraught with anxiety (*Powers of Horror* 62-63). Christ's body on the cross retroactively signifies the subject's own actual suffering during this phase of her infancy. Margery Kempe's apparent fixation with Christ's Passion suggests that her entry into symbolization was

unusually traumatic and not entirely successful. Significantly, according to Kristeva abjection is coextensive with primary narcissism and is the first movement an infant makes away from its mother. Because abjection is not certain rejection, it leaves the infant in an unstable state neither entirely within nor without the archaic dyad. In fact, Kristeva points out, citing Bataille, the "*weakness of that prohibition*"--abjection--is productive of the abject (*Powers of Horror* 64). If Christ's Passion carries as its subtexts both the loss and suffering experienced prior to a subject's entry into symbolization, and the promise of a return to a "lost" maternal paradise, then is it any wonder that the phallicized maternal body and abjection loom large in Margery Kempe's mysticism and in the devotional practices of saints and mystics of the late Middle Ages? The abundance of narratives concerning martyrdom, the nursing of lepers, and painful if not humiliating penitential activities seems hardly surprising in this context if abjection is productive of what it prohibits. I turn to this problematic in my next Chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

*"Now gan sche to louyn that sche had most hatyd be-for-tyme . . .": the
 Abject and Abjection in *The Book of Margery Kempe**

The abject and abjection are Kristeva's areas of investigation in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Abjection is revulsion for the horrible; it is a prohibition against that which disturbs identity or disrupts boundaries, namely the abject which is either filth or an object ascribed as loathsome. In this book Kristeva sets out to describe what the abject and abjection are and how they figure in Judaism and Christianity, and as they appear in the anthropological studies of pagan ritual by Mary Douglas. Kristeva also investigates the abject and abjection in modernist literature. Kristeva claims that "abjection accompanies all religious structuring" (17) and that Christianity incorporates abjection as sin and locates it emanating from inside a subject. She cites Matthew 15:11--"Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (114)--as proof that Christianity, unlike Roman paganism and Judaism, believes the individual cannot be polluted from objects outside her or himself, but that pollution and evil come from within. Kristeva points out that abjection is also the basis for holiness in Christianity: "only after having sinned does the mystic topple over into holiness, and his [*sic*] holiness never ceases to appear to him [*sic*] as fringed by sin" (126). Mysticism exploits abjection by locating it inside the self as sin; through the abjection of self, resulting in the partial loss or denial of self, a mystic can approach God or found an ecstatic communion with Christ that is characterized by loss of language and feelings of merging or fusion. Kristeva conceptualizes abjection

as originally a prohibition directed by an infant against the archaic dyad from which the infant must separate in order to learn language. Thus abjection is crucial to an infant's development of self and is "coextensive with social and symbolic order" (*Powers of Horror* 68). Paradoxically, as stated in the conclusion to Chapter 2, the very "weakness of the prohibition" produces what abjection is supposed to suppress. Thus, as with revulsion for the horrible (or prohibition of the abject), abjection like incest dread is a dual movement of rejection and attraction. On the one hand a prohibition and on the other a fount of mystical ecstasy, abjection confronts the subject under its sway with the threat of dissolving boundaries: at once a threat to be avoided in order to maintain unified subjectivity and a threat to be embraced in order for a mystic to fuse with Christ.

Through my analysis of the Holy Family Romance, we have seen the significance of Margery's attempts to insert herself into the oedipal configuration of the Virgin-Christ dyad. Margery's rescue fantasies, like Freud's description of the young boy who in fantasy usurps his father's position of power and authority thus gaining exclusive access to his mother, enable Margery to usurp the position of the Virgin and form her own dyad with Christ. Her motivation for doing so appears to be oedipal in that, as I have shown in both preceding Chapters, Christ also functions for Margery as a mother. Both Christ's godhead and maternal attributes signify him as the phallic (m)Other. We have seen in her attempted re-construction of a dyadic relationship with Christ and her transgression of inside/outside and pleasure/pain distinctions that Margery's description of her mystical communion with Christ mimics the processes of primary narcissism through which she loses language. Margery transgresses these boundaries through a particular kind of abjection: abjection of the self.

According to Kristeva abjection is the first way that a not-yet-subject begins to separate from the archaic dyad. Abjection of the archaic mother-infant dyad and its associated flows is coextensive with primary narcissism, the phase in an infant's development where it has no other object than its own ego. Primary narcissism anticipates object relations, language acquisition and inside/outside distinctions. Abjection of the dyad prepares the way for a third party, otherwise known as the paternal function,¹ to intervene between mother and infant. Kristeva describes the break-up of the mother-infant dyad as violent and precarious:

The abject confronts us . . . with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling. (*Powers of Horror* 13)

Abjection also confronts us with our earliest attempts at mastery. What must be abjected by the infant is the impulse to remain in fusion with the archaic mother. The desire for this fusional relationship becomes associated with the incest taboo as the child gains mastery and access to language and the father. Abjection of the archaic dyad and its associated flows protects our new and older selves from fusional impulses or desire for continuity. Thus Kristeva describes abjection as a "safe-guard" and as the basis of culture and implicitly civilization:

On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safe guards. The primers of my culture. . . . Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The

¹The paternal function or, in Lacanian terms, the Name of the Father, is according to Jacqueline Rose "not reducible to the presence or absence of the real father as such" (*Female Sexuality* 39). Rather, "[t]he father is a function and refers to a law, the place outside the imaginary dyad and against which it breaks" (39). As such the Name of the Father represents language and culture.

repugnance, the retching thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage and muck. (*Powers of Horror* p.2)²

Abjection figures in primary narcissism in two ways. It both threatens the ego through an underlying attraction for what would destroy it, and it provides the means or the motivation for establishing incest dread. As Kristeva describes it, abjection of the archaic dyad covers over the fragility of primary narcissism; additionally incest dread further distances the newly emerging ego from the threat of dissolution that would result from the return to the archaic dyad. However, as Kristeva puts it, abjection simultaneously "pulverizes and beseeches a subject" (5). Kristeva conceives of abject objects or flows as excrement, urine, blood, pus, cadavers, food, et cetera. When these objects or flows show up, they threaten the inside/outside boundaries of a subject's own clean self (in French, "le propre" serves both meanings), and must be expelled or refused by the subject as "not me." Many of these flows or objects are semiotic signifiers that connote the pre-linguistic relationship between mother and child. According to John Lechte, these signifiers also evoke the mother's authority over the flows and objects which are later abjected along with the archaic dyad (163). These flows are unconsciously associated with the archaic mother and her attributes, according to Kristeva. Thus when we as speaking subjects confront the abject we are frightened by the ineffable, the unnameable, the forgotten and yet secretly yearned-for abjected mother.

²Abjection, as previously stated, is not certain protection from the archaic dyad. Kristeva points out that abjection is "above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger" (*Powers of Horror* 9). By its inability to completely exclude the threatening material of the unconscious—or in Bataille's words "the very weakness of the prohibition"—abjection allows for a subject to be attracted to what might destroy it and in fact is evocative of the archaic dyad.

