ABSTRACT

"She Should Have More if She Were Ruled and Guided by Them":
Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe,
Female Agency in Late Medieval England

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This thesis argues that while patriarchy was certainly present in England during the late medieval period, women of the middle and upper classes were able to exercise agency to a certain degree through using both the patriarchal bargain and an economy of makeshifts. While the methods used by women differed due to the resources available to them, the agency afforded women by the patriarchal bargain and economy of makeshifts was not limited to the aristocracy. Using Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe as cases studies, this thesis examines how these women exercised at least a limited form of agency. Additionally, this thesis examines whether ordinary women have access to the same agency as elite women. Although both were exceptional women during this period, they still serve as ideal case studies because of the sources available about them and their status as role models among their contemporaries.

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Female Agency in Late Medieval England

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

During a visit to York, Margery Kempe was brought before Henry Bowet, the Archbishop of York, who was well known for his stern stand against Lollardy and heresy. He quickly disapproved of her white clothing and commanded that she be fettered as a false heretic when he learned that she was a wife. Kempe boldly stated that she was not a heretic and he could not prove her one. Once she proved a solid understanding of the Articles of Faith, the Archbishop instructed her to take leave of diocese immediately and she must not teach or challenge the people in his diocese. Kempe refused to comply, and stated,

> 'No, sir, I shall not swear, for I shall speak of God and reprove those who swear great oaths wheresoever I go, unto the time that the pope and holy church have ordained that no man shall be so hardy to speak of God, for God almighty forbids not, sir, that we shall speak of him. And also the gospel makes mention that, when the woman had heard our Lord preach, she came before him with a loud voice and said, "Blessed be the womb that bore you and the teats that gave you suck." Then our Lord said again to her, "Forsooth so are they blessed that hear the word of God and keep it." And therefore, sir, I think that the gospel gives me leave to speak of God.'[1]

A clerk then read from a letter of Saint Paul that stated women should not preach to which Kempe asserted that she did not preach because she never entered a pulpit, but simply used communication and good words before recounting a tale about a bad priest.

[1] Lynn Staley, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 92.

The Archbishop commended the tale, but then asked for a man to lead Kempe away from him.[2]

This vignette encapsulates the argument of this thesis. On the one hand, Margery Kempe was constrained by patriarchy—a system of society in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it—as can be seen by the male response to her actions. The Archbishop was upset that Kempe wore the white clothing of a maiden, which she was not, and that she was publicly speaking about God, which women were not supposed to do. On the other hand, Kempe clearly continued to exercise agency by lecturing the men in return, and ultimately was commended by the Archbishop, though he wanted her away from him as quickly as possible.

Like Margery Kempe, women in late medieval England were able to maneuver within the limitations of patriarchy to exercise agency. Two ways in which they did this was through employing what Denise Kandiyoti has coined "the patriarchal bargain" and through what Judith Bennett has called an "economy of maksehifts." According to Kandiyoti, the "patriarchal bargain," is the "conscious and unconscious strategy that women adopt for dealing with the structure of male dominance that define their lives."[3] For example, upper class women exchanged their contributions to the social reproduction of their class and families in return for political power, economic resources, and prestige. In a similar way, Judith Bennett used the phrase "economy of makeshifts" to describe how medieval peasants manipulated available resources to better their economic

[2] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 90-95.

[3] Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

situations.[4] Again, this idea can be applied to upper class medieval women who often used their family connections, children, and husbands (along with the wealth these relationships provided) to gain power and influence within their own lives.

The question, of course, is if all women in medieval Europe had the ability to use the patriarchal bargain and an economy of makeshifts to exercise agency within their own lives, or if these options were primarily available to upper class women. In her work, *History and Feminism*, Judith Bennett argues that patriarchy trumps all during the medieval period, regardless of class. Bennett states that there are three types of patriarchy: the ecclesiastical power of men recognized as Christian leaders; the legal powers of a husband/father over his wife, children, and other dependents; and as a "general system through which women have been and are subordinated to men."[5] Barbara Harris, in her text *English Aristocratic Women*, argues differently and asserts that class trumps gender, meaning women in the upper classes were able to free themselves from the bonds of patriarchy because of their high social status that allowed them more freedom. Through this independence, Harris states that the responsibilities aristocratic women carried out as "wives, mothers, and widows constituted female careers that had as much political and economic as domestic importance and were as crucial to the survival and prosperity of their families and class as the careers of their male kin."[6] This thesis falls between these two parties, arguing that while patriarchy was certainly present in England during the late medieval period, women of the middle and upper classes were

[4] Judith Bennett, *A Medieval Life: Cecilia Penifader of Brigstock, c. 1295-1344* (New York: McGraw-Hill College, 1999).

[5] Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 55-56.

[6] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 5.

able to exercise agency to a certain degree through using both the patriarchal bargain and an economy of makeshifts. While the methods used by women differed due to the resources available to them, the agency afforded women by the patriarchal bargain and economy of makeshifts was not limited to the aristocracy.

Using Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe as case studies, this thesis examines how these women used both the patriarchal bargain and an economy of makeshifts to exercise at least a subordinate form of agency. Additionally, this thesis examines whether ordinary women have access to the same agency as elite women. Although both were exceptional women during this period, they still serve as ideal case studies because of the sources available about them and their status as role models among their contemporaries. As argued by Joan Wallach Scott, men and women rarely fulfilled the expected roles of their gender perfectly.[7] These two women exemplify this through their disregard of social norms, which enabled Woodville and Kempe to exercise greater agency than many of their contemporaries. It is important to stress, though, that this disregard was not a complete rejection, but rather was played out through the use of patriarchal bargaining. For example, Margery Kempe paid off her husband's debts in exchange for a chaste marriage while Elizabeth Woodville used her marriage to Edward IV to marry her numerous siblings into the houses of England's nobility. Thus, one can see that Woodville and Kempe accepted the rules of society and operated within them as opposed to working against them.

[7] Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 169.

Biographical Background

In order to understand the central figures of this thesis, it is important to first discuss their background, social standing, and the events that shaped their lives. Elizabeth Woodville was raised in a traditional upper class household, with the expectation that she would one day marry and become a mother—she was not prepared to fulfill the role of a Queen or public figure. However, Woodville would eventually become a role model of piety and virtue during her tenure as queen consort. Woodville was born in 1437 to Richard Woodville, 1st Earl Rivers, and Jacquetta of Luxembourg. She was married to Sir John Grey in 1452, who was killed in 1461 at the Second Battle of St. Albans, fighting for the Lancastrian cause. Woodville had two sons from this marriage, Thomas and Richard. On 1 May 1464, Woodville secretly married Edward IV at her family home in Northamptonshire. She was the first commoner to marry a monarch since 1066. At the time of the marriage, Edward's cousin and closest advisor, Warwick "the Kingmaker," was planning Edward's marriage to a French princess; several historians have argued that this betrayal led to Warwick's later rebellion against Edward and his open hatred for the Woodville family.[8] Woodville was crowned on 26 May 1465, and brought her large family with her to court. Many of her siblings were quickly married into several of England's noble families.

Over a fourteen-year period Woodville produced ten children, seven girls and three boys. Edward was briefly overthrown in October 1470, and Elizabeth gave birth to their first son, Edward, a month later while in sanctuary at Westminster Abbey. Edward regained the crown in April 1471, and died twelve years later in 1483. Woodville became Queen Mother, and her son Edward ascended to the throne. However, just two months

[8] Arlene Okerlund, *Elizabeth: England's Slandered Queen* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2006), 60.

later, Parliament declared Woodville's marriage to Edward IV null and void in the act Titulus Regius, which stated that Edward had a precontract with Lady Eleanor Butler. Woodville's children with Edward were declared illegitimate and Edward's brother, Richard III, became king. Edward V and his surviving brother, Richard, were held in the Tower and their fate is still debated by historians today. Woodville sought sanctuary once more in Westminster Abbey with her five daughters, and was completely dependent upon the charity of the Abbot.

In 1484, Parliament affirmed Titulus Regius, which asserted that Woodville had ensnared the affections of Edward IV with sorcery and witchcraft. Richard III promised that no harm would come to Woodville's daughters, and all six women left sanctuary in March 1484. Woodville was taken into custody, and lost her dowry and title of Queen Dowager.[9] During this time Woodville allied with Lady Margaret Beaufort to marry her eldest daughter, Elizabeth of York, to Beaufort's son, Henry Tudor, the last Lancastrian claimant to the throne. With the defeat of Richard III in 1485, Henry Tudor became Henry VII and married Elizabeth of York. Woodville's marriage to Edward IV was declared valid and her children legitimized once more. Woodville also regained her title of Queen Dowager. In early 1487, Woodville transferred her dowry and estates to her daughter, the Queen, and retired to Bermondsey Abbey, where she died on 8 June 1492. Her will ordered a simple funeral, and she was placed next to Edward IV in St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle on 12 June 1492.[10]

Margery Kempe was raised similarly to Woodville. She was expected to become a wife and mother, and as part of a merchant middle class family, she would be expected

[9] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 232-243.

[10] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 244-259.

to direct a fairly large household. Born in 1373, Kempe was the daughter of John Brunham, a merchant in Bishop's Lynn, Norfolk. Margery Kempe admits to having been a vain and selfish person for the first half of her life, and she did not become a deeply religious woman until after the birth of her first child and the failure of several business ventures. Once she fully embraced her faith, Kempe became an exemplar of female piety amongst the middle class, though she was not always appreciated in her time. Her father was mayor five times, as well as a Member of Parliament. At the age of twenty, Kempe married John Kempe, a burgess of Lynn. Throughout the span of their marriage the couple had fourteen children. Shortly after the birth of her first child Kempe experienced sickness of mind and body. Kempe feared for her life and needed to confess something from her conscience, so she sent for her confessor, who was hasty and sharp with her. As a result, Kempe did not confess her undisclosed sin and went out of her mind for over half a year.[11] She had visions of demons and had to be tied down to keep her from harming herself. Her madness ended when a vision of Jesus Christ came to her. Kempe immediately calmed herself, and returned to her normal household duties. This return to the world led to the continuance of her worldly ways, and increasing vanity and pride. Kempe dressed in expensive and bright clothes to garner attention from men, and rebuked her husband when he told her not to dress in such fashion. In order to supplement her husband's small income, Kempe began brewing. She states that she was successful for three or four years until her fortune collapsed. Kempe then moved on to milling, and was successful in this as well until one day the horses refused to move. Wise men said that this was a message from God, calling Kempe away from the vanity of this wicked

[11] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 7.

world.[12] Kempe asked God's forgiveness and performed bodily penance for her sins. She began fasting and wore a hair shirt, but continued to bear children.

Kempe, with the help of God, eventually convinced her husband to live a chaste life. In 1414 she departed on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, and Assisi. Kempe also journeyed to Santiago, and later Germany; she also traveled throughout England. When Kempe and her husband were in their sixties, John Kempe suffered a head injury from a fall, and Kempe returned to live with her husband and cared for him for several years. The only one of Kempe's children ever discussed in her book returned during this time with his German wife, and died in 1431. Kempe journeyed with her daughter-in-law to Germany a year later on her last overseas pilgrimage. Once she returned, Kempe found a priest to record her spiritual memoirs. The first book was commenced in 1436, and the second in 1438. The last official record of Kempe's activity records her admittance to the Guild of the Holy Trinity in 1438, and it is believed she died shortly afterwards. Kempe's biographical information shows a dramatic shift from a proud, self-absorbed woman to one that gave up everything for her faith.

Purpose

The significance of this thesis lays in its connection to current historiography regarding women's history and feminist studies as well as how it relates to modern day gender rules. As stated by Bennett, "It is important for us to recognize that the people who lived in the past are not us, and their difference from us compels our attention as much as those differences that we daily encounter such as class, race, religion, sexuality,

[12] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 10.

and world religion."[13] The thesis presented here acknowledges the difference of the people in the past while simultaneously connecting it to modern studies and gender patterns. It is also an addition to the idea of "gendering the master narrative" in an effort to further enhance history.[14] By adding Margery Kempe to history, one can see not only the social tensions men had towards women that did not conform to society, but the reactions of other women as well. Additionally, Kempe illustrates the extent to which a woman was both constrained and able to manipulate the patriarchal society she lived in. By acknowledging the contributions of Woodville during her lifetime, one is able to see similar concepts, including the competence women had when involved in political matters. Woodville is credited with the betrothal of her eldest daughter to the future Henry VII in order to overthrow her brother-in-law, Richard III.

This work is divided into three main chapters that focus on the three major spheres that dominated life in the late medieval period: religion, domestic, and public. The first chapter, which focuses on religion, examines the practical piety of the two women and places it within the context of the two-tiered model debate—a debate whether or not there was a divide between elite and popular religion during the medieval period. How Woodville and Kempe exercised their piety is organized in three main categories of piety: monetary, communal, and personal. The chapter focuses on two major questions: are women equally constrained by gender when practicing their faith, and do elite women practice their faith differently because of their class? It concludes that the difference in how Woodville and Kempe practiced their faith stemmed from their class and not from their beliefs. In other words, religious homogeneity existed among noble and middle class

[13] Bennett, *History Matters*, 47.

[14] Bennett, *History Matters*, 128-152.

women. Due to their different social classes, women used the economy of makeshifts to practice and live their faith. This chapter supports the arguments made by historians such as Peter Brown and Eamon Duffy that there was not a divide, at least amongst women, in religion, though there were differences in how they practiced their faith because of the materials available to them—illustrating the use of an economy of makeshifts in regards to religious practices.

The second chapter focuses on the domestic sphere and examines the ways Woodville and Kempe exercised agency through the use of patriarchal bargaining during their lifecycle stages as wife and widow. Despite differences of social status and wealth, both were held to similar domestic expectations and employed similar strategies to gain a measure of autonomy within the patriarchal world of late medieval England. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates that both women employed the greatest degree of agency during their widowhoods, which was typical of propertied women in this period. Thus, despite class difference, this chapter asserts that social rank itself was less significant in determining agency compared to their position as wife or widow.

The third chapter examines Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville in the public sphere, specifically how they expressed their agency through several outlets and what result this had on their reputations. It opens with a discussion of how Woodville and Kempe interacted with the public and how the public did or did not accept them based on the extent of the fulfillment of typical gender roles. The chapter then focuses on Woodville and Kempe's interactions with the clergy, focusing on how these relationships affected the public as opposed to their practical piety as discussed in Chapter Two. The last part of this chapter examines the two women's interactions with secular authority.

Once again, Woodville and Kempe were held to similar social standards of conduct and duty throughout their lives, and Kempe's perceived refusal to submit to these ideas often caused problems for her. Woodville, on the other hand, worked hard to fulfill her duties a wife, mother, and Queen, in turn earning the approval of her family and subjects.

When Margery Kempe told the Archbishop of York and his men that she was not a heretic and would continue to speak the word of God to those she encountered, she clearly indicated the extent of her agency as a woman. Despite living in a patriarchal society, women were able to maneuver within it to maintain some degree of autonomy over their own lives. Through the use of the patriarchal bargain and an economy of makeshifts, middle and upper class women had access to the same type of agency and could use the tools available to them to exercise control in their own lives.

CHAPTER TWO

"Make Herself Bare for His Love": Female Lay Piety

Introduction

In *The Cult of the Saints*, Peter Brown states, "In the area of life covered by religious practice…differences of class and education play no significant role," implying that a two-tier model in religion did not exist, while R.N. Swanson argues, in *Religion and Devotion in Europe*, that there was a divide between elite and popular religion, especially practical piety.[1] This debate has characterized discussions of Western Christianity. Ronald Finucane portrays his English pilgrims as ignorant and superstitious, stating that the "illiterate masses…explained miracles as wonders performed by hallowed ghosts who flitted in and out of their graves;" these uneducated men and women were influenced by superstitious clergy and misunderstandings of sermons.[2] Finucane's work suggests a major difference of belief between the literate and illiterate. Eamon Duffy, on the other hand, asserts "no substantial gulf existed between the religion of the clergy and the educated elite on the one hand and that of the people at large on the other [in

[1] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints:Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 19. "Evidence provides the basis for attempts to cleave devotional and spiritual practices into different levels, making a distinction between 'elite' and 'popular' religion," R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 185.

[2] Ronald Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 55.

England].”[3] But how do these theories about a two-tiered model apply to women? Katherine French asserts that elite women were especially interested in affective piety, which focused on Christ’s humanness (his birth, suffering, and death) and gave them value and influence within their household. Women who were not elite, mystics, or nuns, practiced their religion differently, mainly in a parish church, and she implies their piety had a different focus. However, French does argue that religious practices amongst both groups were equally gendered.[4] Duffy disagrees and argues that while the “wealthy and literate had increasing access to and interest in types of spirituality previously confined to the monasteries…there was a remarkable degree of religious and imaginative homogeneity across the social spectrum, a shared repertoire of symbols, prayers, and beliefs which crossed and bridge even the gulf between the literate and illiterate.”[5]

This chapter examines the practical piety of two women in fifteenth century England from different social classes, Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe. Although Woodville and Kempe are both exceptional women from this period, they serve as ideal case studies because of the sources available concerning their piety and their status as role models to other women. In order to analyze how these two women exercised their piety, their activities have been organized into three main categories of piety: monetary, communal, and personal. Many feminist historians, such as Katherine French, focus on these categories when they examine women’s piety. Monetary contributions will include a study of donations to the Church in the form of tithes,

[3] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 2.

[4] Katherine French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion After the Black Death* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1-5.

[5] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 3.

oblations, and gifts of land, which are often found in wills. Communal participation as a representation of piety will include a study of women's involvement in guilds, participation in religious festivals and in pilgrimages, and attendance at regular church services. Personal piety will consist of studying women's participation in the sacraments, ownership of religious books, engagement in private prayer practices, and involvement with the clergy (as confessors, parish priests, etc.). Throughout this discussion, this paper will focus on two main questions: first, are women in England during this time equally constrained by gender when they practice their faith; and second, do elite women practice their faith differently because of their social class? In doing so, this paper will contribute to the debate of the two-tier model in England in the fifteenth century, and whether such a model even matters for women during this period.

How these women practiced their faith illustrates the use of the economy of makeshifts in action. Elizabeth Woodville was able to use her power, wealth, and influence to endow not only favorite religious organizations, but also to persuade Pope Sixtus IV to grant an indulgence to those who participated in the newly reestablished Feast of the Visitation. Woodville was able to enter Carthusian establishments that had been funded by the royal family, an act that was unheard of. She persuaded members of her household to participate in favored religious fraternities, and frequently traveled on pilgrimage. As demonstrated in later chapters, Woodville predominantly acted on her own in these matters and typically had to persuade her husband to participate as well, demonstrating her agency in regards to religious matters. Margery Kempe did not have wealth and power to the extent that Woodville did and instead had to rely on a different set of resources. She was much more vocal in her actions, as opposed to donating money

and land, and typically spent more time interacting with people, something Woodville was unable to do because of her social status. Kempe was able to act in an unconventional manner, such as traveling alone, because she bartered with her husband for the ability to do so, and subsequently convinced several clergymen to give their consent as well. Kempe's agency was dependent on male support, demonstrating her maneuvering within the patriarchal bargain. This chapter demonstrates that Kempe and Woodville exercised similar agency in regards to religion, through their use of the patriarchal bargain and the economy of makeshifts.

This chapter discusses how Woodville and Kempe exercised piety within the three major categories: monetary, communal, and personal. The practical piety of Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe shows that while women in these two social classes were practicing their faith somewhat differently, it was because of their position in society, rather than their beliefs, and there was indeed religious homogeneity amongst noble and middle class women.

Practical Piety as Reflected through Monetary Contributions

Woodville and Kempe both made monetary contributions to the Church in their lifetimes; however, the contributions they made and their scale are largely reflective of their social status. Woodville was able to support foundations and create new ones because of her wealth and status in society. Kempe, on the other hand, could not give nearly as much, though she often gave money to the poor, to the point of becoming destitute herself. Their intentions and the reasons why they gifted money (and land in Woodville's case) appear to be similar though. Both wanted to help members of the Church, and the Church itself, as a form of active piety. This evidence supports Duffy's

assertion that people in different social classes were similar in their religion, and acted upon these beliefs to the best of their ability.

As a queen consort, Elizabeth Woodville was relatively active in her monetary contributions to the Church; her endowments focused on both educational and pious aspects. Before her coronation, Woodville took up patronage of Queen's College and allowed them to use her coat of arms. Her financial patronage saved the college from closing, and as a result, the 1475 college statutes named her the "true foundress," and described her as "specially solicitous concerning those matters whereby the safety of souls and the public good were promoted, and poor scholars desirous of advancing themselves in knowledge of letters, are assisted in their need."[6] Woodville appears here as benefactress to all her subjects, rather than a select few, an idea that will be seen later in her petitions to the Pope for indulgences.[7] Edward IV did not initially support Eton College due to its previous Lancastrian patronage, and Woodville is credited with having changed his mind. The epitaph of its provost, Henry Bost, implies that she made large gifts to the college herself, and she personally visited three times in 1471.[8]

In 1478, eight years after the birth of her eldest son Edward, Woodville founded the chapel of St. Erasmus at Westminster Abbey, and it was attached to the old Lady Chapel. This chapel was a thanksgiving to God for the birth of her son, as well as for sanctuary during Edward's exile. The abbey would again provide her sanctuary in 1483,

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[6] J.L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship, 1445-1503* (Oxford: Oxford Univerity Press, 2004), 256; Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 50.

[7] Anne Crawford, "The Piety of Late Medieval English Queens," in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, ed. Caroline Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill (Dover: The Boydell Press, 1985), 50; Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 159.

[8] Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, 257; Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen': Queen Elizabeth Woodville's Reputation, Her Piety, and Her Books," *The Ricardian* X (1995): 233.

this time from her brother-in-law, Richard III. St. Erasmus was the saint invoked against the pains of childbirth, as well as the patron saint of sailors, making him an ideal dedicatee considering that Edward IV was abroad during the time of Prince Edward's birth.[9] At the chapel, Woodville also endowed a two-priest chantry for the royal family.[10]

The following year, Woodville granted the new prior of Sheen, John Ingelby, forty-three acres of land from her manor for life.[11] The two became very close during Woodville's lifetime, and he was her main executor upon her death. Woodville and her husband took an active interest in supporting Syon Abbey, a Bridgettine house, during their tenure as monarchs. The couple even christened their last daughter Bridget in recognition of their devotion to the saint and her general popularity in England.[12] Woodville later secured the King's license for a fraternity of the Holy Trinity, which aimed to support sixty priests at Leadenhall in London.[13] Papal letters from the time confirm that Woodville also supported the Austin friars of Huntingdon.[14] The documentation of Woodville's support of the Church is fragmented, but what remains shows that the queen supported a variety of foundations and remained constant in her support throughout her lifetime.

While it was expected that Woodville make contributions to religious foundations as queen consort, her actions show that she went above these expectations. It was not

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[9] Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, 118-119; Katherine Davies, *The First Queen Elizabeth* (London: Lovat Dickson Limited Publishers, 1937), 178.

[10] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 233.

[11] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 233.

[12] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 133; Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 234.

[13] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 233.

[14] Crawford, "The Piety of Late Medieval English Queens," 51.

necessary for her to save Queen's College, and her interference with Eton College reflects her belief in the importance of education. The monetary contributions made by Woodville, while constant and above her expected contributions, do not appear to be *far* and above her expected role. Her practical piety is reflected more in her communal and personal piety than monetary. This is similar to Kempe's monetary contributions; she was unable to give much and her autobiography gives little reflection on her charity to others and the Church beyond almsgiving, and instead focuses on her communal and personal piety.

There is very little evidence for Kempe's monetary contributions to the Church, because her autobiography focuses predominantly on her communal and personal acts of piety. Discussion of her monetary piety focuses on almsgiving and begging, and the importance of rejecting worldly goods. During her pilgrimages and travels, Kempe describes giving alms to beggars and those in need, to the point that she herself becomes destitute. On one occasion, God "bade her give away all her goods and make herself bare for his love." Kempe promptly gave away "such goods as she had and such as she had borrowed also from the broken-backed man who went with her."[15] Because she had no goods to support herself, Kempe then went into Saint Marcello's Church in Rome to contemplate how to sustain herself. Christ came to her and told her she was not as poor as he had been upon the cross, and told her "'you have clothes on your body, and I had none. And you have counseled other men to be poor for my sake, and therefore you must follow your own counsel…I shall pray my own mother to beg for you, for you have many

[15] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 67.

times begged for me and for my mother also.'"[16] Upon leaving, Kempe then found a man who gave her money to buy food.[17] This episode reflects Kempe's desire to set aside worldly possessions, and imitate the poor status of Christ. It also highlights that Kempe was active in her donations and begging; she even counseled others to become poor for Christ's sake, something that she herself followed after this experience. Further, this illustrates that Kempe has the agency to act as she wishes within reason.

At the beginning of her book, Kempe also points out the importance of targeting alms to the local poor as well. When an unknown young man befriended the parish priest and asked for alms, Kempe was "sorely moved in her spirit against that young man, and said they had many poor neighbors which they knew well enough had great need to be helped and relieved, and it was more charitable to help those who they knew well as well-disposed folk and their own neighbors than other strangers which they knew not," and cautions that "many speak and show full fair outward to the sight of the people—God knows what they are in their souls."[18] This prudence was typical of the parish community in late medieval and early modern England, and expected from a "hard-nosed mercantile community" like Lynn.[19] The parish community knew locals who were in need and were faithful members of the Church, as opposed to strangers attempting to steal money from the Church. Kempe, who was a successful businesswoman years before, appears to have agreed with this sentiment, and shows not only her common sense, but her strong desire to help her neighbors and her close relationship to the parish priest.

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[16] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 67-68.

[17] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 68.

[18] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 41.

[19] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 363-364.

The differences between Woodville and Kempe's monetary piety is based predominantly on their social status. Both women are contributing, but these grants depend on what they themselves have available. Woodville was unable to establish the Chapel of St. Erasmus until several years after the birth of her son, instead of founding it immediately, due to the political circumstances at the time. Kempe gave away all of her money on pilgrimage, and became destitute herself, but she was unable to do much beyond that because of her middle class status. They do, however, contribute to different aspects of the church. Woodville supported religious foundations and clergymen, whereas Kempe supported pious lay people like herself. The evidence of the monetary contributions by these women suggests continuity with Eamon Duffy's argument. Even though these women were contributing to the aspects of their life that were significant to them, the intentions behind this form of piety were similar, though the actions themselves were not identical.

Communal Participation as an Act of Piety

Much more is known about the communal participation of Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe as reflections of their Christian piety. Both women went on pilgrimages and were members of religious fraternities. Again, the scale on which these two women were participating reflects their different social status, rather than a difference in religious beliefs. Woodville was an active participant in communal piety because of her role as a public figure, but the wide variety and frequency of these actions show the piety of herself as a person and not just a public figure. Kempe was also a relatively public figure in her community as well, because of her father's positions in the community, and her own as a working woman. However, Kempe went above and beyond

the expected participation of a member of the community and often left the community to practice her faith, allowing her to become a well-known figure throughout England.

Communal participation as a representation of piety played a major role in Woodville's life. She participated in religious pageants, was involved in several fraternities and took multiple pilgrimages throughout England. Her will reflected her piety through her desire for a simple funeral. Woodville's first pageant was the one that took place before her coronation, on 24 May 1465, when she made her entrance into London. She was greeted by clerks singing at the Southwark Bridge, and then by a choir of boys at the entrance to the chapel of St. Thomas. The pageant then occurred, and had eight images, including the Holy Spirit, St. Paul, the patron saint of London, St. Elizabeth (Woodville's name saint) and Mary Cepholas (the twice-married sister of the Virgin Mary). She was then presented with six ballads composed in her honor by John Genycote.[20] In 1469, when Woodville took her two daughters to visit Norwich in July, they were greeted at the Westwick Gates with a pageant featuring the apostles, sixteen virgins, and the Archangel Gabriel. Another pageant inside the city reenacted the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to St. Elizabeth; these two figures were clearly chosen to honor the queen. At the Black Friars, where Woodville was staying, she sat in the "great chair of the fraternity of St. Luke to watch a performance by Mr. Fakke and his boys."[21] Woodville was once again greeted with a religious pageant of royal ancestors and saintly protectors when she visited Coventry with her son, Edward, in 1474.[22]

[20] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 227.

[21] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 227.

[22] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 227.

Woodville not only participated in these pageants, she also fulfilled her queenly role of tending to religious offices. In 1468 she was granted the next presentation to the hospital of St. Anthony in London, and in 1472 she received the disposition of the next vacant canonry and prebend for King's Chapel of St. Stephen's at Westminster Palace. Two years later she became the patron of the chantry at Flaunsworde. In 1475 she presented George Daune as chaplain in the royal chapel of St. Stephen at Westminster, and the following year she was again granted the next vacant canonry and prebend. Arlene Okerlund asserts that the "proof that such offices were not merely *pro-forma* rituals of position resides in her other actions and charities."[23] Had Woodville not been invested in finding quality candidates for these offices, she would not have been continuously asked to contribute or give her opinion.

Throughout her time as queen, Woodville became an active sister in several fraternities: the Holy Trinity, Luton, the Assumption of the Virgin of the London Skinners, Christchurch Cathedral Canterbury, and the Virgin Mary and the Nine Orders of Angels in Syon.[24] She is most notably associated with the Skinners' Fraternity of the Assumption of the Virgin. It is believed that her yeoman of the robes, John Chamber, drew her attention to the group. Her interest spread to other members of her household including two of her ladies, and Margaret of Anjou, who was no longer regarded as a threat to the Yorkists. Woodville actively promoted the cult of the Virgin, and in 1480 she petitioned Pope Sixtus IV to allow subjects to enjoy the indulgences attached to the newly reestablished feast of the Visitation. In a letter to the Pope she also stated that she hoped for the "devotion of the faithful of the realm for the Ave Maria to be increased

[23] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 250.

[24] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 234.

more and more."[25] The Pope acknowledged this request by attaching indulgences to the use of the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the recitation of the Ave Maria at each Angelus bell. He further dictated that copies of the letter granting these indulgences be exhibited throughout the country, ensuring that everyone knew of the opportunities to gain indulgences, as well as the queen's intercessory role in the spiritual welfare. He wrote, "seeing that the queen desire the devotion of the faithful of the realm for the said Salutation to be increased."[26] The feast of the Visitation and the Ave Maria were both connected with the queen's name saint—the Ave includes St. Elizabeth's words at the Visitation, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb"—and potentially may have influenced her decision to promote them, though queens were typically associated with the Virgin Mary and Woodville could have been simply supporting Mary.[27] In 1477, the Pope had also granted seven years of indulgences to all who visited the church of the Austin friars in Huntingdon on the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, a group that Woodville financially supported, as stated earlier.[28]

Woodville took part in several pilgrimages throughout her lifetime. There are conflicting reports of her pilgrimages to Canterbury. Some state that she went with the king in 1465, with her daughter Elizabeth in 1470, and again with the king in 1471; while others argue that the king accompanied Woodville and their daughter to Canterbury in

[25] Laynesmith, The Last Medieval Queens, 254.

[26] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 233-234.

[27] Laynesmith, The Last Medieval Queens, 254.

[28] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 234.

1470.[29] Regardless, Woodville took at least three pilgrimages to the shrine of Thomas Becket. Woodville also took two of her daughters on pilgrimage to Norwich.[30]

After the birth of her first child with Edward IV, Woodville took part in an elaborate churching. Baron Leo von Rozmital and Gabriel Tetzel recorded this ritual, and their account of the feast after the churching contributed to the negative stories about the queen that were passed down in history. Woodville's churching began in her great chamber, where she laid in a state bed behind closed curtains and waited for the arrival of noblemen and women and the Chapel Royal. Two duchesses drew back the curtains, and two dukes lifted her into the room. The queen was viewed as a fragile, precious, and sacred object during this ceremony. A lit candelabrum was offered to her, but one of the dukes carried it before her into the chapel. Approximately sixty maidens and ladies followed the queen, and a majority of the procession was men, about sixty counts and dukes, forty-two members of the king's choir, musicians, priests bearing relics, and scholars singing and carrying lights. They stopped at the chapel door, and the archbishop sprinkled the queen with holy water before taking her by the hand and leading her into the church. Then the mass of the Trinity was performed, and before the offering was made the queen presented the candelabra, the chrisom cloth from her daughter's baptism, and some gold. After the ceremony was over the men and women separated for feasting and drinking. The Earl of Warwick sat in for the king at the men's feast, while the queen dined with her ladies. Baron Leo von Rozmital and Gabriel Tetzel observed the women's feast behind a screen, and stated that the queen sat on a golden chair with her mother and

[29] Davies, *The First Queen Elizabeth*, 134; Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 233.

[30] Laynesmith, The Last Medieval Queens, 148.

sister-in-law on either side. Noblewomen, who knelt throughout the three-hour meal, served her and the entire feast took place in silence. This led the two men to believe that the queen was haughty, but it is now believed that this was simply conformance to English tradition.[31]

When Woodville died in 1492, she had no property and her will asked that she "be buried with the bodie of my Lord at Windessore…without pompes entering or costlie expensis donne thereabought."[32] The desire for a simple ceremony may have been Woodville's way of emphasizing the departure she made from the splendor of her life when she retired to Bermondsey Abbey. Woodville's eldest daughter, Elizabeth of York, had just begun her lying-in, and was unable to arrange her mother's funeral. The task fell to Henry VII, who honored Woodville's wishes, though observers at the funeral wrote that he was simply too cheap to pay for a more regal funeral. The number of mourners at the funeral was small, all in attendance were people who had personally known the queen, and her daughter Anne took the role of chief mourner in lieu of Elizabeth of York. Woodville's status as a widow, and not a queen, allowed her the right to choose her own funeral, which was one for a woman, rather than a queen.[33]

Woodville's communal acts of piety throughout her tenure as queen were reflective of both conformity to public expectations and her own personal piety. She appears to have gone above and beyond the expected duties of a queen in regards to public religious involvement, as evidenced by her continued involvement in granting

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[31] Davies, The First Queen Elizabeth, 94-95; Laynesmith, The Last Medieval Queens, 117-118.

[32] Laynesmith, The Last Medieval Queens, 127.

[33] Davies, *The First Queen Elizabeth*, 220-222; Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, 127-129; David MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville (1437-1492): Her Life and Times* (London: Arthur Baker Limited, 1938), 200-203.

offices, her membership in several religious fraternities, and participation in religious ceremonies and festivals. Margery Kempe became an unexpected public figure during her lifetime, one that was both chased off by her Christian brothers and in high demand by others. Kempe was an active pilgrim, often preached to others, and prayed for neighbors during times of sickness and death.

Margery Kempe gained both a positive and negative reputation throughout her travels and communal participation in her acts of piety. She began her first pilgrimage in 1413, and in her work describes how she came about the decision. Kempe "had a desire to see those places where He was born and where He suffered His passion and where He died, along with other holy places where He was in His life and also after His resurrection."[34] She then states that God told her two years before she departed that she should go to Rome, Jerusalem, and St. James. When she replied that she had no one to go with, he told her not to worry, he would send a group to accompany her. Kempe spent almost two years abroad, traveling from Constance to Venice, then on to Jerusalem where she saw the River Jordan and Holy Sepulcher among many famous holy sites. She then returned to Venice, and traveled to Assisi and Rome. Kempe stayed in Rome for about nine months, before she left for Yarmouth and continued on to Norwich. Her husband joined her here before they returned to Lynn. A year later Kempe left again and journeyed to Bristol, Santiago, and Leicester. In fall of 1417 she headed for York, then Beverly before she returned to Lynn again.[35] Throughout these travels Kempe was greeted with both hospitality and hostility, a theme that is common in regards to the relationship between her spiritual life and the public. On a pilgrimage to Canterbury,

[34] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 24-25.

[35] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 46-109.

Kempe "was greatly despised and reproved because she wept so hard, both by the monks and priests and by secular men."[36] She ended up being chased out of the city, and called a Lollard and a heretic. Kempe was also stopped during her pilgrimage to York to make an offer to St. William. She was questioned by a doctor and group of clerks, who wanted to know where her letter of record was. She explained that her husband gave her permission orally, and the men then examined her in the Articles of Faith and other doctrine. She passed, but the doctor still wanted to imprison her. The secular men objected, and Kempe was allowed to go free. One of the clerks came up to Kempe after and apologized for siding with the doctor. He then asked her to pray for him, which she gladly did.[37] Despite persecutions by some, Kempe remained pious and relatively optimistic throughout her travels. She believed that God was protecting her, and that what she was doing pleased Him.

As another form of communal piety, Kempe would speak publicly to crowds about Christ and comfort people on their deathbeds. In London, with her husband, "many worthy men desired to hear her dalliance and her communication, for her communication was so much of the love of God that the hearers were oftentimes stirred through it to weep right soberly. And so she had there right great welcome, and her husband because of her, as long as they would abide in the city."[38] Many of the people who found Kempe boisterous and intolerable in life desired having her at their bedside when they were dying. She cleverly stated, "The said creature was desired by many people to be with them at their dying and to pray for them, for, though they loved not her weeping nor her

[36] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 21-23.

[37] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 90.

[38] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 28.

crying in their lifetime, they desired that she should both weep and cry when they should die, and so she did."[39] Even though some were harsh to her in life, Kempe still prayed for them and took their illness and death to heart. When she saw them die, "she thought she saw our Lord die and sometimes our Lady, as our God would illuminate her ghostly sight with understanding. Then should she cry, weep, and sob fully wonderfully as if she had beheld our Lord in his dying or our Lady in her dying."[40] She did not begrudge them for treating her harshly in the past.

Kempe spent much of her time performing acts of service to those in needs both as a form of penance, as well as a desire to do good deeds as a form of Christian charity. While in Rome, her confessor told Kempe that as part of her penance and obedience she should serve a poor woman in the city. Kempe did so for six weeks, and says that she served the woman as well as she would have done our Lady. Kempe herself had no bed to lie on, or clothing to cover herself with other than her mantle. She was full of vermin and suffered great pains during this six-week period. She also "fetched home water and sticks on her neck for the poor woman and begged food and wine both for her. And, when the poor woman's wine was sour, this creature herself drank that sour wine and gave the poor woman good wine that she had bought for her own self."[41] During her later years Kempe told her confessor that she wished to kiss lepers. He in turn told her that she could not kiss men, but she could kiss women. Overjoyed, Kempe kissed two female lepers, "with many a holy thought and many a devout tear, and, when she had kissed them and told them full many good words and stirred them to meekness and patience so that they

[39] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 126-127.

[40] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 126-127.

[41] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 62-63.

should not grudge about their sickness but highly thank God therefore and they should have great bliss in heaven through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ."[42] In the next chapter of her book, Kempe describes her visitations to a woman who went out of her mind after delivering a child. The woman's husband asked Kempe to come visit her, and Kempe "went to her each day, once or twice at the least, and, while she was with her, she was meek enough and heard her speak and dally with a good will, without any roaring or crying. And the said creature prayed for this woman everyday…[and] God gave her her wit and her mind again."[43] Kempe's communal piety was extensive throughout the second half of her life; she took several long pilgrimages, was alone for much of this time, preached the message of God to crowds, despite the possibility of arrest for heresy, and prayed and nurtured for the sick and dying, regardless of their former treatment of her. During the time her book was written, Kempe was also admitted to Lynn's "most prestigious religious confraternity, the Trinity guild."[44]

Communal participation as an act of piety is a major aspect in both of these women's lives. Both went above and beyond their call of duty, showing that they regarded this as an important factor in their faith. Woodville was much more active in her contributions and helping people in a large scale, while Kempe was more personal in her communal aid. Social status played a decisive role in this, as it would be much more difficult for the queen of England to wander amongst the people and preach on the streets. Kempe was able to do this because she did not have obligations to society like

[42] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 129-130.

[43] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 130-131.

[44] Raymond Powell, "Margery Kempe: An Exemplar of Late Medieval English Piety," *The Catholic Historical Review* 89 (Jan. 2003): 19.

Woodville did; she was a wife and mother, but her husband allowed her to travel throughout the country as she pleased. The difference between the actions of these two women reflects a difference in circumstance, not religious belief. When placed in the social context of their time, the actions of Woodville and Kempe reflect "mainstream medieval English piety" on a grander scale from their social contemporaries.[45]

Personal Piety

The personal piety of Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe align more closely than in the categories of monetary and communal piety. This is because their religion is reflected on a personal scale rather than one that is determined mainly by class and public roles. There are still differences because of social status, but the primary focus and intentions behind Woodville and Kempe's actions are the same. Katherine French asserts that elite women focused on the humanity of Christ because it gave their lives meaning, and implies that the piety of lower class women was focused on their parish church.[46] However, the personal piety of Kempe shows this to be incorrect; Kempe's personal piety is focused predominantly on the humanity of Christ, as can be seen through her visions and reflections. Another historian asserts that in this respect, Kempe was "mirroring the values taught in common devotional practice."[47] In fact, Kempe appears to be less involved with her parish church than the women described by French. Less is actually known about whether or not Woodville, an elite woman, focused on the humanity of Christ, though her personal piety does reflect deep Christian values.

[45] Powell, "Margery Kempe," 3.

[46] French, *The Good Women of the Parish*, 5.

[47] Powell, "Margery Kempe," 13.

Elizabeth Woodville's great piety can be seen in her personal acts of piety, which included close personal relationships with churchmen, the ownership of a unique religious text, and her desire to be in holy places during important periods of her life. As stated earlier, Woodville appears to have developed a close relationship with John Ingelby, the prior of Shene, a Carthusian monastery. She granted him forty-three acres of land in 1479, and he was the main executor upon her death. Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs believe that Ingelby's "devotional austerity informed the piety of [Elizabeth's] last years."[48] Woodville's other two executors were clergymen also, William Sutton, doctor of theology and vicar of St. Stephen's Walbrook and of Ashford, and Thomas Brent, a canon of St. Paul's and Woodville's chaplain and almoner. Their association with Woodville further suggests "the austere direction of her piety during her last years."[49]

A unique religious book, the *Hours of the Guardian Angel*, is associated with Woodville, a text that emphasized the public role of a queen and wife while providing a model for female humility and obedience. Only one other copy of this work has survived, and it is not identical to Woodville's copy. Her version treats the Hours of the Guardian Angel as a devotion, with the hours of the day in their typical order beginning with Matins, and includes the *Te deum*, prayers, and short devotional phrases to form a complete book of hours. All of the psalms and other texts are given in full, instead of being abbreviated to their first lines. The overall scheme of the Hours is identical to the hours of the Virgin Mary, but the sections inside are concerned with angels or the

[48] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 233.

[49] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 234-235.

guardian angel itself.[50] The inside of the book contains a presentation scene, showing a woman presenting the work to a crowned queen. The dedicatory poem is addressed to a "Sovereign Princess," and the first lines of the text form an acrostic "Elizabeth." This text is the only evidence connecting Woodville to the cult of All Saints or the Guardian Angel. The cult was very popular during this period, and had a well-known chapel with a fraternity and hospital dedicated to All Angels and the Virgin Mary near Syon Abbey and the royal palace of Shene. Joan Luyt, a lady of the court, may have been the woman who presented the book to Woodville, and the one portrayed in the presentation scene. The dedicatory poem states that the owner of the work had specifically requested a copy, indicating that Woodville's "taste in devotional literature may have been both positive and sophisticated."[51] A work by John Lydgate, *A Life of Our Lady*, is also associated with Woodville. The text combined "devotion with pleasant narrative and the highest example of womanhood."[52] The inscription inside of the book reads, "thys boke yeven to the queene our souereyne lady ffor to se the converssacyon off our moost blessed lady off hevyn ffor to conffort and to passe tyme in redyng and ovyr seyng thys lytyll trety off hyr blessed," and a motto is inscribed as well, stating "aymer et a tandyr (to love and to wait)." These inscriptions, as well as the text itself, emphasize the public role of a queen

[50] Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, "The Cult of the Angels in Late Fifteenth-Century England: An Hours of the Guardian Angel Presented to Queen Elizabeth Woodville," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Jane Taylor and Lesley Smith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 239-240.

[51] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 231.

[52] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 232.

and wife, and the subject—the Virgin Mary—was considered the model for female humility and obedience.[53]

Woodville's reasons for refusing to simply become Edward IV's mistress in 1463 have been debated, considering the many obvious advantages and her widowed status at the time, but many modern historians now argue that this shows her virtue, rather than greed.[54] During the important events in her life, Woodville often gravitated to religious houses. In 1464 she chose Reading Abbey as her honeymoon site.[55] Woodville favored the Carthusians, as seen by her relationship with John Ingelby and donations to their foundations, and she later received papal permission to enter Carthusian houses that were royal foundations, as long as she obtained the priors' consent.[56] While awaiting the birth of her sixth child in 1473, Woodville moved to Shrewsbury to stay with the Dominican Blackfriars. They were known for their preaching against avarice and gluttony, and admonished the rich that "true wealth resides in the spiritual value of charity…Elizabeth found comfort and care in the midst of a strict and ascetic religious community."[57] Woodville twice sought sanctuary in Westminster Abbey, first in 1470 when Warwick invaded England and Edward fled abroad, and again in 1483 after Richard III took the throne and declared Woodville's marriage to Edward IV null and void. Woodville gave birth to her first son at Westminster in 1470, and in 1483 she brought her five daughters

[53] Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A 'Most Benevolent Queen,'" 232.

[54] Davies, *The First Queen Elizabeth*, 44.

[55] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 245.

[56] Crawford, "The Piety of Late Medieval English Queens," 51; Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 251.

[57] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 155.

with her.[58] She was completely dependent on the Abbot for sustenance both times.[59] In 1486, once Henry VII was on the throne and married to Woodville's eldest daughter, Woodville, who could have lived wherever she pleased, signed a forty-year lease at Cheneygate manor within Westminster Close. It was close to Westminster Palace and allowed Woodville to be close to both her family and God.[60] A year later, however, she registered as a boarder at Bermondsey Abbey, where she received free hospitality as the widow of a descendant of the Abbey's founder.[61] Given her affinity for the Carthusians, it is interesting why Woodville chose to end her days amongst the Cluniacs. Earlier historians argued that Henry VII forced her to retire here for supposed involvement in the Lambert Simnel affair, but there is no evidence to support this claim. Later historians believe that her failing health and a desire to retreat from the world are a more probable explanation. The abbot, John de Marlow, had been one of the men who officiated at Edward IV's funeral, and a possible relationship may have influenced her decision. Woodville was housed in the monks' guest suite until her death in 1492.[62] Her personal piety was reflected throughout her lifetime; Woodville had close relationships with clergymen, commissioned and owned religious texts, and sought boarding in religious houses not only during times of crisis, but during other important life stages as well, such as her pregnancy and her retirement from court life.

[58] Davies, *The First Queen Elizabeth*, 119, 189; Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 236.

[59] Davies, *The First Queen Elizabeth*, 189; Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 236.

[60] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 245.

[61] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 248.

[62] Crawford, "The Piety of Late Medieval English Queens," 51.

The personal piety of Margery Kempe is the main focus of her autobiography, and is clearly evident throughout the work. She frequently discusses her constant tears, her relationships with clergymen, her vow of chastity, and her meditations, visions, and discussions with God. Kempe received her gift of tears when she was in Jerusalem, while walking the Stations of the Cross. Kempe states that she wept and sobbed plenteously, "And this was the first cry that ever she cried in any contemplation. And this manner of crying endured many years after this time for aught that any man might do, and therefore suffered she much despite and much reproof. The crying was so loud and so wonderful that it made the people astonished unless they had heard it before or else they knew the cause of the crying."[63] Many were annoyed with her weeping, and as a result Kempe would try to hold it in for as long as possible, and tried to withstand it. However, it would always break out, "and the more that she would labor to keep it in or to put it away, much the more should she cry and the louder."[64] When Kempe returned to England, she journeyed to visit Julian of Norwich, who told her that these tears were a gift from God, not an evil spirit as some men said. Julian then states, "'when God visits a creature with tears of contrition, devotion, or compassion, he may and ought to believe that the Holy Ghost is in his soul…there may no evil spirit give these tokens, for Jerome says that tears torment more the devil than do the pains of hell.'"[65] These tears and loud weeping were one of the many ways Kempe achieved her salvation; they illuminated the Passion and her love of Christ. And through them Kempe endured a form of purgatory on earth, for she was publicly rejected and shamed by those who were annoyed by her tears. Anthony

[63] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 50.

[64] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 51.

[65] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 32.

Goodman states that through this, Kempe constructed a means of "steadfast assurance of salvation which was psychologically uplifting and replaced inner turmoil by deep serendipity."[66]

Kempe's personal piety also allowed her to create close relationships with clergymen, both in Lynn and ones she met on her travels. Kempe's relationship with her confessor, whom she calls Master N., is extremely important to her. When Jesus asked her whom she would choose as her companion and friend in heaven she says her confessor because "I may never requite him the goodness that he has done for me and the gracious labors that he has had about me in the hearing of my confession."[67] She further asks that "in praying, in thinking, in weeping, in pilgrimage going, in fasting, or in speaking any good word, it is fully my will that you give Master N. half to the increase of his merit as if he did them himself. And the other half, Lord, spread on your friends and your enemies and on my friends and my enemies, for I will have only you for my reward."[68] This meaningful relationship is reflected in Kempe's unselfish request that Master N. receive credit for her actions. The fact that she further requests the other half of the credit go to friends and enemies instead of herself shows Kempe's pious love for others.

Kempe later befriended a new priest that came to Lynn, who was impressed by her tears and piety. This priest, Kempe states, loved and trusted her and blessed the time that he knew her, "for he found great ghostly comfort in her and she caused him to

[66] Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World* (London: Pearson Educated Limited, 2002), 110.

[67] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 16.

[68] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 17.

examine much good scripture and many a good doctor which he would not have looked at at that time had she not been. He read to her many a good book of high contemplation and other books…"[69] There was also an anchorite in Lynn who treasured Kempe's friendship. When she returned from a pilgrimage, he told her that much evil had been said about her in her absence, and he was encouraged to end his friendship with her. The anchorite told Kempe that he in turn told them, "I dare well say you were a good woman, a lover of God, and highly inspired with the Holy Ghost. And I will not forsake her for any lady in this realm in order to speak with the lady and leave her, for rather I should leave the lady and speak with her. If I might not do both, then I would do the contrary."[70]

During the medieval period, a hierarchical model of virgin-widow-spouse was placed on women by the early church fathers, and was a hierarchy of the saved based on a person's state of chastity at the point of death, "the division of those who have never done, those who have stopped, and those who do."[71] Based on the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-23, virgins "merit a hundredfold reward, widows a sixtyfold reward, and the married a thirtyfold reward."[72] Because of this model, Kempe often despaired about that fact that she was a married woman who gave birth to fourteen children. In her book she is upset at the thought that virgins dance merrily in heaven, because she fears that she may never do so, "For, because I am no maiden, lack of maidenhood is to me now great sorrow. It seems to me I wish I had been slain when I was taken to the font stone so that I should never have displeased you, and then should you, blessed Lord, have had my

[69] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 106.

[70] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 29.

[71] Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15.

[72] Beattie, *Medieval Single Women*, 15.

maidenhead without end."[73] God tells her not to worry, that she is blessed, and will in fact skip purgatory upon her death and ascend straight to heaven. Regardless, Kempe still worked to encourage her husband to live a chaste life with her. She told him that they "had displeased God by their inordinate love…and now it was good that they should, by both their wills and the consent of them both, punish and chastise themselves willfully by abstaining from the lust of their bodies."[74] Kempe often dressed in all white, as commanded by God. When he first told her to, she said she feared what people would wonder about her, but she complied. Like her tears, Kempe's white clothing was a focus of social stigma by those who did not appreciate her actions. However, she gladly wore them whenever God told her to, suffering a form of earthly purgatory.[75]

When Kempe first turned away from her worldliness and pride, she began to do "great bodily penance" and wear a hair shirt for two years.[76] However, Jesus Christ then came to her in a vision and told her to put aside her hair shirt, for he would place one in her heart. He then commanded her to "forsake what you love best in this world, and that is eating of meat. And instead of that flesh you shall eat my flesh and my blood, that is the very body of Christ in the sacrament of the altar. This is my will, daughter, that you receive my body every Sunday, and I shall flow so much grace into you that all the world shall marvel thereof."[77] Kempe obediently followed this command, much to the annoyance of her later traveling partners on pilgrimage. At one point in their journey the

[73] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 38.

[74] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 10.

[75] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 25.

[76] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 10-13.

[77] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 14.

group came across an English friar and they asked him to command Kempe to eat meat, as well as cease her crying. He in turn replied, "'I will not make her eat meat while she may abstain herself and be the better disposed to love our Lord…as for her weeping, it is not in my power to restrain it, for it is the gift of the Holy Ghost.'"[78] Once more, Kempe's personal piety and devout following of God's commands earns her the anger and judgment of others. She steadfastly ignores their disdain and continues in her practices of piety toward God.

Kempe's contemplations throughout her book are two kinds. The more frequent is an inner dialogue with Christ, and occasionally the Virgin Mary or God the Father, and other saints. The other is a sort of contemplation, where she has visions of sacred beings or events, such as scenes from the life of Christ and Mary. These visions are extremely vivid, with sound that blocks out the world around her, and often cause another bout of extreme weeping.[79] In one of the first visions she described, Kempe gave herself over to meditation and asked Christ what she should think about. He told her to think of the Virgin Mary. Kempe then saw a pregnant St. Anne, who gave birth to Mary. She saw St. Elizabeth give birth to John the Baptist, and finally, Mary give birth to Jesus Christ. Kempe herself then held the infant Savior, and lovingly told him, "'Lord, I shall fare fair with you; I shall not bind you sorely. I pray you not be displeased with me.'"[80] Near the end of her work, Kempe stated that by this point in her life "her mind and her thought were so joined to God that she never forgot him, but continually had mind of him and beheld him in all creatures. And ever more that she increased in sorrow and in contrition,

[78] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 47.

[79] Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, 105.

[80] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 15.

in lowness, in meekness, and in the holy dread of our Lord, and in knowledge of her own frailty."[81] Her mind is always focused on God, and the Trinity, despite her presence in the secular world. Kempe's personal piety is intense and devoted; she never wavers despite the ridicule and persecution she faces.

Again, the expression of piety by these two women is somewhat different; however, they do have many aspects in common. Woodville and Kempe each had close relationships with clergymen, took part in the sacraments, and found comfort in holy sites. The only significant difference is Kempe's personal devotion which manifested in visions of and dialogues with Jesus Christ, something Woodville is not known to have done. Personal piety, in this respect, appears to have been much more similar between the elite and middle class than communal or monetary participation. This reflects a religious homogeneity between elite and middle class women, one that appears to have focused not only on strong, similar Christian values, but also the humanity of Christ.

Conclusion

The debate over a two-tiered model in religion has been one that characterized discussion of Western Christianity during the medieval period. When applied to Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe, as models of women from different social classes during the late medieval period, this model appears to be non-existent. The faith of these women was the same, though it was practiced somewhat differently. The practice of Woodville's and Kempe's practical piety stemmed from their class difference, rather than fundamental beliefs. Woodville was able to make land donations and ask the Pope for indulgences because she was the queen of England. Kempe gave what money she could, to the point

[81] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 126.

of becoming destitute herself, while on pilgrimage. Both women took pilgrimages; however, Woodville did not travel by foot like Kempe, again, because of her social status. Their personal piety reflects continuity between the classes. Both women valued their relationships with confessors and clergymen, and took solace in religious foundations. Their religious practices also appear to be equally gendered. In order to travel on pilgrimage, Woodville and Kempe both needed permission from their husband, and living a chaste life required the consent of both partners as well. Kempe was persecuted on several occasions because she was a laywoman preaching about Christ to crowds.

Katherine French stated that elite women were interested in affective piety, which focused on Christ's humanness; Kempe was also interested in this aspect of piety. When God told her that he would wed her to the Godhead she "kept silence in her soul and answered not thereto, for she was full sore afraid of the Godhead, and she had no knowledge of the dalliance of the Godhead, for all her love and all her affection was set on the manhood of Christ and thereof had she good knowledge, and she would for no thing have parted therefrom."[82] Many of her visions focused on the birth, suffering, and death of Christ. Despite her uniqueness as a person, it can be inferred that many other women of her class also focused on affective piety. The humanness of Christ made him a relatable figure in their life, much like the saints.

Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe, while unique figures who stand out from this period in medieval England, can be viewed as good examples of female piety amongst the elite and middle classes. Both women actively lived their faith, above and beyond what was expected of them. The way they participated in acts of piety appears to

[82] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 63.

have been similar to what other women were doing, but on a grander scale. Woodville was able to perform greater monetary acts of piety because of her wealth as queen, but she was unable to travel as a poor pilgrim for the same reason. Kempe was able to do the opposite because she was a middle class woman. Kempe stood out because of her dialogues with and visions of Christ, but the other women she encounters in her travels appear to be participating in their faith in similar ways of pilgrimage and devotion to Christ. As a whole, based on case studies of Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe, women seem to have practiced their faith—as well as exercised their agency—in similar manners, and their social class determined their economy of makeshifts, which in turn decided how they could practice their faith in certain areas (monetary, communal and personal), rather than how it was practiced as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE

"My Husband Gave Me Leave": Women in the Domestic Sphere

Introduction

After eight weeks of chastity, John Kempe asked his wife in chapter eleven of *The Book of Margery Kempe* if she would rather see him beheaded or resume their conjugal activities. Margery responded that truthfully she would rather her husband die than return to a life of uncleanness. John, not surprisingly retorted, "You are no good wife." Yet, John still bartered with Margery, telling her that if she would continue to lie with him in one bed, pay his debts before she departs on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and share meals with him on Friday he would consent to a chaste marriage. Margery accepted these conditions, saying to John, "Grant me that you shall not come in my bed, and I grant you to requite your debts before I go to Jerusalem. And make my body free to God so that you never challenge me by asking the debt of matrimony after this day while you live, and I shall eat and drink of the Friday at your bidding." John agreed, replying, "As free may your body be to God as it has been to me."[1]

This scene provides valuable insight into the private sphere of Margery's marriage, as it demonstrates an intimate conversation about the marital obligations of sex, money, and companionship. It also provides a clear example of the patriarchal bargaining that Kempe and her female contemporaries often employed throughout their lives. Originally discussed by Denise Kandiyoti, the "patriarchal bargain" is the conscious and

[1] Lynn Staley, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 18-20.

unconscious strategies women adopt for dealing with the structures of male dominance that define their lives. Because women from propertied classes could use their resources to bargain for agency, they had a vested interest in maintaining the system that oppressed them. In other words, women like Margery Kempe could use their material resources to help them be more successful in making choices about how they lived their everyday lives.[2]

This chapter also demonstrates how two women through an "economy of makeshifts" negotiated patriarchy within their marriages and families. As described by Judith Bennett, women often used the resources available to them to barter and take advantage of opportunities that came their way.[3] These women were much more privileged than Cecilia Penifader, the medieval peasant to which Bennett first applies the concept of the economy of makeshifts, and held property and had kin, especially in Woodville's case. Their economy of makeshift was therefore more a "matter of juggling resources than a matter of desperate expedients."[4] Margery Kempe clearly employed patriarchal bargaining to free herself from domestic concerns as well as to protect herself from her unorthodox behavior using her wealth, status and direction from God as her currency. Conversely, Elizabeth Woodville commanded greater material resources than Margery Kempe but was more traditional in how she yielded to patriarchy. At the same time, she still manipulated the system to exercise control over her life and help her kin. She was able to use her children as a form of currency, first with her husband, then with

[2] Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

[3] Judith Bennett, *A Medieval Life: Cecilia Penifader of Brigstock, c. 1295-1344* (New York: McGraw-Hill College, 1999), 87-100.

[4] Bennett, *A Medieval Life* , 99.

Richard III and Henry Tudor in an effort to protect herself and her children in the turbulent time following Edward IV's death.

This chapter examines how these two women exercised agency through the use of patriarchal bargaining during their lifecycle stages as wife and widow. Despite differences in social status and degree of wealth, both Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville were held to similar domestic expectations and employed similar methods to have some degree of autonomy within the male-dominated family system of late medieval England. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates that Woodville and Kempe demonstrated the greatest amount of agency during their widowhoods—or in Margery's case after her married chastity began—which was typical of propertied women in the late medieval period. Thus, despite the differences between Kempe and Woodville, this chapter argues that class itself was less significant in determining a woman's agency compared to their position as a widow or chaste wife.

Childhood

The fact that Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe were from different social classes is reflected in their upbringings. Despite these differences, however, both received the type of education and upbringing that was typical for their class. As women, they would have been brought up with the expectation that they would one day marry well. In order to do so, Woodville and Kempe would have been taught certain skills, such as how to run a household, along with specific behavioral traits that were desired in a wife, such

as obedience to male authority.[5] Additional training for Woodville would have been reflected due to her status within the aristocracy.

What can be inferred about Kempe's childhood from her book or contemporary sources is slim. Kempe was the daughter of a powerful burgess in Lynn, John Brunham, who had five times been mayor of the town and twice served as a Member of Parliament. Brunham was part of the network of wealthy members who controlled the government of Lynn in the late fourteenth century until the revision of the constitution in 1411.[6] Kempe married a member of her father's guild, who was therefore in her same social class, though never as successful as Kempe's father, or even as well off monetarily as Kempe herself. Kempe was also an active member of commercial society in her youth, though both of her businesses failed.

Anthony Goodman proposes that Kempe would have been an imaginative and talkative child, prone to a vivid imagination.[7] Kempe alluded to her disobedience as a child early in her book, stating, "She recalled the unkindness of her childhood as our Lord would bring them to her memory full many a time. And then, she beholding her own wickedness, she might but sorrow and weep and ever pray for mercy and forgiveness."[8] Her notable grasp of the tenets of the Faith suggests that she was well instructed on matters of religion. Throughout her book Kempe demonstrates an uncanny ability to memorize and understand Scripture as well as devotional literature, a skill that

[5] For an example of typical women's education and training, see "How the Goodwife Taught Her Daughter." http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/sgas4frm.htm.

[6] Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World* (London: Pearson Educated Limited, 2002), 48.

[7] Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, 62.

[8] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 11.

may have been developed from an early age. Her views on how children should behave were conventional; she was a true daughter when she studied to please Him and there was "never a child so buxom to the father as I will be to you."[9] The sort of practical skills Kempe would have been taught would have been those necessary to running a household, though it is unknown whether or not she could compile accounts. She would have had maids to look after domestic needs, and her role in business was also supervisory. Kempe resorts to the role of servant in her book only as an act of self-abnegation, and in her meditations she joyfully places herself as a maidservant to the Virgin and Christ. As Goodman observes, Kempe is represented as "of a status to be waited on, with a keen sense as to how service should be performed, and as possessed of an ability to do the job herself in a practical and frugal way."[10] One can infer that Kempe's mother provided a good example of how to run a merchant household. If she were taught arts such as embroidery (which one might expect), she did not give them the attention that many of her female contemporaries did.

Elizabeth Woodville, through her mother, Jacquetta of Luxembourg, had blood from the highest of European nobility, while her father, Sir Richard Wydeville, was a well-known knight in the court of Henry VI. When both dowager queens died in 1437, Jacquetta was the highest-ranking woman in England, and with her dowry as Duchess of Bedford from her first marriage, she was also one of the richest. While Sir Richard did not match his wife's title and wealth, he earned his fame with his service to the King and skills as a jouster. Similar to Kempe, little is recorded regarding Woodville's upbringing. She was clearly raised in an aristocratic household, and may have been a lady-in-waiting

[9] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 24.

[10] Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World*, 64.

to Queen Margaret when she was fifteen. Court records from 1452-3 mention "Domine Elizabeth Grey" as being given jewels by the Queen; this is believed to be a reference to Woodville, already betrothed to her first husband, Sir John Grey. Given medieval courtly practices and the friendship of Jacquetta and Margaret, it is likely that Elizabeth was in service to the Queen sometime during her youth.

Though very little is recorded about Woodville's childhood, it was most likely typical of girls in aristocratic households. Barbara Harris writes that aristocratic women were socialized to view themselves as future wives. The goal of their education was "to teach them the manners and religious values of their class and the skills they would need to manage their great households and serve their families."[11] Daughters were raised to be chaste and obedient. Woodville seems to have learned these lessons well, since popular literature regarding Woodville's marriage asserts that Edward IV married her because she refused to become his mistress. On a practical level, future successful wives needed to be literate in English, have basic knowledge of arithmetic, receive hands-on training in household managements, and understand to a certain degree property law. Women were expected to be obedient to fathers, husbands, and brothers, while simultaneously taking initiative as mistress of the household. This sort of "subordinate agency" was learned by observing and imitating mothers and the adult women of the households the young girls lived in.[12] Needlework and weaving were skills that provided these women a creative and respectable way of spending their time. Woodville owned a volume of French grail romances, which could indicate that she was taught French at some point. It is highly unlikely that she knew any Latin though, along with her female contemporaries.

[11] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 27.

[12] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 28.

Woodville's betrothal to Sir John Grey at fifteen indicates that she was most likely brought up as a typical aristocratic young woman, one who was seen as an investment for an advantageous marriage. Her position as an unmarried girl especially highlights the dependence of young women on their parents to arrange marriages for them and provide the economic resources necessary to marry well. Their position within the aristocracy, access to patronage, the court, and their standard of living depended on their spouses' rank, wealth and political power.

The upbringings of Woodville and Kempe were similar in what was expected of them—deference to the male head of household and the skills to run the household. Despite class difference, the patriarchal boundaries placed on them were quite similar. Women could, however, use these skills to manage their households or estates and even to take initiative within them. This is evident in Kempe and Woodville's marriages. Both women had control of finances and their household, and once free from their "feme covert" status as widows (or in Kempe's case her chaste marriage) they were able to gain more agency. Although they always lived within the system of patriarchy, it was their ability to maneuver and bargain within this system that grew once they left childhood and became married women.

Marriage and Motherhood

As discussed above, women were trained with the expectation that they would one day marry and produce children of their own. Both of the women analyzed here fulfilled this expectation admirably. Kempe married at the age of twenty to John Kempe and had fourteen children. Woodville married Sir John Grey sometime around 1452 and produced two sons before Sir John's death at the Second Battle of St. Albans in 1461.

Woodville then married Edward IV in 1464 and the union produced ten children, seven girls and three boys. Though regularly pregnant both women were expected to continue running their respective households. As Barbara Harris writes, "wifehood constituted a career that incorporated reproductive, managerial, political, and social functions essential to the survival and prosperity of their husbands' patrilineages."[13] In order to reproduce the heirs needed, wives were expected to pay the conjugal debt, an act that Kempe would eventually find abhorrent and barter with her husband to be released from, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Wives' energy and attention was devoted to their marital families and households, while their responsibilities also required them to maintain kinship networks and friendships in an effort to advance their husbands' and sons' careers. Wives who were successful in fulfilling their expected roles were rewarded materially and earned the love and respect of their husbands, family, and friends.

Despite the importance placed on married women within the family sphere, they had less legal rights than their single or widowed counterparts. Once married they were under the doctrine of coverture, merging their identity with their husband's, who the law defined as their baron or lord. They were in fact more subordinated to their spouse than feudal law subordinated a vassal to his lord.[14] However, the frequent absences of an aristocratic husband meant that wives were often left in charge, requiring a certain amount of initiative on their part. As a result, the women who were praised for being obedient and competent were not those that were passive or required specific instructions for everyday business. They were also equally vested in the success of their husband and family, requiring their acceptance of patriarchal authority, obedience, and avoiding

[13] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 61.

[14] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 61.

opposition with their husbands. So long as women remained compliant, they were able to maintain a considerable degree of agency, guide the direction of their life, and exercise authority and power in their households.[15] Woodville and Kempe fit within this model as described by Harris, and it was through their fulfillment of their roles as wife and mother that they were able to exercise considerable agency towards their own goals.

Margery Kempe initially appears to be a domineering wife over a meek husband; however, her recollections within her book that hint at their marriage and domestic life show that Kempe still submitted to her husband's will and often bartered with him in order to receive what she wanted. Kempe continually demonstrated through her actions the ability to exercise agency within her household; however, she still had to acknowledge the authority of her husband in response to her actions. The authority of her husband is present in Kempe's actions and it is through him that she is able to travel and act as she does. Kempe clearly fulfills her expected gender roles as wife and mother, and having done so she is able to bargain with John in an effort to achieve her personal goals later in life.

Kempe is believed to have married John Kempe in 1393, who was admitted to the burgess-ship of Lynn on 28 May 1393. In October 1395 he was elected one of the jurats, a position once held by his father, who had been a prominent member within the burgess. John Kempe's brother, Simon, appears to have played an active role in urban government but John himself is not mentioned further. According to her book, Kempe had fourteen children. After the birth of her first child she became deeply depressed, and after an unsuccessful confession of her sins, went mad for several months. When she finally regained her senses Kempe immediately asked her husband for the keys to the buttery

[15] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 62.

back so that she could take her meat and drink as before. Despite the council of others to refuse her, John "ever having tenderness and compassion for her, commanded they should deliver her the keys. And she took her meat and drink as her bodily strength would serve her."[16] This episode shows that Kempe did indeed have control within her household; prior to her madness she was in charge of access to the buttery where the food and drink for the household was kept. This episode also shows, however, that Kempe's control over the buttery was ultimately controlled by her husband, who had to give permission to return the keys to her.

Kempe clearly demonstrated her agency through her clothing, which her husband was unable to control. While most families worked to marry their daughter up in society, Kempe stated that her husband was not worthy of her when he asked her to set aside her prideful clothing. She stated that she "answered harshly and shortly and said that she was come of worthy kindred; he seemed never the man to have married her, for her father was sometime mayor of the town, and since then he was an alderman of the high Guild of the Trinity. And therefore she would save the worship of her kindred whatsoever any man said."[17] Kempe, we learn, dressed quite ostentatiously with "gold pipes on her head and her hoods with the tippets were dagged" in order to attract attention from other men whom she considered worthy of her status.[18] John was unable to convince her to dress otherwise and was insulted by his wife about his social status.

Kempe was also able to exercise considerable agency through her household business ventures, even going so far as to defy her husband the first time. Kempe's

[16] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 8.

[17] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 8.

[18] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 8.

businesses appear to have been household occupations; the first was brewing and the second milling. The condemnation of Kempe's activities only begin after the failure of her milling attempt, not when she began brewing, indicating this was not unusual in commercial Lynn. Brewing was a typical source of profit for women, who would sell their extra product as an additional source of income for their family. Kempe was initially successful for the first three or four years, until her business failed. She believed this was punishment from God, and she went to her husband and asked for his mercy because "she would not follow his counsel before, and said that her pride and her sin were the cause of all her punishing."[19] However, she quickly forgot her reformed ways and started a new household occupation with the horse mill she owned. The horse refused to move shortly after production began though and Kempe gave up on the corn mill, and again believed that it was vengeance from God for her sinful ways. The failure of her brewing enterprise shows that her husband did not approve of her actions, as Kempe had to ask his forgiveness for going against his wishes.

Kempe's agency in regards to her travel is consistently tempered by patriarchy. Once Kempe became devoted to Christ he commanded Kempe to visit certain holy sites; however, she was "under authority, and could not go without the consent of her husband." She asked him to "grant her leave" and John, "fully trusting it was the will of God" consented and traveled with her to the places she desired to visit.[20] During their travels John was embarrassed by his wife's weeping at a church in Canterbury and left her there by herself. She was then confronted and accused of being a Lollard, and Kempe stated that she was "without any earthly comfort, and knew not where her husband was

[19] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 9.

[20] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 18.

gone."[21] Two men then returned her to her inn and her husband. Though Kempe was moving under spiritual guidance, it is clear to all that she was still under the authority of her husband on earth, one who graciously allows her to move about. While still married to John she needed his permission, though once she was widowed in her later years Kempe chose to travel despite the disapproval of her confessor and other men.

Though Christ told Kempe "it is suitable for the wife to be homely with her husband…they must lie together and rest together in joy in peace," she found the conjugal debt repugnant. Kempe admitted that in her youth she took great pleasure in her husband's body but now was abhorred at the thought and desired to be chaste. She found the "debt of matrimony" so "abominable that she had rather, she thought, eat or drink the ooze, the muck in the channel, than to consent to any fleshly communing, save only for obedience."[22] Though John appeared to have let his wife get away with many things, he refused to grant this request. His authority is most evident here and it is only through bargaining that Kempe is able to finally convince him to live a chaste marriage. Going back to the vignette that opened this chapter, Kempe convinced her husband to relent by paying off his debts and taking meals with him on Fridays. Once John had agreed they journeyed to Lincoln to ask the bishop to recognize their chastity. Kempe asked him to give her the "mantle and the ring and clothe me in all white clothes."[23] He replied by stating that he would only do so with her husband's permission. The authority of her husband was present in Kempe's actions and it was through him that she was able to travel and act as she did. Kempe clearly fulfilled her expected gender roles as wife and

[21] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 22.

[22] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 10.

[23] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 26.

mother, and having done so she was able to bargain with John in an effort to achieve her personal goals later in life.

Kempe was able to convince John to live a chaste life in part because of the fact that she fulfilled her role as mother and gave birth to fourteen children. Little is mentioned of Kempe's children throughout her book, as they did not relate directly to her spiritual journey. It is possible that many did not survive infancy, and her book only mentions one that survived to adulthood. Kempe did express concern about raising a child when she discovered she was pregnant once more, though Christ told her He would "ordain for a keeper."[24] The criticism Kempe received from others throughout her work often centered on her failure more as a wife rather than a mother, so it is possible that like the women of the upper class, Kempe did not have as much of a direct role in raising her children that one might assume. She did discuss her son in the second part of her book, who lived a life of lechery abroad until he contracted a skin condition. Once he repented, Kempe gave him her blessing and his disease cleared. The son eventually married a German woman and brought her back to England.

After Kempe returned from her pilgrimage abroad the rumors that she bore a child had preceded her and John met her at Yorkshire to travel to London for a confirmation of her privilege from the archbishop. The two then set up separate households since they had agreed to a chaste marriage. John suffered a head injury after a fall down the stairs when he was around sixty, and Kempe was blamed for his accident since she was not around to look after him. The people stated that Kempe was "worthy to be hanged for his

[24] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 36.

death, forasmuch as she might have kept him and did not."[25] She then took him home with her and looked after him. Kempe recorded that she "had full much labor with him, for in his last days he turned childish again and lacked reason."[26] Kempe viewed this care taking as a type of penance because "in her young age she had full many delectable thoughts, fleshly lusts, and inordinate loves for his person."[27] However, this was also her duty as a wife and had she not cared for him the community would have condemned her.

Margery Kempe was given great freedom in her marriage, and it was mostly through her bargaining with her husband. Her willful character can be credited with her stretching patriarchal authority to the limit, though John did assert his authority when he wanted. She produced children as expected and ran her husband's household in her earlier years, which allowed for some of the later freedoms John allowed her. Once John had agreed to a chaste marriage Kempe exercised greater freedom, and even more so once he had perished, as will be discussed shortly.

Elizabeth Woodville appears to have been milder in her assertion of agency during her second marriage. Not much is known about her first marriage to Sir John Grey except that the union produced two sons, Thomas and Richard. After Grey died Woodville was left to defend her dower estates at Groby against her mother-in-law, which led to her romanticized meeting with Edward IV. Her second marriage, however, led enemy contemporaries to brand her as a grasping opportunist who worked to advance her family and personal wealth. Woodville did work to advance her family, though it was in traditional methods that were typical of the period. Criticism of her actions ignore the

[25] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 131.

[26] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 132.

[27] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 132.

stature of her father, Lord Rivers, as a Knight of the Garter who had long been in service to the King, and Woodville's mother held significant weight as the Duchess of Bedford. Woodville's brother Anthony had married Lady Elizabeth Scales in 1461, long before his sister held influence with the King, indicating that the family could do well on their own.

Woodville did indeed use her influence to further her family though, as can be seen with her eldest son Thomas Grey and her siblings. Thomas Grey was married at the age eleven to Anne Holland, daughter of the Duchess of Exeter. The young lady had previously been contracted to the Earl of Warwick's nephew and Woodville paid the Duchess 4,000 marks to dissolve the contract. Anne Holland was the only child of the Duke of Exeter, the next Lancastrian claimant to the throne after Edward, son of Henry VI. By marrying her son to Anne, Woodville placed her son close to the Lancastrian throne and thwarted Warwick who had the same goal in mind. Her ability to outwit Warwick the Kingmaker shows not only intelligence on Woodville's part but a significant amount of power as well.[28]

The rapidity of Woodville's siblings' marriages into the greatest families in England shows that Woodville held sway with her husband and worked to advance her family through alliances with the most respected families in the country. Woodville had six sisters, all of whom were married within the first five years of her marriage to the King. Within six months of her marriage, Woodville's eldest sister Margaret was married to Thomas, Lord Maltravers, heir to the Earl of Arundel and nephew to Warwick. In 1466 Katherine Woodville was married to Henry, Duke of Buckingham, Edward IV's first cousin and ward. That September Mary Woodville married William Herbert, second Earl

[28] Arlene Okerlund, *Elizabeth: England's Slandered Queen* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2006), 75-80.

of Pembroke. Anne Woodville married the heir to the Earl of Essex in August 1467, Jacquetta married John, Lord Strange of Knockyn, Joan married Anthony, Lord Grey of Ruthin, and Martha married Sir John Bromley of Bartomley.[29] In January 1465 Woodville's brother Sir John, who about twenty years old, was married to the thrice widowed Catherine Neville, Duchess of Norfolk, who was around sixty-five years of age. She was also the elder sister of Cecily Neville, Edward IV's mother. This made Sir John an uncle to the King and brother-in-law to the woman who vehemently opposed her son's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville. The Duchess of Norfolk's nephew was Warwick, who was obviously displeased with the union. Four years later during his rebellion he would have Sir John beheaded.[30] The Neville family had risen to power during the previous generations, and the Woodvilles intermarried with several members, much to chagrin of their leader, Warwick. Woodville would have certainly been involved in arranging these marriages, demonstrating an acceptance of the patriarchal system and an ability to manipulate it in her favor.

Once married, Woodville needed to set up her household. She was economical in her spending, demonstrating an understanding of the tenuous times and her training to be efficient when running a household. Edward gave Ormond Palace to the Queen, along with a grant to his manor at Greenwich in 1465.[31] In 1466 he transferred his manor at Sheen to Woodville; she also spent time at Eltham, Windsor, and Westminster.[32] The medieval household was elaborate; a large number of attendants served the needs of just a

[29] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 77-80.

[30] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 78, 119.

[31] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV 1461-1467* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1897), 433, 64.

[32] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV 1461-1467*, 525.

few residents that regularly moved among their numerous estates. Queens typically maintained a separate household from their husbands, one that served the needs of the family and was financed by the queen. Woodville's income was derived from her dower lands and fees provided by the king. On 16 March 1465 Woodville received a grant for life of fourteen manors, several towns and castles, and parks and forests, all of which paid annual fees to her receiver general. Cash assessments were also included in the grant, though compared to the rest only formed a minor source of income.[33] A study by A.R. Myers refutes prior claims that Woodville was extravagant. When compared to her predecessor, Margaret of Anjou, Woodville was significantly thriftier. In 1452-3, Margaret's income amounted to £7,563, while Woodville's in 1466-67 was only £4,541. Despite the smaller income, Woodville ended the year with a balance of £200, where Margaret had a £24 deficit.[34] Margaret's household staff included 120 individuals, Woodville's only 100. While Margaret had ten ladies-in-waiting, Woodville had five. Woodville spent £919 of her income on her chamber, while her predecessor had spent £1,719.[35] Her frugality matched her husband's, who had to cut back after the insolvent reign of Henry VI. With her household organized and not in debt, Woodville was also able to support educational and charitable interests, which in turn benefited her husband's name. By supporting herself and using extra funds to advance her husband's name, Woodville not only supported her subordinate role within the patriarchal system, she also earned the respect of her husband and those around her. This in turn would allow her to

[33] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV 1461-1467*, 430.

[34] A.R. Myers, "The Household of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, 1466-7," *Bulletin of The John Rylands Library* 50 (1967-68): 208, 212.

[35] Myers, "The Household of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, 1466-7," 210-211.

advance personal agendas, such as the advancement of her family and involvement with political matters.

Woodville certainly fulfilled her expected role of mother by bearing a total of twelve children during her lifetime, and she used them to secure her family in the upper echelon of society and, when cornered in her widowhood, to protect herself and her other children. This does not mean she uncaringly bartered her children in exchange for power; it was for the welfare of her children that she exerted her influence, especially during her widowhoods. Her first child, Thomas Grey, was born in 1455 when Woodville was eighteen. Her last child, Bridget of York, was born in 1480 when the queen was forty-three. It appears that her children, especially early in her marriage, were often with the queen as opposed to set up in their own households. She visited Norwich in July 1469 with her three small daughters; Cecily had been born that March. Edward had promised the town that he would visit again with his queen; however, he had to go north to settle a Lancastrian rebellion and Woodville went without him.

When the Earl of Warwick revolted against the king in 1469, Edward was forced into exile abroad on 2 October 1469, leaving the queen alone in London with three children and eight months pregnant. She chose to take sanctuary in Westminster Abbey, and from there did her best to help her husband and quell the rebellion.[36] As a guaranteed right by the medieval church of protection from the secular power, Westminster, filled with debtors, thieves, and murderers, was not an ideal place for a pregnant queen with children in tow. As her biographer Okerlund points out, queens seldom sought sanctuary because they could retreat to the fortified walls of the Tower and chivalric tradition

[36] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 119.

protected them from execution.[37] Woodville's decision to seek refuge in Westminster shows her immense distrust of Warwick, who had executed her father and brother a few weeks before. Her initiative protected herself and her children from Warwick, who was out for vengeance. From sanctuary, Woodville sent Abbot Millyng to the Mayor of London on her behalf, requesting that they take control of the Tower in the name of the king. She stated that she feared Warwick would violate sanctuary and "'despoil and kill her.'"[38] Like aristocratic women who cared for the household while their husbands were away, Woodville worked from sanctuary to protect the city of London, her home and haven. She gave birth to her first son with Edward a month after entering sanctuary on 2 November 1469. Her midwife and physician were present, indicating that Woodville planned ahead to assure the safety of her child and herself in such turbulent situation. Edward was finally able to return in April 1470, and Fleetwood's chronicle summarizes the Queen's experience and reunion with her husband:

> [He] then went to the Qwene, and comfortyd her; that had a longe tyme abyden and soiourned at Westmynstar, asswringe hir parson only the the great fraunchis of that holy place, in right great trowble, sorow, and hevines, whiche she sustayned with all manar pacience that belonged to eny creature, and as constantly as hathe bene sene at any tyme of so highe estate to endure; in the whiche season natheles she had browght into this worlde, to the Kyngs greatyste joy, a fayre sonn, a prince, where with she presentyd hym at his comynge, to his herts syngluler comforte and gladnes, and to all them that hym trewly loved and wolde serve. From thens, that nyght, the Kynge retornyd to London, and the Qwene with hym, and lodged at the lodgynge of my Lady his mothar; where they harde devyne service that nyght, and upon morne, Good Fryeday.[39]

[37] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 119.

[38] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 122.

[39] "Fleetwood's Chronicle, The Arrival of Edward IV," Richard III Society, http://www.r3.org/bookcase/arrival3.html (accessed December 6, 2011).

After he was restored to the throne, Edward's trust in his wife was even more evident than before, especially through his appointments of her to several councils. Edward appointed the Queen as head of the Prince's Council in July 1471, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Durham, the Duke of Clarence, Earl Rivers, and a few other respected men. They were "appointed to be of council unto the said Prince, giving unto them, and every four of them, with the advice and express consent of the Queen, large power to advise and council the said Prince" until he was fourteen years old.[40] Edward created another Prince's Council in 1473, this one with the purpose of governing Wales and bringing it under control. Prince Edward represented the King's authority and the Queen was once again one of the primary members of the council.[41]

As Edward prepared for war in 1475, Elizabeth was left in charge of the family. She was four months pregnant with the King's seventh child, and Edward's newest will reflects his faith in her to look after the welfare of their children should something happen to him. He left 10,000 marks each to his two eldest daughters as a dowry, as long as "they be governed and ruled in their marriages by our dearest wife the Queen."[42] He gave generous consideration to the welfare of his wife as well, writing that she should receive "during her life all the revenues, issues, and profits" of her current lands and manors. She was also to receive all the personal property of the household, including "bedding, arrases, tapestries, verdours, stuff of our household, ornaments of our Chapel with books appertaining to the same." Her right to personal goods is curiously mentioned

[40] Katherine Davies, *The First Queen Elizabeth* (London: Lovat Dickson Limited Publishers, 1937), 133.

[41] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 150.

[42] *Excerpta Historica, or Illustrations of English History* (London: Samuel Bentley, 1831), 369.

twice, and Woodville was "to dispose of it freely at her will and pleasure without let or interruption of our Executors."[43] Edward named ten executors to his will, the first and foremost being "our said dearest and most entirely beloved wife Elizabeth the Queen." The King's great trust in his wife is evident, and stemmed from her ability to adequately raise his children, run her households, and take political initiative when necessary. Woodville had proved herself more than competent and through her acceptance of her role as wife and mother she had gained a considerable amount of agency, so much so that the King entrusted her as the head of their son's council and the executor of his will, a task that included his funeral, arranging the marriages of his heirs, and paying off his debts.

The Queen consistently proved herself well trained as a wife and mother, one that had gained her husband's trust and exercised a considerable amount of agency as a result. Through her production of children and competence in raising them Woodville further gained control of the situation around her. Woodville was able to place her siblings and eldest son amongst the top families in the country, she was left in charge of her family and some political matters whenever her husband was away, and she held a significant amount of land and money in her own name. By embracing the patriarchal system she was raised in, Woodville was a model wife and mother, and as a result gained the ability to exercise her own initiative to better her life and that of her kin.

Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville used the training and skills available to them throughout their lives to exercise a significant amount of agency over their own lives. Their economy of makeshifts was not identical to the peasant life described by Judith Bennett, but rather their talents. Kempe and Woodville proved to be the intelligent

[43] *Excerpta Historica*, 378.

women described by Barbara Harris who earned the respect and trust of their husbands. After Kempe had borne her husband fourteen children she began to distance herself from her marriage, and through her personal wealth was able to barter for her independence, though she still remained controlled by the patriarchal system and relied on her husband's approval for her actions, something he could have easily revoked. Woodville also provided her husband with the heirs he desperately needed, and by sufficiently running her household and raising those children through times of war and peace, she gained his trust and respect. Woodville was much more conventional in her acceptance of the patriarchal system, while Kempe pushed it to its limit; however, both were able to successfully maneuver a considerable amount of control over their lives by fulfilling their expected roles as wife and mother.

Widowhood

Widowhood was a state most married women experienced and the state in which they were able to exercise a new degree of authority and independence. They were freed from coverture and able to act on their own, controlling inheritances and income for the first time. Widows were able to head their own household, most were executors of their husband's will, and were the guardians of their minor and unmarried children. Typically a widow would take care of her property to protect it for herself and her children and ensure their survival and continued prosperity.[44] As Barbara Harris writes, "the extent of men's confidence in their wives' reliability and practical skills is evident in the decision of many husbands who included their wives among their executors to ensure that the

[44] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 127-128.

women controlled the performance of their wills."[45] This is certainly seen in Woodville's case. Harris asserts that widowhood was the most powerful stage in an aristocratic woman's lifecycle. They were free from coverture, headed their own households, owned and managed huge amounts of property, and occupied the key positions of executor of their husband's will and guardian of their children. They held control over their own person, and generally could choose whether to remain single or marry again.[46] While Margery Kempe was not an aristocratic woman, she did experience many of these benefits once she had separated from her husband, and even more so after his passing. Elizabeth Woodville worked to maintain this degree of independence for herself as well, and had Richard III not taken the throne from her son she certainly would have; however, the first several years of her widowhood were turbulent and it was not until Henry VII ascended that she was able to experience a more typical widowhood.

Kempe's newfound independence from her husband and her marriage allowed her to exercise even more agency than before and travel as she wished. Once Kempe had secured a chaste marriage with her husband she was able to travel on pilgrimage overseas. Since she was now independent Kempe had to pay her own way to Jerusalem and it took her two years to raise the funds. Much like a widow is entrusted to settle her deceased husband's debts, Kempe visited the parish priest and told him if "any man or woman claimed any debt of her husband or her, they should come and speak with her before she went, and she, with the help of God, should make compensation to each of

[45] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 129.

[46] Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 160.

them so that they should hold themselves content. And so she did."[47] As part of her arrangement with her husband Kempe had promised to pay his debts, and this scene further demonstrates that she was upholding her end of their agreement to ensure that she was able to travel abroad and maintain her independence. Kempe again took care of her financial affairs when she returned to England and repaid the "broken back man who had been with her at Rome" that "she borrowed certain gold from him and at the bidding of God she gave away to poor people."[48] She then told the man that she would repay him in Bristol, and upon her return "there was given her so much money that she might well pay the foresaid man all that she owed him."[49] Much of Kempe's ability to operate independently within society was based on her financial situation, which allowed her to barter with her husband, as well as others that she encountered.

Despite the deal Kempe made with her husband, she was still bound within the rules of a patriarchal society, which often questioned her actions. Though John Kempe had given his wife his permission to travel as she wished, many men still questioned her actions, including the Archbishop of York. Kempe was able to answer back to these men and even challenge the clergy because of the letter of permission from her husband. In York she was first questioned by a doctor, who asked why she was there and if she had a husband. When she replied that she did he demanded her letter of record. Kempe stated, "'my husband gave me leave with his own mouth,'" and then questioned the doctor about why he persecuted her and not other pilgrims who passed through.[50] The doctor then

[47] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 44-45.

[48] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 78.

[49] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 78.

[50] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 90.

ordered her to appear before the Archbishop of York. When she was brought to the Archbishop's chapel, several members of his household called her "lollard" and "heretic." Kempe bravely told them, "Sirs, I fear you shall be burnt in hell without end unless you amend yourselves of your swearing of oaths, for you keep not the commandments of God. I would not swear as you do for all the good for this world."[51] The staff then left her and she was questioned by the Archbishop, who demanded she be fettered because she was a false heretic. Kempe insisted him that she was not, and he could not prove her as one. The following day he commanded her to take leave of the city and neither teach nor challenge the people in his diocese. Kempe told him she would not swear such an oath, "for I shall speak of God and reprove those who swear great oaths wheresoever I go."[52] She then told the men a tale of a priest who was admonished for his lackadaisical attitude towards his duties as a priest. Though the Archbishop liked the tale he asked, "'Where shall I find a man who might lead this woman from me?'" and paid a man five shillings to "'lead her fast out of this country.'"[53] Kempe was soon arrested and brought once more before the Archbishop who was upset to see her again. She convinced him of her faith and he granted her his letter and seal as a record that Kempe had excused herself against her enemies.[54] Kempe then returned home and stopped in West Lynn to send for her husband. She told him that she would not return home until she received the letter and seal from the Archbishop of Canterbury as well. The two journeyed to London and obtained the letter before returning to Lynn together. The encounter with the

[51] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 91.

[52] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 93.

[53] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 94-95.

[54] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 99.

Archbishop of York showed that even though Kempe was free from the rule of her husband, she was still bound under the rule of patriarchy. Her travels as a lone woman in all white disturbed the Archbishop and his colleagues because Kempe was not subscribing to the expectations of her gender. Furthermore, Kempe dared to speak back to the Archbishop when he lectured her on her actions and attempted to make her swear to cease preaching to the citizens of York. She even recounted an excerpt from a sermon about a below par clergyman to them. Her willfulness demonstrated her newfound agency, especially as she had managed to journey to the Holy Land and return on her own.

After John's death Kempe once more decided to travel despite the disapproval of her confessor. She wished to accompany her daughter-in-law back to Germany following the death of her son. When her confessor asked who would accompany the young woman back to Germany Kempe stated that she would. Her confessor told her that she was an old woman and was not allowed. Kempe initially consented to his bidding, but soon after was moved by God to go and after hearing a sermon where the preacher frequently stated, "If God be with us, who shall be against us?" she was convinced that she must go.[55] Kempe held her opinion and faith in God above what an earthly man commanded her to do, illustrating that she believed herself able to form decisions and act on her own will. Kempe's agency was at its height in this scenario, and she was unapologetic for her defiance of male commands. The last that was heard of Kempe as when she joined the Holy Trinity Guild of Lynn in 1438. Kempe traveled extensively once she was freed from her obligations to her husband, though she was expected to conform to the patriarchal norms of society, which she often did not follow closely. She expressed a greater amount

[55] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 165.

of agency once she entered a chaste marriage by traveling abroad, maintaining her own household, and conversing with men of the Church. She continued to travel in her old age after her husband's death and joined the Lynn's most prestigious guild when she was around sixty-five.

As a young widow from 1461 to 1464, Woodville worked to protect the interests of her sons by Sir John Grey. Her lands from her marriage were tied up in a legal dispute with her mother-in-law, depriving the young widow of an income and forcing her to return to her family estate at Grafton. Though her father held influence at court, he was unable to settle the dispute in his daughter's favor, which may have led to Woodville's decision to intercede with the King directly. Her mother-in-law had remarried and her new husband petitioned the Lord Chancellor that the tenants of three manors given to Woodville at her marriage should instead be given to Lady Ferrers. Woodville filed two petitions on her behalf, and the dispute was finally settled in 1463 with the King's intervention in favor of Woodville.[56] Prior to her wedding to the King, Woodville also contracted with William, Lord Hastings, to marry her son to Hastings' unborn daughter. The indenture of 13 April 1464 reads:

> …made between Elizabeth Grey, widow of Sir John Grey, knight, son, and heir of Edward Grey, late Lord Ferrers, and William, Lord Hastings for the marriage of Thomas Grey, her son or in the case of his death of Richard his brother, with the eldest daughter to be born within the next five or six years to Lord Hastings; or failing such a daughter with one of the daughters to be born within the same period to Ralph Hastings, his brother, or, failing such a daughter with one of the daughters of Dame Anne Ferrers his sister.[57]

[56] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 50.

[57] *The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville* (London: Ellis, 1935), 31-32.

The intention of this marriage was to bring peace between the Yorkist and Lancastrian groups in Northhamptonshire. Woodville clearly recognized the importance of creating peace in her neighborhood, as well as arranging a marriage for her son to a member of an influential family. Though Woodville was only around twenty-five at the time, she understood the importance and need to protect her dower lands for her sons, as well as arranging advantageous marriages for them.

Edward IV's sudden death in April 1483 left Woodville in a precarious situation; their son and heir to the throne was only twelve years old and the court was divided into two factions. One was led by the Queen and included her family and eldest sons, the other consisted of the King's men led by William Hastings and the King's brother, Richard. As Edward V prepared to head to London, the Queen argued at the King's Council meeting that an army should be commissioned to accompany her son and bring him to London as quickly as possible to be coronate. Croyland states that Woodville was the peacemaker: "The Queen most beneficiently tried to extinguish every spark of murmuring and disturbance, and wrote to her son, requesting him on his road to London, not to exceed an escort of two thousand men."[58] Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as uncle to the boy-king, was to be the Protector until the boy reached his majority. However, Richard arrested the Queen's brother, Sir Richard Grey, and the Marquis of Dorset for treason and took custody of Edward V. The Queen once more fled to sanctuary in Westminster. Sir Thomas More records:

> The Queen in great flight and heaviness, bewailing her child's ruin, her friend's mischance, and her own infortune, damning the time that ever she dissuaded the gathering of power about the King, got her self in all the

[58] "The Croyland Chronicle," Richard III Society, http://www.r3.org/bookcase/croyland/croy7.html (accessed December 12, 2011).

> haste possible with her younger son and daughters out of the Palace of Westminster in which she then lay, into the Sanctuary, lodging her self and her company there in the Abbot's place.[59]

Richard entered London and placed the young King in the Tower for protection. Then, along with several of his supporters, the Archbishops of York and Canterbury, and the Bishops of Bath and Ely, met as executors of Edward IV's will and seized control of his goods, jewels and seals. This meeting not only violated the stipulations of the late King's will but also stripped Woodville of all her power. While Woodville remained in sanctuary Richard accused her of plotting to kill him as well as using sorcery in an attempt to destroy him. From Westminster, the Queen once more became the head of her family, negotiating with those in power outside for the safety of her sons and daughters.[60]

Richard demanded that Woodville release her son Richard into his company, stating several reasons why she must: by refusing to hand him over she implied the council was untrustworthy, the young King needed his brother's companionship, by depriving her son liberty the Queen was like Medea, the council feared she would send him abroad, he should not be in the company of the rabble of heinous traitors in sanctuary, and since the boy had done no wrong he could not claim sanctuary.[61] Woodville responded to their arguments, stating: if Edward needed his brother's company then they should both be placed in the care of their mother or procure other children his age for him, Richard had been ill and needed to stay with his mother who knew how to care for him, the imprisonment of her brother and second eldest son Richard

[59] Thomas More, *More's History of King Richard III* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1883), II: 20-21.

[60] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 210-216.

[61] More, *More's History of King Richard III*, 27-33.

indicated malicious intent, her son had every right to seek sanctuary, and since the law made the mother guardian of her children no one could remove her son from her protection.[62] Finally the Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury pledged the safety of Richard on his body and soul, and Woodville, unable to refuse the oath of such an important and trusted spiritual advisor, finally agreed to release Richard into their custody. Woodville's attempts to protect her children led to her defiance of the country's most powerful men, and it was only after the appeal of a spiritual authority that she relented. Woodville may have been stripped of most of her legal power following the death of her husband, but she remained in control of her children and used them as means of protecting not only herself, but the children themselves as well.

Following the rumored disappearance of her two sons with Edward, Woodville plotted the overthrow of her brother-in-law who, in June 1483, had declared her marriage to Edward IV null and void due to a pre-contract with Eleanor Butler. Though it is unknown who contacted who first, Woodville and Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, discussed the marriage of Woodville's eldest daughter, Elizabeth of York, to Margaret's son, Henry Tudor. On Christmas Day 1483, Henry Tudor took a solemn oath at the Cathedral of Rennes to marry Elizabeth of York.[63] Richard III, on 1 March 1484, swore an oath before the Lord Mayor of London and the assembled estates not to cause any harm to Woodville's daughters and Woodville herself would be given an annual stipend and placed under the authority of John Nesfield. After months in sanctuary, Woodville consented, knowing that her daughters could not live in sanctuary forever. Where Woodville was kept during her time as a ward of Nesfield is unknown, but her

[62] More, *More's History of King Richard III*, 34-40.

[63] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 235.

decision to leave sanctuary was so that her daughters could reenter the real world. Though Woodville had been stripped of her power and wealth, she remained obstinate for the good of her daughters until there was no other alternative to consent to Richard's demands.

Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field on 22 August 1485 and upon his ascension to the throne restored to Woodville her "estate, dignity, preeminence, and name," along with the possessions she held before Richard took them away.[64] Woodville lived at court with her daughters and Margaret Beaufort until February 1487, where she retired to Bermondsey Abbey. Before doing so, the Queen Mother transferred her dowry to her daughter, now Queen Consort.[65] Woodville had successfully regained what was hers, and in a manner typical of aristocratic widows, protected it until she was ready to transfer it to her heirs, in this case her eldest daughter. Woodville then chose to retire from court life to the quiet of Bermondsey Abbey, an act that indicated she was fully in charge of her person.

Though Woodville's second widowhood did not follow a traditional pattern, her ability to defend her children in sanctuary and communicate and scheme with the outside world indicate she was a woman who would fight to regain what was rightfully hers, as well as protect the welfare of her children. After the ascension of Henry VII Woodville was properly recognized as Dowager Queen and the respect such a position commanded. Her agency throughout this period stemmed from her children as a bargaining tool in this economy of makeshifts in the struggle for power. Margery Kempe used her money to gain freedom from her husband, but was still constrained within the patriarchal system

[64] *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII* (London: Longman & Co., 1873) I: 121.

[65] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 244-250.

and backlash when she acted out of character for her sex. Both women used the resources available to them to exercise the greatest amount of agency they could during the time in their lives when they should have been the most free to do so.

Conclusion

The patriarchal system dominated the lives of women during the late medieval period in England, and in an effort to gain control over their lives, women typically worked within this system. By supporting the system that oppressed them they were able to bargain with their resources to earn power. This bargaining and economy of makeshifts is evident in the lives of Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville. After successfully bearing fourteen children and maintaining her husband's household, Kempe, who held money in her own name, was able to barter with her husband to gain independence from him to travel and set up her own household in order to live a chaste life devoted to God. Woodville also provided the children her husband desired and earned his trust through her competent raising of his children and ability to run the family when he was away. While Woodville was more traditional in her operation within the system of patriarchy, she still exercised a considerable amount of agency during her marriage and widowhood.

Despite their class differences, Kempe and Woodville employed similar methods of bargaining to gain some autonomy within their lives. They held a considerable amount of agency in their marriages and widowhoods, and this power was different during these two life stages. This chapter has argued that regardless of class women employed similar methods of bargaining, through the use of an economy of makeshifts, in exchange for agency within their marriages and as widows. Their lifetime careers as women allowed for considerable power over their families and allowed them at times to outmaneuver the

men in their lives—such as Kempe preaching to the Archbishop of York or Woodville marrying her son to Anne Holland and spiting Warwick. In effect, these women were able to successfully manipulate the system to their benefit. Though they tended to accept and operate within the system, their vibrant personalities allowed them to stand up to the men in their lives when challenged and assert their own form of female power.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Of Good and Ill Repute": Female Autonomy in the Public Sphere

Introduction

As public figures, the images of Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe were often subject to great scrutiny due to their potential controversial status in society. Kempe journeyed throughout England dressed in all white, sobbing and preaching to the masses, leading to persecution. Woodville openly defied her brother-in-law after her husband's death and as a result he claimed that her marriage to Edward IV was invalid and that Woodville practiced witchcraft. However, neither woman sought to be controversial. Woodville continuously worked to fulfill her public roles as queen, supporting charities, religious houses, and educational institutions. Kempe believed that she was following God's will doing his work and often struggled with the persecution she endured in return from her peers.

This chapter seeks to examine Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville in the public sphere, specifically how they expressed their agency through several outlets and what result this had on their image. First, it discusses the women's interactions with the public at large and evaluates how the public regarded them based on the extent to which they fulfilled traditional gender roles. Woodville mostly held the public's good favor, except among various nobles, such as Warwick, when they believed that she acted to spite them. Kempe, on the other hand, provoked stronger sentiments, as she was either embraced or repudiated by the people she encountered. Second, the chapter examines

Woodville and Kempe's interactions with the clergy, focusing on how these relationships affected the public as opposed to their practical piety as discussed in Chapter Two. Kempe's interactions with clerical authority is well documented in her book whereas Woodville did not leave behind as much evidence of her involvement other than founding chapels and supporting religious houses. Finally, the last part of this chapter examines the two women's interactions with secular authority. Woodville appears to be relatively involved in the political world during her husband's reign and was entrusted with a great amount of responsibility. Kempe did not record many interactions with secular authority. However, what little there is provides evidence of her typical encounters and reflects hostility towards a woman who does not appear to accept her role as a subordinate wife and mother.

While women were certainly involved in the public sphere of late medieval English society, they were still expected to maintain typical gender roles under the confines of patriarchy. The reputation of a woman in regards to her fulfilling expected gender roles often reflected the overall reputation of her family. The very fact that Woodville and Kempe became such public figures complicated their ability to maintain positive reputations. While Woodville worked hard to keep a good reputation which (she would have hoped) reflected well on her family, Kempe seems to have not been very concerned about her (or her family's) reputation. Moreover, the often very negative reactions to Kempe seem to suggest that popular opinion opposed an independent woman acting on her own accord (especially one who caused frequent public disturbances). Woodville's actions as queen, however, were often positively accepted by the public because she worked for the public good as a subordinate of her husband, the king. Thus,

this chapter argues that public favor towards women in late medieval England hinged on how well women were perceived as fulfilling traditional gender roles. Women acting outside of the patriarchal authority structure were more likely to earn bad reputations. This chapter clearly illuminates the public distrust of independent women in late medieval England, as seen through Kempe, as well as the public acceptance of women who worked to better the name of their husband and their family, as seen through Woodville.

Interactions with the Populace

The interactions Woodville and Kempe had with the general populace reflect both the typical expectations held within society, along with the reactions that were provoked by following or defying these social customs. As Queen, Woodville's principal duty was to provide heirs, participate in the ceremonial life of the court, and advertise the prestige and power of the royal family. While Edward did grant Woodville some formal roles in politics, she mainly exerted her influence through unofficial avenues, such as intercession and within her household.[1] As an upper middle-class woman, Kempe would have been held to similar social norms, yet she set these aside in her later life to journey about the country as she felt commanded by God. Woodville maintained the nation's affection for the most part during her tenure as Queen due to her participation in her proper role in society. She also appeared to have acted above and beyond what was expected, often working tirelessly to maintain religious and secular foundations and interceding with her husband in their favor. While Kempe often prayed and counseled those in need, she did not actively work to promote her family's good name and was instead perceived as a

[1] Discussed in greater detail in Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500* (New York: Pearson Educated Limited, 2002), 124-126.

black mark upon it. As this chapter argues, Kempe's failure to work for the good of her family contributed to her negative reception by most people she encountered. She remained steadfast in her practices, despite the negative reputation she received.

Throughout her tenure as queen, Woodville participated in traditional ceremonies to illustrate to the public the strength and power of the monarchy. Woodville's coronation was the first important aspect of her recognition as not only queen consort, but also as Edward IV's wife since the couple had courted and married in secret. The elaborate ceremony also signified the stability and wealth of the kingdom. On 24 May 1465, Woodville departed in a procession from Eltham Palace to the Tower of London. Her chair, saddle, and pillion were covered in silk, and she was adorned in jewels and precious stones. Near Southwark she was joined by the Lord Mayor and aldermen, who escorted her across London Bridge which had been prepared for days as scenery for pageants to greet the Queen. One pageant included eight images representing two angels and six virgins, with peacock feathers creating the wings of the angels, while another was representative of significant saints. Groups of singers were also stationed along the way. The Queen was greeted at the Tower by her husband, and she spent the night there. The following day the procession departed from the Tower to Westminster Palace, where Woodville spent the night. On 26 May 1465, Woodville was crowned Queen of England. The coronation itself, along with the banquet, is recorded in great detail in a contemporary manuscript, edited by George Smith in 1935.[2]

The ceremony began with the Duke of Clarence riding into Westminster Hall on horseback, accompanied by the Earl of Arundel and the Duke of Norfolk. The Queen

[2] Arlene Okerlund, *Elizabeth: England's Slandered Queen* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2006), 60-62.

followed, walking under a canopy and clothed in a mantle of purple. The Bishop of Durham was on her right and the Bishop of Salisbury was on her left, with the Abbot of Westminster following. Before entering the monastery, Woodville removed her shoes and proceeded barefoot, where she was met by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The group continued forward, followed by the Queen's attendants: the Duchess of Buckingham, who carried the Queen's train, the Duchess of Suffolk, Lady Margaret of York, and the Duchess of Bedford. These ladies were followed by thirteen duchesses and countesses, fourteen baronesses, and twelve ladies baronettes.[3]

The procession stopped at the Choir to the High Altar, where the Queen was anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and then crowned with the assistance of the Archbishop of York. She was then seated on the throne "with great reverence and solemnity," where she was presented with the Sceptre Spiritual and the Sceptre Temporal while the gospel was read. They were then returned to the Abbot of Westminster and Earl of Essex while the Queen walked to the altar for the offering. The mass concluded with the Queen singing *Te Deum*. The procession then exited the monastery through the Great Hall in the same order they entered. Woodville changed into a new purple surcoat for the coronation banquet. The Queen was seated at a high table, with the Archbishop of Canterbury on her right and the Duchess of Suffolk and Lady Margaret on her left, with three long tables of guests arranged below. Three courses were served with elaborate ceremony, with music playing throughout the meal. The banquet ended with the Queen washing her hands and exiting to her chambers in the same procession as before.[4]

[3] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 62-63. *The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville* (London: Ellis, 1935), 14-17.

[4] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 63-64. *The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville*, 17-25.

The following day a traditional tournament was held on the green next to Westminster to allow the citizens of London to share in the celebration. The King himself was absent from the festivities in general as tradition dictated. The absence of the Duchess of York, Edward's mother, has led to speculation of her disapproval of the marriage, but the participation of Edward's sisters indicates that at least some of the family accepted Woodville.[5] The elaborate coronation of the Queen confirmed her new role in society to the people, as well as the transference of her new duties. Woodville's fulfillment and active participation in this celebration reflected the kind of queen she would become, one that embraced her proper gender role for her rank in society and used it to her advantage and that of her family.

Woodville quickly became pregnant and gave birth to the king's first child, Elizabeth, which was followed by yet another elaborate ceremony, the queen's churching. The ceremony was once again meant to show the power and prestige of the monarchy, as well as their capability to produce heirs for the kingdom. The churching took place in March 1466 and was an elaborate ritual to cleanse the mother of the sin associated with the body and sex in medieval England. It also served the purpose of demonstrating the stability and strength of the royal family to the country, as well as foreigners. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the event was recorded by two Bohemian visitors, Gabriel Tetzel and Leo, Lord of Rozmital. Tetzel's account not only spread the news of the King's first child, but also the wealth and ceremony in England. Woodville's churching ceremony appears similar to her coronation:

> The Queen left her childbed that morning and went to church in stately order, accompanied by many priests bearing relics and by many scholars singing and carrying lights. There followed a great company of ladies and

[5] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 64-66. *The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville*, 25.

> maidens from the country and from London, who had been summoned. Then came a great company of trumpeters, pipers, and players of stringed instruments. The king's choir followed, forty-two of them, who sang excellently. Then came twenty-four heralds and pursuivants, followed by sixty counts and knights. At last came the Queen escorted by two dukes. Above her was a canopy. Behind her were her mother and maidens and ladies to the number of sixty. Then the Queen heard the singing of an Office, and, having left the church, she returned to her palace in procession as before. Then all who had joined the procession remained to eat. They sat down, women and men, ecclesiastical and lay, each according to rank, and filled four great rooms.[6]

The visitors then observed the nobles eating before being conducted to the Queen's apartments and observed her banquet. The subsequent description did much to damage Woodville's reputation amongst earlier historians, due to Tetzel and Rozmital's misunderstanding of English custom:

> The queen sat alone at table on a costly golden chair. The Queen's mother and the King's sister had to stand some distance away. When the Queen spoke with her mother or the King's sister, they knelt down before her until she had drunk water. Not until the first dish was set before the Queen could the Queen's mother and the King's sister be seated. The ladies and maidens and all who served the Queen at the table were all of noble birth and had to kneel so long as the Queen was eating. The meal lasted for three hours. The food which was served to the Queen, the Queen's mother, the King's sister and the others was most costly. Much might be written of it. Everyone was silent and not a word was spoken. My lord and his attendants stood the whole time in the alcove and looked on. After the banquet they commenced to dance. The Queen remained seated in her chair. Her mother knelt before her, but at time the Queen bade her rise. The King's sister danced a stately dance with two dukes, and this, and the courtly reverence they paid to the Queen, was such as I have never seen elsewhere, nor have I ever seen such exceedingly beautiful maidens. Among them were eight duchesses and thirty countesses and the others were all daughters of influential men. After the dance the King's choristers entered and were ordered to sing.[7]

[6] *The Travels of Leo Von Rozmital Through Germany, Flanders, England, France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, 1465-1467* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1957), 45-46.

[7] *The Travels of Leo Von Rozmital*, 47-48.

Initially historians assumed that such ritual was an indication of Woodville's "hauteur, extravagance and arrogance."[8] More recently, however, historians have argued against this, stating it as an elaborate ritual of the English court and the religious significance of churching a queen who had provided the first heir to the Yorkist throne. Whereas Letts cites Woodville making her own mother kneel as a sign of arrogance, precedent illustrates that it was expected and Woodville indicating to her mother to rise was out of consideration of the older woman's discomfort.[9] Further, it indicates that Woodville was a participant in the social customs of the time but still kept in mind the comfort and best interests of her family, as can be seen when she encourages her mother to break protocol and end her discomfort.

After the restoration of Edward IV to the throne in 1471, Woodville and the King went on pilgrimage to Canterbury to give thanks for their good fortune and allow the public to see the couple reunited.[10] The plight of the Queen during the past two years was acknowledged in the poem "On the Recovery of the Throne by Edward IV," indicating the significant role Woodville had played during this turbulent period:

O queen Elizabeth, of blessed creature
O glorious God, what pain had she?
What languor and anguish did she endure?
When her lord and sovereign was in adversity.
To hear of her weeping it was great pity,
When she remembered the King, she was woo,
Thus in every thing the will of God is doo.

Here after, good lady, in your felicity,

[8] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 85. Most notable in advancing this is Malcolm Letts, translator of Rozmital's account.

[9] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 86.

[10] Within two years Woodville had experienced the execution of her father and brother, her mother's trial for witchcraft, her husband's exile, the birth of their first son in sanctuary, and a siege on the Tower.

Remember old troubles and things past,
And think that Christ himself is he
That is King of kings, and ever shall last,
Knit it in your heart surely and fast,
And think he hath delivered you out of woo,
Hearly thank him, it pleaseth him so to doo.

And ever, good lady, for the love of Jhesu,
And his blessed mother in any wise,
Remember such persons as have been true,
Help every man to have justice.
And those that will other manner matters devise,
They love not the King, I dare say soo,
Beseeching ever God that this will be doo.[11]

This poem is representative of the good wishes the English had for their monarchs, and shows that Woodville was still held in high esteem throughout the country. It acknowledges that Woodville suffered greatly during Edward's exile. However, she placed her trust in God and worked for the restoration of her husband. This shows that Woodville is seen not only as a pious woman, but a good wife and competent political figure. She is worthy of the praise of the public because she consistently supported her husband despite her own desperate situation.

Woodville was further praised for her steadfastness during this turbulent time by other contemporaries, as well as historians, because she was committed to maintaining the role of good wife and mother. She was praised by the Speaker of the House of Commons, "the whiche declared before the Kinge and his noble and sadde counsell, thentente and desire of his Comyns, specially in the comendacion of the womanly

[11] Thomas Wright, *Political Poems and Song relating to English History, composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 281-2.

behaveur and the greate constance of the Quene, he beigne beyonde the See."[12] MacGibbon, often critical of Woodville, comments sympathetically on her plight during Edward's exile, and notes that "the feminine helplessness of Elizabeth and the passive resignation with which she had endured all the inconveniences of sanctuary in the hour of childbirth, had created for her, throughout the kingdom, a tender regard…wonder and affection were reawakened for Elizabeth."[13] Woodville's steadfastness during her husband's plight reflected well on the couple, as well as the newly restored monarchy. She had suffered a great trauma, yet successfully gave birth to the Yorkist heir and upheld her feminine image.

Whereas Woodville was typically beloved by her subjects, Kempe was received with mixed sentiments as individuals either loved or hated her; however, those around her typically recognized her position as a spiritual authority. These varying reactions to Kempe and her public actions are illustrated early on in her spiritual journey when she recounts how a section of the church roof in her hometown collapsed on her. While praying, the highest part of the church fell "on her head and on her back, a stone which weighed three pounds and a short end of the beam weighing six pounds, so that she thought her back broke asunder."[14] She cried out for mercy and immediately her pain departed. Master Alan, Kempe's spiritual advisor and close friend, proclaimed the fact that she emerged unscathed a miracle and sign of God's grace. Many people "would not believe it, but rather believed it was a token of wrath and vengeance than they would

[12] David MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville (1437-1492): Her Life and Times* (London: Arthur Baker Limited, 1938), 109.

[13] MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, 108.

[14] Lynn Staley, trans., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 17.

believe it was any token of mercy or favor."[15] The fact that the beam fell on Kempe was seen as a punishment to scare her, rather than that she was not injured due to divine interference.

On an early journey through England described by Kempe, she was greatly mistreated by those around her. They "accused her through temptation by the devil of things that she was never guilty of," and only one man would travel with her through the countryside.[16] However, once the people "spoke against this creature because she wept so sorely, and said she was a false hypocrite and falsely deceived the people, and threatened to burn her" the previously mentioned man "utterly reproved her, and foully despised her, and would go no further with her."[17] Kempe's maid also "waxed rude against her mistress," so that only Kempe's husband remained with her by the time they reached Lincoln.[18]

When Kempe was traveling through Hessle she was accused of being a Lollard, and "women came running out of their houses with their distaffs, crying to the people, 'Burn this false heretic.'"[19] The distaff was a major tool in spinning and is typically associated with women, making it significant that women were also party to the rejection of Kempe. Both men and women shouted at her, "'Damsel, forsake this life that you have, and go spin and card as other women do, and suffer not so much shame and so

[15] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 18.

[16] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 25.

[17] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 25.

[18] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 25.

[19] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 95.

much woe. We would not suffer so much for any good on earth.'"[20] The women, as well as the men, were offended by Kempe's rejection of her typical gender roles. They saw it as an affront to their own decision to conform to societal expectations, rather than reject them as Kempe did. Kempe's traveling and preaching offended religious orthodoxy along with social form and gender normativity.

When Kempe was finally able to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land she quickly offended her traveling companions, who were "most displeased because she wept so much and spoke always of the love and goodness of our Lord, as well at the table as in other places."[21] They often "reproved her and greatly chided her and said they would not suffer her as her husband did when she was at home and in England."[22] One man told Kempe he prayed that the devil's death would quickly take her, and the group decided to forsake her, including her maid. The following day one man visited Kempe and told her to beg forgiveness from the company and ask to accompany them until they reached Constance. The group acquiesced; however, they made her dress like a fool, in a canvas in the manner of a sackcloth, and sit at the end of the table at meals. When the group encountered an English friar, they "made great complaint about this creature…and said utterly she should no longer be in their company unless he would command her to eat meat as they did and leave her weeping and that she should not speak so much of holiness."[23] The legate refused to do so, angering the group, which decided to leave Kempe behind and take her maid with them. Kempe continued to follow her group

[20] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 96.

[21] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 45.

[22] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 45.

[23] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 47.

throughout the pilgrimage, though they typically ignored her and maintained their separation from her.

Kempe continued to experience animosity from her neighbors because of her lifestyle and at one point her friends asked her to move out of town because so many people were against her. She refused, stating she would only go wherever God commanded her. She feared entering the church and disturbing the people with her weeping so God took away her tears. However, this still led to conflict with her neighbors. Many believed she dared not cry because the friar preached against her, so they held him as "a holy man and her a false hypocrite. And, as some spoke evil of her before because she cried, so some spoke now evil of her because she cried not."[24] Kempe's rejection of standard gender roles is what caused conflict with her neighbors, despite the fact that she worked hard to gain their favor.

Not all civilians she encountered hated Kempe, yet those that embraced her were often living on the fringe of society as well. On her journey from Venice to Rome, Kempe joined two Friars and a woman who owned a statue of the infant Jesus. Though they could not speak the same language as Kempe, they provided for her and she prayed for them in return. Whenever they entered a town, the woman would allow other women to dress the statue of Jesus and kiss it. This caused Kempe to be "taken with sweet devotion and sweet meditations so that she wept with great sobbing and loud crying."[25] Her companions embraced her reactions, rather than spurn her like her previous traveling group.

[24] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 114.

[25] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 57.

While in Shene, she encountered a young man, who desired to understand why Kempe wept. He told her of his desire to take the habit of holy religion, and asked that she "'show motherly and kindly your conceit unto me as I trust in you.'"[26] Kempe told the young man that her weeping was for her previous unkindness towards her maker, along with the great joy that accompanies the knowledge of the excellent charity of her redeemer. