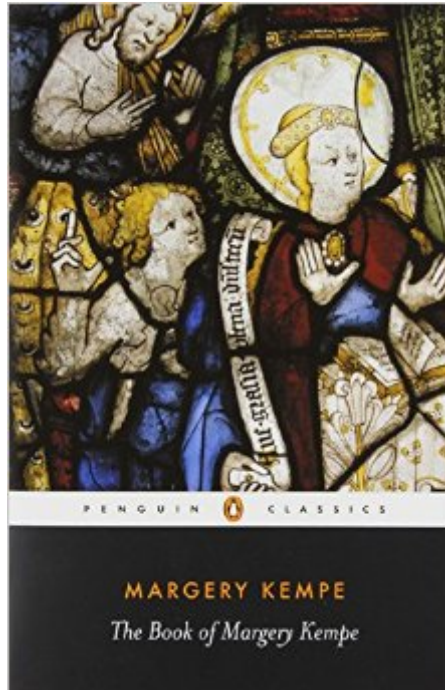


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The Book Of Margery Kempe (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

"You can boldly take me in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you want" — The story of the eventful and controversial life of Margery Kempe - wife, mother, businesswoman, pilgrim and visionary - is the earliest surviving autobiography in English. Here Kemp recounts in vivid, unembarrassed detail the madness that followed the birth of the first of her fourteen children, the failure of her brewery business, her dramatic call to the spiritual life, her visions and uncontrollable tears, the struggle to convert her husband to a vow of chastity and her pilgrimages to Europe and the Holy Land. Margery Kempe could not read or write, and dictated her remarkable story late in life. It remains an extraordinary record of human faith and a portrait of a medieval woman of unforgettable character and courage. — For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Margery Kempe lived from about 1373~1440s, and she really LIVED. In this book, accorded by many to be the first autobiography in English, a scribe records the tale of her life, but most specifically the aspects of it that relate to her spirituality. She was outspoken, controversial, courageous, annoying, devout, and eccentric and all of these aspects shine through into the book,

even through the cloudy filter of a male religious scribe who may have 'polished' her words to make her sound more orthodox. Margery began life as the daughter of the mayor of Lynn in England, and made a well-suited marriage. After the birth of her first child, she went mad due to some pent-up guilt and an unsympathetic confessor, and during this madness was spoken to by Jesus. This moment changed her life, and snapped her out of the madness. She continued with her worldly ways with failed attempts at entrepreneurship and her delight in the physical side of marital relations... but after about 20 years she felt the pull of God and decided she needed to devote herself entirely to him. Margery went about a long process of procuring chastity from her husband and set off on pilgrimages world wide. She was known for her loud, uncontrollable weeping fits that occurred at random and caused many to claim she was a heretic. However, she stood trial before the Archbishops of England, on multiple occasions, and was never once convicted of heresy, and in fact often impressed the higher church officials with her knowledge of doctrine and the Bible. She went through many struggles in her life, but her deity was always there communicating with her or helping her through the cruelty of others, assuring her that all her pain on earth would only increase her joy in heaven.

My Medieval class is keeping me very busy reading about women in the 14th century. First, I read about Julian of Norwich and her book, "Revelations of Divine Love", which I found to be very wordy and dense. "The Book of Margery Kempe" was easier, in that the theological development is embryonic, and therefore easier to understand, and the reader gets more information about Margery and her personal life. Margery Kempe lived in England in the 14th century. The daughter of a well-to-do who served as mayor of his town, Margery seems to have had high expectations for her life that weren't realized. She married a man who had money problems, had fourteen children, and ran a brewery business that failed. After the birth of one of her children, Margery had a vision of Christ, and her life was forever changed. The bulk of the book details her various pilgrimages and adventures, as well as detailed accounts of her discussions with Christ. While this is quite a colorful book, in an emotional sense, Margery doesn't come across as a very sincere person, which is what one would expect from a bride of Christ. One small incident that comes to mind is when Margery is praying for one of her religious instructors to get well. She doesn't pray that he will get healthy for his own sake, but so that she will be able to talk to him again. This theme of self-centered behavior runs throughout the book. Problems are seen not as tests of her faith or spirit, but as personal attacks on Margery, and they are something to be confronted instead of endured, although Margery pays lip service to the concepts of patience and humility. What got Margery into so much trouble in

the first place was the expressions of her intimate dialogues with Christ.

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