In defining and constructing abjection Kristeva utilizes Lacan's theory of the lost object--*objet petite a*. According to Jacqueline Rose "In his later work Lacan defined the objective of psychoanalysis as breaking the confusion behind this mystification, a rupture between the *object a* and the Other, whose conflation he saw as the elevation of fantasy into the order of truth" (46). "Truth" or "reality" is defined by Lacan as recognizing that fundamental want or desire is always already in excess of the thing desired including the Other. Thus desire can never be satisfied within the realm of social reality because desire is predicated in social reality upon loss and lack (as previously stated in Chapter 2, p. 56). *Objet a* is the "something" lost at "the advent of desire" (McCannell 166). It is, according to Stuart Schneiderman, "the object always desired and never attained, the object that causes the subject to desire in cases where he can never gain the satisfaction of possessing the object" (*Powers of Horror* x). What the subject initially loses at the advent of subjectivity is something irretrievable, something ineffable: the archaic mother. *Objet a* in fact connotes desire for a non-object. Juliet MacCannell points out that one of the "faces" of Lacan's *objet a* is abjection (167). Abjection, particularly the abjection of self, is according to Kristeva the only "signified" for the experience of objectless want that is preliminary to being or previous to "the being of the object" (*Powers of Horror* 5). Thus the only meaning of *objet a* is abjection, an experience that paradoxically both threatens and produces subjectivity. Significantly, as the only "signified" or meaning of this want, the abject and abjection as they appear in *The Book of Margery Kempe* then provide a means of partially articulating or semiotically signifying this want that is otherwise ineffable.

In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva mentions mysticism and several mystics--St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Francis of Assisi and Angela of Foligno--to illustrate

abjection of self and to point out that the mystic joys in abjecting her or himself. Kristeva states that "The mystic's familiarity with abjection is a fount of infinite jouissance" (127). Kristeva's earlier description of this jouissance points to the experience as one that conflates pleasure and pain: "One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it . . . Violently and painfully" (9). According to this description of the jouissance of abjection, the one who experiences it loses desire and to some extent consciousness.

Abjection of the self involves the rejection of inside/outside and pleasure/pain boundaries that establish self and identity. This process, as previously shown, mimics the phase in an infant's development known as primary narcissism. Abjection of self is never more than a means through which a mystic mimics or idealizes primary narcissism because the mystic does desire an object (however unattainable) external to the self: Christ. If abjection is *objet a*'s only signified, then, as Kristeva points out, "There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (*Powers of Horror* 5). According to Kristeva, abjection of self reveals to the subject "that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being" (*Powers of Horror* 5). As previously stated, what the subject loses in order to be is the archaic dyad. The abject, what the subject prohibits in order to be, besides its quality of horror has, according to Kristeva, one criterion of the object: "that of being opposed to *I*" (1). A mystic uses this quality of the abject in order to dissolve her own subjectivity and enter into an ecstatic state or fusion with Christ. It appears that the exploitation of abjection in mysticism serves to bring a subject face to face with what it lacks and consequently desires: the phallic (m)Other masquerading as Christ.

Abjection of self is made exemplary in the Catholic faith through martyr stories, legendary accounts of Christ's passion, hagiography, and other celebrated accounts of self-denial and self-loathing. Unsurprisingly these narratives contain a series of motifs and images of abjection. Some of the more frequent of these motifs and images are: blood, pus, leprosy, muck from open-air sewers, and a variety of inedible foods.³ As previously stated, abject objects and/or flows are strongly associated with the mother of the archaic dyad. Significantly, Kristeva writes of a two-sided sacred in *Powers of Horror*. The one aspect, murder, "is defensive and socializing"; "the other, incest, shows fear and indifferentiation" (58). For both male and female children, as illustrated by Freud's later re-formulation of the Oedipal phase for girls in "Female Sexuality," murderous impulses are directed toward the father and incestuous impulses are directed toward the mother. Kristeva describes the incestuous side of the sacred as "neglected" and as her object of inquiry. The incestuous side of the sacred is "non-representable," "threatening and fusional" and is "of the archaic dyad . . . on which language has no hold but one woven of fright and repulsion" (58). Thus Kristeva's conception of a "two-sided sacred" is oedipally differentiated between murderous desire directed at the father and incestuous desire directed at the mother. Clearly Catholicism in narratives of the Nativity (the birth of a son who is his own father), the Passion (a murder), and the Assumption (the marriage of mother and son) presents both aspects of the two-sided sacred. What is important to note here is the dual nature of the sacred characterized by the symbolic paternal and the semiotic maternal. I suggest that the theme of abjection of self before God and the abject motifs in legendary accounts of Christ's life,

³Kristeva suggests that "[f]lood loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (*Powers of Horror* 2).

particularly his Passion, contain expressions of the maternal and incestuous aspect of the sacred.

Obviously the figure of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism connotes the maternal. However, it is possible that Catholicism may evoke the maternal and incestuous aspect of the sacred more radically or more primarily through abjection and abject motifs.⁴ One of the more striking scenarios narrated in *The Book of Margery Kempe* is Margery's fantasy of being pelted with sewage while naked and bound to a hurdle usually used for "the transportation of a criminal to execution" (406). As aforementioned, nakedness and waste--vomit, excrement, mucus--were once in our psychic histories intimately associated with the "lost" mother through her control over our nakedness and fluids, our early psychic connection to the fluids in the womb and the bodily flows produced during the birthing process: "inter faeces et urinas nascimur (we are born between feces and urine)."⁵ By the motifs of sewage

⁴Kristeva points out that religions attempt to come to terms with the archaic maternal threat to subjectivity by attempting to symbolize it through rituals of defilement: "A whole facet of the sacred, true lining of the sacrificial, compulsive, and paranoid side of religions, assumes the task of warding off that danger. This is precisely where we encounter the rituals of defilement and their derivatives, which, based on the feeling of abjection and all converging on the maternal, attempt to symbolize the other threat to the subject: that of being swamped by the dual relationship [primary narcissism], thereby risking the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being. The function of these religious rituals is to ward off the subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother" (*Powers of Horror* 64). Rather than avoiding the abject, rituals of defilement attempt to signify what is otherwise frightening and unknown: in effect these rituals try to symbolize the unsymbolizable. In Catholicism what is unclean and dangerous is located internally, not externally; thus in order to exploit the powers of horror the Christian narrative's privileged site for abjection is the self. Hence in order to control the archaic maternal threat a Christian mystic practises rituals of defilement that are directed against the self.

⁵Stanislav Grof points out that "[d]uring the conclusion of this stage [the end of the birthing process], the child can come into contact with various kinds of biological material, such as blood, mucus, urine, and feces." He adds, quoting the Latin quoted above, that "[i]n deliveries conducted outside the medical setting and without the use of enema and catheterization, the involvement of feces and urine is quite common. Also, in many of the deliveries in the early decades of this century, the Latin saying . . . reflected a clinical reality rather than a philosophical metaphor" (*Realms of the Human Unconscious* 124).

and nakedness, Margery's degrading fantasy may be evoking the maternal and incestuous aspect of the sacred:

"Now trewly, Lord, I wolde I cowde louyn the as mych as thu mythist makyn me to louyn the. Yyf it wer possibyl, I wolde louyn the as wel as alle the seyntys in Heuyn louyn the & as wel as alle the creaturys in erth myth louyn the. And I wolde, Lord, for thi lofe be leyd nakyd on an hyrdil, alle men to wonderyn on me for thi loue, so it wer no perel to her sowlys, & thei to castyn slory & slugge on me, & be drawyn fro town to town euery day my lyfe-tyme, yyf thu wer plesyd therby & no mannys sowle hyndryd, thi wil mote be fulfillyd & not myn." (184)

Margery's offer to Christ is spectacular in its very public incorporation of both spiritual and literal defilement. The secret or repressed knowledge that is embedded in Margery's abject fantasy is that Margery seeks to re-infantilize herself by sacrificing her own clean body. Implicitly, Margery's fantasy of defiling her body suggests that she expects to be spiritually cleansed and loved by Christ. Margery's fantasy of nakedness and filth appears to carry as a subtext an infantile conflation of love and cleansing that is connotative of the archaic mother-infant dyad.

In addition to the nakedness and filth of Margery's abject scenario, there is a third motif associated with the hurdle: criminality. Kristeva points out that it is not only filth that causes abjection but "what disturbs identity, system, order" (*Powers of Horror* 4) and law. Criminal behaviour, the literal breaking of the law, is thus abject. Language, law and the father are all metaphorically connected in both Christianity and Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis and thus the maternal is associated with disruption and lawlessness. Significantly, all three motifs of Margery's abject scenario involve obvious social improprieties. Through radical self-loathing and the abject flows associated with the above scenario, Margery threatens the security of the law and the boundaries associated with the father and subjectivity

within her own psyche. Because language, the father, the public, and the social are all metaphorically connected, Margery obviously risks destroying or at least making tenuous her ties to collective existence when she abjects herself. Kristeva quotes Bataille's seemingly contradictory definition of abjection from his *Essais de sociologie*:

Abjection . . . is merely the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding abject things (and that act establishes the foundations of collective existence). (*Powers of Horror* 56)

Thus abjection is an expulsion that can never quite satisfactorily exclude or reject what threatens subjectivity. Abjection's threat to subjectivity and its subsequent de-stabilization of collective existence is both the goal and the source of jouissance for the mystic. Repulsion or horror for the abject, as I will demonstrate later in this Chapter, is what a mystic seeks to suppress in order to transgress inside/outside and pleasure/pain boundaries. Her transgression of these boundaries serves to deconstruct her subjectivity and mimic the processes of primary narcissism. The method for suppressing horror for abject things is the mystic's equation of increasing tolerance for abjection with increasing degrees of faith. The consequence of this equation is that a mystic must resort to greater and greater degrees of self-abnegation in order to reach an impossible perfection of faith.

As Margery Kempe becomes more devout, she describes herself as increasingly more sinful and abject. Tied to the growth of her devotion is Margery's increasing desire for punishment:

& euyr the mor that sche encresyd in lofe & in deuocyon, the mor sche encresyd in sorwe & in contricyon, in lownes, in mekenes, & in the holy dreed of owyr Lord, & in knowlache of hir owyn frelte, that, yf sche sey a creatur be ponischyd er scharply chastisyd, sche xulde thynkyn that sche had ben mor worthy to be chastisyd than that creatur

was for hir vnkyndnes a-geyns God. Than xulde sche cryen, wepyn, & sobbyn for hir owyn synne and for the compassyon of the creatur that sche sey so ben ponyschyd & scharply chastisyd. (172)

The logic of this passage implies that Margery's sinfulness is greater in proportion than anyone else's. Margery's "vnkyndnes" against God in this passage is negative and yet grandiose. Similarly, in another instance, Margery amplifies her sinfulness by contrasting the punishment she feels she deserves with the punishment that is humanly possible:

For sche wist rygth wel sche had synned gretly a-yens God & was worthy mor schame & sorwe than ony man coud don to hir, & dyspite of the werld was the rygth way to-Heuyn-ward sythen Cryst hym-self ches that way. (13)

There is a dual movement in this passage: one self-aggrandizing in that Margery here is practising *imitatio christi*--she suffers as Christ did--and the other self-abasing in that Margery appears to believe that she deserves misery and punishment. Through abjection of self Margery constructs herself as the worst of all sinners: a negative and yet spectacular construction. It is plausible that her motives for doing so may be partially explained by Kristeva's observation that a mystic's holiness is dependent upon her sinfulness. Thus it is impossible for Margery ever to achieve perfection and purity, the ostensible goal of her asceticism, because she is fundamentally flawed. Her flaws are paradoxically both the source of her jouissance and the cause of her alienation from Christ in this world.

A mystic or saint appears to have an investment in feeling flawed or "bad" in that this "badness" allows her to transgress the socially constructed boundaries of her body and self.⁶ Margery Kempe's abjection of self by

⁶Karma Lochrie points out that the ideal female body in the middle ages was a sealed--virginal--body, but that through practices of abjection or *imitatio christi*, the female mystic could exploit her body and self and gain access to the divine. As pointed out in my Introduction, Lochrie argues that by transgressing these boundaries through abjection the possibility of a "new speech"--inclusive of that which is not accounted for by the symbolic order--emerges, one

exaggerated claims of sinfulness and desire for punishment are similar to Maria D'Oignies' devotional practices described by the narrator of her *Life*. While Maria achieves acclaim for her holiness, she never ceases to believe in her sinfulness. According to her biographer:

for gode myndes know gilte there where no gilte is, often she knelyd atte prestys feet and accusynge hirselfe confessyd hir with terys of sum thinge in the whiche vnnethis wee myghte absteine fro laghter, as sum childely woordes that she spake in veyne in hir youthe. . . . she shroue hir with a wondirful contricyone of herte & she punyshynge hir-selfe, often dredyd there where was nouthre dred ne doute. (*Anglia* 138)

As an exemplary figure, Maria D'Oignies is almost without sin. Like Margery, Maria believes she is the most miserable and lowest sinner who deserves physical punishment. According to this passage, both the narrator and the reader know that Maria's so-called "sins" are either not sins at all or laughable by virtue of their triviality. Both *The Book of Margery Kempe* and Maria D'Oignies' *Life* appear to equate exemplary devotion with extreme self-loathing and exaggerated claims of sinfulness. Self-loathing and inflated declarations of sin signify as humility before the world and God and, perhaps more importantly, at least to the mystic, as a way of rationalizing her transgression of socially constructed norms concerning the self and the body.

As penitent women Margery and Maria appear to suffer appropriately for their sinful, abject natures; however, for both punishment is paradoxically desirable. Far from avoiding punishment, Margery Kempe claims that on days "whech she suffyrd no tribulacyon sche was not mery ne glad as that day whan sche suffyrd tribulacyon" (120). For Margery tribulation is equated with punishment for past sins and her *Book* is testimony to the trope that one can

which is "limitless" and presumably feminine as opposed to masculine. Her argument for the creation of a new speech through the dissolution of boundaries appears to me to be utopian. However, Lochrie's description suggests to me that the mystic confronts what is unsymbolizable which in turn suggests that the mystic in ecstasy enters an ineffable maternal territory.

never suffer enough. This is however a conservative reading of Margery's practice of punishing herself, for the above passage is clearly oxymoronic in its equation of punishment with merriment. Punishment for the mystic appears to have partially lost its distinct purpose: its punitive effect. Punishment by its very exaggeration and excess in Margery's text loses its frightening intent. Nicholas Love's *Meditationes* is also very much concerned with suffering and punishment and by apparently extolling their virtues, Love paradoxically turns suffering and punishment into something to be embraced. By invoking the example of the disciples, Love suggests that a Christian can never suffer too much:

And as touchinge patience in necessitie: seinge the disciples of our Lorde Jesu, who had left and forsaken all that they had for to followe him, suffered patiently and gladly so greate necessitie in his presence, whom they saw so miraculously to feede and releue many thousands of other men, how much more oughte we to haue patience in like necessitie when it hapneth vnto vs by his permission, beinge nothinge so worthie, nor yet so perfect in his loue as they were, but rather haue deserued for our impatience and vnkindnes against so good a Lorde, much more punishments and wants then he doth suffer vs to sustaine (258)

According to the above, any adversity suffered is less than what is deserved. Mysticism takes this logic to its extreme and a mystic consequently desires greater punishment than she receives and/or exaggerates her "impatience and vnkindnes".

Margery Kempe further echoes this sentiment of exaggerated criminality and the ensuing desire for inappropriately harsh punishment in her following speech to Christ:

In Holy Writte, Lord, thu byddyst me louyn myn enmys, & I wot wel that in al this world was neuyr so gret an enmye to me as I haue ben to the. Therfor, Lord, thei I wer slayn an hundryd sithys on a day, yyf it wer possibyl, for thy loue, yet cowde I neuyr yeldyn the the goodnes that thu hast schewyd to me.(183-84)

In this dialogue with Christ, Margery establishes her own infinitely sinful, abject nature and Christ's equally infinite magnanimity and love.⁷

Furthermore, Margery's imagined scenario of multiple slayings serves to indicate the impossibility of ever paying the debt she feels she owes Christ and thereby she solidifies her abject state. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva writes: "*debt* points to a ruthless creditor and assigns the subject to the place of debtor whose infinite payment will fill the distance that separates him from God only by means of a faith indefinitely maintained" (120-21). Kristeva conceives of sin as debt and "*retribution*" but also as the "requisite of the Beautiful" (122) because "the Christian conception of sin also includes a recognition of an evil whose power is in direct ratio to the holiness that identifies it as such, and into which it can convert" (123). Thus included in the Christian conception of sin is a *jouissance* that Kristeva describes as "fullness" and "plenty." However, Kristeva points out that while sin has "a chance of becoming fortunate" (131), "only on the fringes of mysticism, or in rare moments of Christian life, can the most subtle transgression of law, that is to say, the enunciation of sin in the presence of the One, reverberate not as a denunciation but as the glorious counterweight to the inquisitorial fate of confession" (131).

That Margery's "enunciation of sin in the presence" of Christ "reverberates" as "fortunate" is born out throughout her dialogues with Christ and in fact preconditions her ascent into heaven:

"Dowtyr, it is mor plesyng vn-to me that thu suffyr despitys & scornys, schamys & repreuys, wrongys & disesys than yif thin hed wer smet of

⁷St. Bridget of Sweden also conceives of herself as undeserving of Christ's love and likens herself to an ass: "Thanne answerde the spouse, seint Birgitte: O king of all glorie and blisse, yeuer of all wisdom and graunter of all vertues, why takist thou me to suche a werk, that haue wasted my body in synnes? I am as an asse, lewde and vnwyse and defectif in vertues; and I haue trespassid in alle thinges and no thyng amended" (*Revelations of St. Birgitta* 105).

thre tymes on the day euery day in sevyn yer. . . . Whan thu comyst hom in-to Heuyn, than xal eury sorwe turnyn the to joye." (131)

Margery's belief in her own sinful nature conditions her desire to receive "despitys & scornys" etc. gladly. Christ consistently reassures Margery that her sin and her suffering will be turned into joy in heaven:

Dowtyr, thow hast despysed thi-self, therfor thow xalt neuyr be despysed of God. Haue mend, dowtyr, what Mary Mawdelyn was, Mary Eypcyan, Seynt Powyl, & many other seyntys that arn now in Hevyn, for of vnworthy I make worthy, & of synful I make rytful. (49)

Mary Magdalen perhaps more than any other biblical character exemplifies sinfulness and abjection of self as preconditions to communion with Christ. Nicholas Love's translation of the *Meditationes* implies that Mary Magdalen's holiness and good standing with Christ are dependent upon her life of sin, feelings of self-loathing, and her remarkable ability to abject herself before Christ and the Pharisee. After describing how Mary Magdalen washes Christ's feet with tears and dries them with her hair Love comments:

. . . neurtheles she shewed the great affection she had to confession, by hir outwarde actes and deedes: in that she presented not hir self vnto our Sauoure to aske forgiuenes in priuate as she might haue done only betweene him & hir in some secret maner, but sparinge no shame she chose the place and the time where it mighte be to hir open and manifeste reproofe, to witt in the house of the Pharise whom she knewe to hould in great disdanie all sinfull persons: and also at the time of meat whe[n] she mighte geue the more occasion for all to wonder at hir (243)

This passage encourages dramatic displays of penance. Apparently public humiliation is exemplary.

According to both Love and the gospel, Mary Magdalen cannot touch Jesus because he is not yet ascended to his father. However, when describing the joy with which Jesus and Mary Magdalen meet each other, Love defies the gospel and maintains that Jesus allows Mary to touch him after all. Love writes:

In this maner these two true louers conuersed together with exceeding ioy & contentment: and she with wonderful delight behelde his moste glorious bodie, and humbiie propounded sundrie questions vnto him, and he in all thinges satisfied hir to hir vnspeakeable comforte. Wherefore we may suppose that althoughe our Lorde so stranglie as it seemth, answered hir at the beginninge (warninge hir that she should not touche him) yet we may deuoutlie think that afterwardes he suffered hir not only to touche but also to kisse, yea both handes and feete before they departed. (587-88)

The narrator's description of Christ's behaviour as strange implies that Christ's denial of his body to the touch of Mary is incomprehensible and confusing. Hence this passage demonstrates the importance of both Christ's touch and the materiality of Christ's body for the devout.⁸ Thus, in Love's narrative, it is inconceivable for Christ to greet Mary Magdalen with coldness in much the same way that it is inconceivable to Love and other narrators of legendary accounts of Christ's life that Christ does not first meet with his mother during his resurrection. Mary Magdalen, the prostitute, as the polar opposite to the Virgin, is the model for abjection of self. Her story promises the repentant Christian that sins, no matter what the degree, will be forgiven. In Love's text Mary Magdalen's access to Christ's body is crucial to signifying Christ's love for her. It is not enough that he merely appears to her during his resurrection.

Margery Kempe also describes Christ's meeting with Mary Magdalen during his resurrection. Like Love, Margery describes Christ's prior meeting with his mother, but unlike Love Margery does not describe Mary Magdalen touching Christ:

And than the creatur thowt that Mary went forth wyth gret joye, & that was gret merueyl to hir that Mary enioyid, for yyf owr Lord had seyde to hir as he dede to Mary, hir thowt sche cowde neuyr a ben mery. That

⁸In *Holy Feast Holy Fast* Caroline Bynum suggests that the materiality of Christ's body is particularly attractive to female mystics and saints because his body is in some sense like their own, i.e. bleeding and nourishing.

was whan sche wolde a kissyd hys feet, & he seyde, "Towche me not."
 The creatur had so gret swem & heuynes in that worde that euyr whan
 sche herd it in any sermown, as sche dede many tymys, sche wept,
 sorwyd, & cryid as sche xulde a deyde for lofe & desir that sche had to
 ben wyth owr Lord. (197)

Clearly the "[t]owche me not" scenario inspires fear and suffering for Margery. It is perhaps to similar fears that Nicholas Love's narrative responds with its revisionary account.⁹ Aside from the technicality of Christ not yet being ascended to his father, and especially because of Mary Magdalen's former intimacy with Christ's physical being, his command: "[t]owche me not," appears to be curiously cold. For Margery Kempe the "[t]owche me not" phrase inspires great sadness and longing for it apparently serves as a reminder to her that she is not yet with "owr Lord." The scenario in fact appears to inspire fear of abandonment. Because both Love's and Margery Kempe's texts emphasize the physical importance of Christ's being, there is in the "[t]owche me not" scenario an inexplicable contradiction between the Christian promise of agape and Christ's actions towards one of his most loyal followers. Margery Kempe cannot understand how the Magdalen can remain so cheerful after being so denied; her behaviour is to Margery a "gret merueyl" (197). Because, as I suggest earlier Christ is the phallic (m)Other, it is plausible to speculate that the "[t]owche me not" scenario in Margery Kempe's text has a psychological meaning that implies a repetition of maternal abandonment. Conversely, the reversal of the official "[t]owche me not" scenario in Love's text, suggests the opposite, but not without first threatening the Magdalen with rejection.

⁹In any case the pseudo-Bonaventuran author was certainly more at liberty to revise an authoritative text than an uneducated woman whose dictated account of her life was most likely heavily edited if not censored.

In abjecting herself as the greatest enemy of Christ, rejection is to Margery a distinct possibility. Margery's fear of rejection coupled with her sense of debt to Christ may partly explain the impetus behind her production of some of her more spectacularly abject scenarios. In her bid to abject herself before Christ, Margery Kempe imagines scenarios of radical self-mutilation clearly modelled after martyr stories and Christ's Passion. For instance, Margery offers her life and body to Christ: "Yyf it wer thy wille, Lord, I wolde for thi lofe & for magnifyng of thi name ben hewyn as smal as flesch to the potte" (142).¹⁰ Later in the narrative Christ thanks Margery for the charity of her offer (204). Margery's preferred means of abjecting herself is, however, through worldly humiliation and scorn. She says to Christ during one of her bouts of illness: "I had leuyr suffyr alle the schrewyd wordys that men myth seyn of me & alle clerkys to prechyn a-yens me for thy lofe, so it were no hyndryng to no mannys sowle, than this peyne that I haue" (138).¹¹ However, while Margery apparently dislikes physical pain she still produces fantasies of torture. Margery imagines a scenario where she is bound to a stake and decapitated. The narrator states that she is afraid of death and therefore this is the "most soft" death that she can imagine:

Hyr thow[t] sche wold a be slayn for Goddys lofe, but dred for the poynt of deth, & therfor sche ymagyned hyr-self the most soft deth, as hir thowt, for dred of inpacyens, that was to be bowndyn hyr hed & hir fet to a stokke & hir hed to be smet of wyth a scharp ex for Goddys lofe. Than seyde our Lord in hir mende, "I thank the, dowtyr, that thou woldyst <suffer deth> for my lofe, for, as oftyn as thou thynkyst so,

¹⁰Maria D'Oignies is reputed to have actually cut off pieces of her own flesh and buried them in the ground.

¹¹Later in the text Margery apparently contradicts her unwillingness to suffer bodily pain, at least in fantasy: "Sche myth nethyr wepyn lowde ne stille but whan God wolde sende it hir, for sche was sumtyme so bareyn fro terrys a day er sumtyme half a day & had so gret peyne for desyr that sche had of hem that sche wold a youyn al this worlde, yyf it had ben hir, for a fewe teerys, er a suffyrd ryth gret bodily peyne for to a gotyn hem wyth" (199).

thow schalt haue the same mede in Heuyen as thow thu suffredyst the same deth. (30)

Margery's desire to be "slayn for Goddys lofe" is an attempt to articulate before Christ the depth of her love by the extent she is willing to sacrifice herself. And while Margery imagines a relatively quick and easy death, her decapitation scenario echoes the spectacle of a martyr story; for presumably Margery will lose her head publicly through a sequence of events that further establishes the wickedness of mankind. Furthermore, while her death is "soft" (easy to take), it is undeniably violent. Through the implied spectacle and violence of Margery's proposed death, she invokes martyrdom.

In Nicholas Love's text, the narrator describes how martyrs can suffer extreme mutilation over an extraordinary length of time:

Secondlie whence is it that Martirs haue such great strengthe against diuers torments, but as Saint Bernarde saith in that they sett all their hertes and deuocion in the passion and in the woundes of Christ: for what time the martir standeth with his bodyall to rent and neuerthelesse is gladde & ioyfull in all his paine, where trowen you is then his soule & his heart, surelie in the woundes of Iesu, yea the woundes not cloted but open & wyde to enter in, for elles he sholde feelee the harde payne & not be able to endure the torment, but soone fale & denie God. (12)

Metaphorically, by tearing one's body one can enter the wounds of Christ which are open and welcoming. By penetrating him or herself a mystic and/or martyr penetrates Christ's suffering and communes with him. Mutilated, abjectly bleeding flesh becomes the passage through which a mystic or martyr enters communion with the Other or phallic mother.¹²

¹²In "La Mysterique", Irigaray explicitly maternalizes Christ's wounds. She explains the trajectory of a mystic's thinking, implicitly equating wound with vagina: "Could it be true that not every wound need remain secret, that not every laceration was shameful? Could a sore be *holy*? Ecstasy is there in that glorious slit where she curls up as if in her nest, where she rests as if she had found her home—and He is also in her. She bathes in a blood that flows over her, hot and purifying. And what she discovers in this divine passion, she neither can nor will translate" (200). Irigaray's description of the ecstasy of entering the wound of Christ suggests that the mystic is entering the womb of the phallic (m)Other.

Hagiographies and martyr stories are filled with magical and exaggerated feats of endurance of and tolerance for abject objects, radical dismemberment, and torture. Clearly less extreme and fantastic in her devotional practices than a martyr or a saint, Margery focuses on Christ's bleeding and wounded flesh, entering through his wounds, and her own psychic ones, communion or fusion with the phallic (m)Other.

In response to the particular kinds of exaggerated-pain-and-suffering scenarios evident in saints lives and martyr stories, Margery produces slaying and mutilation scenarios, develops a love for lepers, and subjects herself to public ridicule. Maria D'Oignies' biography is an example of the exaggerated-pain-and-suffering narratives that Margery may have been aware of. Maria D'Oignies' biographer stretches Maria's abjection of self to hyperbole. Meant to instruct, the text describes how Maria sleeps on the floor of the church in the cold of winter (it is so cold the wine in the chalice freezes), without adequate clothing and bare feet. Maria also fasts to the point of attempting to live off consecrated host. The more substantial food she eats is described as black, sharp bread that is unfit for dogs and causes her mouth to bleed. Maria apparently suffers no immediate ill effects from cold and fasting save for a slight headache. The narrator addresses the reader or listener with an incriminating warning:

Woo to yow that are lacches, slepyng in softe shetys and yeury beddys,
that vsith softe thinges & sliken: yee are booth deed and beryed in youre
dayes in this worldys welth, but in a poynte yee shal doune falle in to
the deppeste of helle, where vndir yowe shalbe strewed vermyne and
youre couerynge shalbe wormes. (*Anglia* 146)

The reader is promised a fate in death that the mystic or saint might "enjoy" in life. A mystic in attempting to abject herself seeks pain, suffering, and abject objects or flows and then miraculously suffers no ill effects from these

states or objects and in fact finds within them mystical ecstasy and/or saintliness. For instance, in various accounts of St. Elizabeth's life, the saint sleeps in a pig sty and at another moment in her life is knocked into a sewer by an old woman she had previously helped:

[a]nd as she wente, there was a strayte weye vpon stones and a depe myre vnder and ful of fylthe, & as she passed she mette an olde woman to whom she had doon moche good tofore, & this olde woman wold gyue hir no weye, soo that she fyl in the depe myre and fylth; and thenne she aroos and scraped hir vesture and lawghed. (Caxton 1062)

St. Elizabeth's response, which is to laugh, contains within it both the Christian doctrine of turning the other cheek and the ability to be unaffected by filth and pollution. As we shall see, the significance of this event lies in its inclusion in her biography as it indicates her biographer's apparently ubiquitous thematic concern with filth.

St. Elizabeth is famous for her hospitals and love for lepers. Butler's *The Lives of the Saints* contains a story meant to emphasize St. Elizabeth's charity and compassion towards lepers:

Everyone is familiar with the beautiful incident in the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary when, in the very bed she shared with her husband, she laid a miserable leper The indignant landgrave rushed into the room and dragged off the bedclothes. "But," in the noble words of the historians, "at that instant Almighty God opened the eyes of his soul, and instead of a leper he saw the figure of Christ crucified stretched upon the bed." (Nov. 387)

Apparently St. Elizabeth is able to tolerate a miraculous proximity to lepers. Both Caxton's and Osbern Bokenham's versions of St. Elizabeth's life include St. Elizabeth's legendary care of lepers and focus upon the flows that she cleans up, emphasizing her good works, but also emphasizing the horrible nature of her tasks. Bokenham writes:

[a]nd not-wythstondyng hys horrybylnesse,
Swych in mekenesse was hyr grace, lo,

That aile hys sorys both more & lesse,
 Whan no madyn of hyrs wold put hand to,
 Wyth a pyn or a nedle for to vndo.
 And lete out the fylthe she not dede abasshe,
 And hys ruggyd erys she clyppyd a[l]so,
 And wyth hyr owyn handys hys hede to wasshe. (265 ll 9777-84)

And thow she [e]uery stynkyng exhalacyoun
 Of the eyr bare alwey heuily,
 Yet for goddys loue seke mennys corrupcyoun
 She not abhorryd, but ful pacyently
 Hyr besyid hem for to helpe & cure
 Whan hyr maydyns wych stodyn by
 Vnneth of hem myght the breth endur. (272 ll 10009-16)

There is a striking emphasis in these two passages on the exact nature of the nursing duties St. Elizabeth performs. She is able to withstand odours that ordinary nurses cannot. She can clean wounds that other nurses are unable to go near. Bokenham's inclusion of the image of "a pyn or a nedle" is suggestive of the procedure St. Elizabeth uses to clean lepers wounds and the resulting flow of fluids. The air of the hospital "stynkyng" with "mennys corrupcyon" does not appear to affect St. Elizabeth, but rather serves to illustrate her great sensitivity and generosity towards the sick. Echoing Bokenham's account¹³ of St. Elizabeth's saintly tolerance for abject flows that revolt her servants, Caxton's translation of *The Golden Legend* also includes an incidence of St. Elizabeth cleaning and cutting the hair of a leper:

She was of so grete humylyte that for the loue of god she layed in hir lappe a man horrible seek, whyche had his vysage stynkyng like carayn, & she share of the ordure and fylthe of his heed and wysshe hit, wherof hir chamberers lothed and loughe hir to scorne. (1060)

The Caxton account subjects St. Elizabeth to a further burden, the scorn of her servants. Like Bokenham's version, the Caxton version also evokes images of

¹³Caxton's *Golden Legend* may be based on a prose translation of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* called the *Gilte Legende*. The *Gilte Legende*, as Sheila Delany points out in the introduction to her translation of Bokenham's *Legend* (page xiv), may be attributable to Bokenham which would account for certain thematic and incidental similarities between the two texts.

pus and rotting flesh. For instance, the narrator's description of the man's face as "stynking like carayn" suggests that the flesh of his face and parts of his head are open wounds oozing pus and blood. In addition to her close proximity to pus and rotting flesh, the Caxton version euphemistically describes St. Elizabeth cleaning up excrement:

. . . by nyght she bare the seek men betweene hyr armes to lete them doo theyr neccessytees and broughte them ageyn, and made clene theyr clothes and shetes that were foule. She broughte the meselles a bedde & wysse theyr soores and wyped them & dyd alle that longed to an hospytaller. (1066)

St. Elizabeth's nursing, besides being saintly in its generosity, points to a fascination by her biographers for the abject objects and flows of her work. Clearly some of St. Elizabeth's saintliness has to do with her tolerance of pus and excrement. St. Elizabeth does not appear to be repulsed by her work or her patients. Her proximity to and apparent insulation from these abject flows make her holy. St. Elizabeth is credited with saying: "Yf I coude fynde another lyf more despised I wold haue taken it . . ." (Caxton 1064).¹⁴

An apparent insulation from abject objects or a denial of their horrible nature is, therefore, exemplary. Margery Kempe in keeping with her miraculous role-models also develops a love for lepers after she withdraws from her worldly life:

Thus owr mercyful Lord Crist Ihesu drow hys creatur vn-to hys lofe & to mynde of hys Passyon that sche myth not duryn to beheldyn a lazer er an-other seke man, specially yyf he had any wowndys aperyng on hym. So sche cryid & so sche wept as yyf sche had sen owr Lord Ihesu Crist wyth hys wowndys bledying. & so sche dede in the syght of hir sowle, for thorw the beheldying of the seke man hir mende was al takyn in-to owr Lord Ihesu Crist. Then had sche gret mornying & sorwyng for sche myth not kyssyn the lazerys whan sche sey hem er met wyth hem

¹⁴This statement also appears in the Bokenham version: "And ful ofty she seyde, wyth chere smylyng,/ If ony lyf of more despectuousnesse/ She coude han fondyn in ony thyng,/ She hyt wold han chosyn wyth greth gladnesse" (281 ll 10357-60).

in the stretys for the lofe of Ihesu. Now gan sche to louyn that sche had most hatyd be-for-tyme, for ther was no-tyng mor lothful ne mor abhomynabyll to hir whil sche was in the yerys of werldly prosperite than to seen er beheldyn a lazer, whom now thorw owr Lordys mercy sche desyryd to halsyn & kyssyn for the lofe of Ihesu whan sche had tyme & place conuenient. (176-77)

Margery is no longer frightened by the abject nature of leprosy and instead through abjection of self "[n]ow gan she to louyn that sche had most hatyd." Kristeva describes the abject as "a wellspring of sign for a non-object" (*Powers of Horror* 11); that is, it is the signifier for an original state of want that is without an object (primary narcissism). Through sublimation, which Kristeva describes as "nothing else than the possibility of naming the pre-nominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal" (*Powers of Horror* 11), abjection of self is according to Kristeva controllable or made "safe." Thus Margery Kempe's transgressions against her "self" (which indicate her desire to return to the archaic dyad) are made "safe" by the sublimating effect of her devotional practices, founded as they are in official church theology.

Margery associates herself with vile substances or undesirable human conditions both voluntarily and by necessity. Besides leprosy, incontinence is also one of the human conditions that Margery associates with and then offers to Christ as a sign of her love. Typically, Margery's account of her care for John Kempe in his old age also mentions the strain that this put on her finances:¹⁵

... as he leuyd & had ful mech labowr wyth hym, for in hys last days he turnyd childisch a-yen & lakkyd reson that he coud 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 ther he sat be the fyre er at the tabil, whepyr it wer, he wolde sparyn no place. And therfor was hir

¹⁵Sheila Delany refers to this "pervasive cash nexus" evident in Margery's *Book* in her essay "Sexual Economics."

labowr meche the mor in waschyng & wryngyng & hir costage in
fyrng & lettyd hir ful meche fro hir contemplacyon that many tymys
sche xuld an yrrkyd hir labowr saf sche betuowt hir how sche in hir
yong age had ful many delectabyl thowtys, fleschly lustys, & inordinat
louys to hys persone. & therfor sche was glad to be ponischyd wyth the
same persone & toke it meche the mor esily & seruyd hym & helpyd
hym, as hir thowt, as sche wolde a don Crist hym-self. (181)

In keeping with my previous observations concerning a mystic's relationship to punishment, Margery becomes "glad" of her burden. By paralleling and hence conflating the old, senile and filthy John Kempe with his former youthful and virile self, Margery turns John into a grotesque burden through whom she can channel her penance for her former sins. In addition to providing Margery with the means for working out her penance, John Kempe's return to infancy parallels the conflation of roles that exists between Margery and Christ. Margery explicitly exploits this conflation of infant/husband and sublimates John Kempe into the infant Christ: Margery's spiritual "little husband."

Thus far we have seen that love of Christ is tied intimately with either desire for or amazing tolerance of vile substances and conditions in addition to an oedipal constellation of roles for both the mystic and Christ as discussed in Chapter 1. Furthermore, Margery's own association with flows that are psychologically connected to the archaic dyad of mother and infant, Margery's transformation of these flows into punishment and the sacred imply a transgression of inside/outside and pleasure/pain boundaries. Margery's transgression of these boundaries and her ensuing mystical ecstasy mimic the processes of primary narcissism. As discussed in Chapter 2, Christ is a sublimated representative of the archaic mother, a sublimation known as the phallic (m)Other. Therefore, Margery's experience of communion with Christ, predicated as it is on her mimesis of the phase in an infant's

development before it has fully separated from the archaic dyad, appears to be motivated by an unconscious and incestuous desire to return to the forbidden mother. Margery reaches this state of mystical ecstasy, typified by a confusion of inside/outside, pleasure/pain boundaries that makes identity fragile, by abjection of self.

According to the clinical picture, abjection of self, characterized by an inability or a refusal to exclude an abject object in adulthood, implies that as an infant one suffered an intolerable pre-oedipal identification with one's mother. Ideally, at this stage of development an infant begins to incorporate a "good" mother and by so doing is able later in life to authentically nurture itself from within. According to Kristeva, an infant who because of inadequate care is unable to introject a "good" mother, instead in fantasy incorporates a devouring mother who persecutes and sets the subject up as bad--abject (*Powers of Horror* 102). Such a subject, lacking a 'good' mother, can only ever signify or define itself as abject and thus never emotionally separates from its mother. The child and latterly the adult becomes a "devotee" of the abject and "does not cease looking, within what flows from the other's 'innermost being,' for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body" (*Powers of Horror* 54). Margery Kempe appears in her text to be unable and unwilling to give up her fascination with the abject and her feelings of abjection; this implies that she is in fact unwilling and unable to give up her mother complex. It is plausible that Margery, through her violent scenarios, crying, self denial, and hallucinations of Christ, re-stages over and over again--like the "tireless builder" of Kristeva's enigmatic description of "the one through whom the abject exists" (*Powers of Horror* 8)--the loss and suffering she experienced at first coming into language and subjectivity. *The Book of*

Margery Kempe through the Christian narrative of the Virgin birth and Christ's Passion exploits the underlying oedipal issues of late-medieval Catholic art and literature and thus mobilizes Holy Family Romance scenarios. In so doing Margery enters a matrix of abjection in order to lose herself in God, thus replicating the fusional quality of the Virgin-Christ dyad. Margery's subsequent suffering and jouissance expressed in her *Book* are in fact translations of the ineffable and inevitable suffering and repressed desires that to a varying extent everyone carries over from infancy to adulthood.

Conclusion

My thesis has concerned itself with psychoanalyzing general and particular trends in medieval devotional practices as they are illustrated in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The value of this retrospective account of a late medieval mystic's psychic landscape lies in its deconstruction of the emotional forces employed by the Catholic church of the time to move the faithful. While this Catholic narrative is particular to a historical period, what remains consistent to this day is its representation of and emphasis on two things: the mother-infant dyad of the Virgin and Christ, and Christian agape, the father who loves you first. The very nomenclature of father invokes the family and subsequently invites the faithful to conflate the here and now with past family situations. And while many Protestant sects do not worship the Virgin (and apparently not the maternal), God may still be a manifestation of the phallic mother due to his status as the Other.¹ Lacan describes the primordial relation to the mother as "pregnant . . . with that Other to be situated *some way short of* any needs which it might gratify" (80). Because God is this Other whose origin is the mother, that is the one who possesses the power of satisfying the needs of the faithful and consequently the one who can deprive

¹I wish to support my claim the God can be a manifestation of the phallic mother, even for Protestants, by the way of the anecdotal. I was recently at the Mormon Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah. The tour, for the most part, left me with the impression that the Mormon faith is grounded by the paternal as it is largely based upon teachings and stories from the Old Testament, including a wild folkloric story that would have two simultaneous comings of Christ, one in Jerusalem, the other in North America. After a tour of the facilities, we were all led to a small dark theatre that was plushly carpeted and noticeably warmer than previous places we toured. In this womb-like setting we viewed on the screen a beautiful young man holding a horse by its bridle and repeating the phrase "You are not alone. Jesus loves you" to the background sound of a heart beat. So while there was no evidence of the Virgin in the devotional paintings and the statue of the crucified Christ was absolutely bloodless, the Mormons did invoke maternal imagery or the semiotic in order to attract their visitors to the Mormon faith. Significantly this was at the end of the tour, just before we were asked for our addresses.

them of their needs, love for Him can be described as an idealization of archaic mother-infant love.

I have argued that Margery's faith is characterized by its emphasis on a triangulated oedipal family of Virgin, Christ and Margery, as well as on dyadic infantile love. The notion of family, notably the mother and child dyad, was in fact exploited by elements in the orthodox Catholic church of Margery's time through legendary stories of Christ's infancy, the Holy Family Romance, Eucharistic devotion, and the crucifixion. While there have been tremendous changes in social mores and standards of living throughout the West producing profoundly different ideas concerning self and society reflected as they are by literature, art, and religion, what remains ubiquitous to subjectivity throughout history is that self and desire are shaped in relation to mothers and fathers whether actual or surrogate. As adults, we carry over from childhood the satisfactions and the dissatisfactions that we experienced in relation with our parents; it is perhaps trite but nonetheless true to say that parental, notably maternal, love shapes our lives. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the truth of this assertion is the proliferation of portraits and legendary accounts of the Madonna and infant Jesus during the later Middle Ages.

My thesis has, as stated from the outset, been concerned with how the particular, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, reflects the general: late medieval female piety, affective spirituality, and mysticism. I have concerned myself with analyzing the tropes of Margery's mysticism and their psychoanalytic import concerning issues related to the early development of the subject. Margery's multiple relationships with Christ and her abjection of self foreground the blurring of adult and childish desire, of the past with the present. Her descriptions of her devotional practice and its semiotic meaning

reveal the condensation and displacement of her repressed desire for the archaic mother. Through the sublimating effects of theology, mysticism makes safe the partial expression of the most dangerous knowledge to subjectivity, the repressed.

But what of this notion of the "subject"? Judith Butler, borrowing in part from Irigaray's work, claims that the "very notion of the person, positioned within language as a 'subject,' is a masculinist construction and prerogative which effectively excludes the structural and semantic possibility of a feminine gender" (*Gender Trouble* 11). As such there is only one sex, the masculine. The consequence of a single sex signifying economy is that woman, whom or whatever she is, is relegated to the realm of the repressed. Irigaray suggests that through mystical ecstasy a woman can escape the representational tyranny of an identity based upon the notion of "self-as-same." Irigaray claims that mysticism is outside of the normative power relations which prescribe identity: "This most private chamber opens only to one who is indebted to no possession for potency. It is wedded only in the abolution of all power, all having, all being, that is founded elsewhere and otherwise than in this embrace of fire whose end is past conception" (196).

In opposition to Irigaray's claim, Sarah Beckwith in her analysis of *The Book of Margery Kempe* in her essay "A Very Material Mysticism" points out that,

[t]he existence of this body of literature is a salutary reminder of the extent to which mystical relationships with God are not immune to relations of power and that far from being direct and unmediated, dissolving subjectivity in an escape out of the social and symbolic order, they only take place through the social relationships that mediate them. (47)

Beckwith and Irigaray come to their investigations of mysticism with two very different agendas. Beckwith insists upon the realities of social interaction

as her interest lies in the social movement and social construction of women in the Middle Ages. Significantly, Beckwith does not question the ontological consequences of "subjectivity" for women; this ontological problem is the focus of much of Irigaray's work and most certainly informs her investigation of mysticism. However, Irigaray romanticizes the liberating potential of mysticism in an effort to differentiate the female subject from her masculinist subjectivity. As Judith Butler points out, also problematic is Irigaray's globalization of phallogocentrism. Butler argues that this globalization of the "enemy" effectively creates another dialectic, one which universalizes "man" in order to construct a "female" identity: "The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of forms" (13).

As far as mysticism goes, I believe, like Beckwith, that mystical speech allows woman to occupy the position of the repressed and the unconscious: Freud's Dark Continent and Lacan's Other. Subject to mystification, the mystic as such is captivating in her extravagance, in her madness and her articulation of the repressed in its violence, with its incestuous associations and implications and its incorporation of the abject. Far from liberating, mysticism allows the mystic to occupy a world of conflated boundaries and identities. As we have seen, the abject and abjection are the containers for the repressed archaic dyad of mother and infant, the site of primary repression. If the idealized archaic dyad is a site that may be productive of the feminine, as Irigaray's reading of mysticism would seem to indicate, this would imply that the feminine can only exist outside all social constructions. Obviously for the present day political aspirations of women, this conclusion is far from satisfying.

I instead read mystical speech as articulating or releasing pent up unconscious desires struggling to be resolved. Rather than articulating a possible site for the feminine, mystical speech speaks the unconscious and incestuous desire for the forbidden maternal. It is plausible that Irigaray, in her reading of mysticism, conflates the repressed maternal with the notion of the repressed feminine. If this is so, her quest to retrieve the irretrievable powerfully articulates the collective and repressed desire of the West for the archaic mother. I am not so sure that this conflation is avoidable. As Judith Butler points out in her reading of Lacan, "woman as reassuring sign is the displaced maternal body, the vain but persistent promise of the recovery of pre-individuated *jouissance*" (45). Woman, as she is constructed, is a conflation of identities, subjected to the conscious and unconscious desires of man. Thus at present it may be impossible to differentiate between the archaic maternal and the feminine as both apparently do not exist in language. Or it is possible that the search for the "feminine" is a red herring, in that identity based on gender is always already a social fiction.

Margery Kempe, the spiritual wife, daughter and mother of Christ, dramatically demonstrates through her narrative the *jouissance* of such a conflation and its repercussions in her daily life of penitential abstinence, social ostracism, and hysterical crying. That this compression of identities was common for both the mystic and the Virgin in relation with Christ in the devotional literature of the time further suggests that the orthodox Catholic church actively encouraged its members--women in particular--to misrecognize the Holy Family as family and encouraged them to blur adult and infant love. Under these circumstances the spiritual bride of Christ could play out a complex and multi-level oedipal fantasy whereby instead of emotionally separating from her family, she weds it. Ultimately, like any

other large institution, the Catholic church's most subtle, and one could argue most effective, form of power lies in the emotional response it is able to inspire in its members. Psychoanalysis suggests that the family is the most powerful emotional nexus which a church, an institution, a business, or a government can draw from.

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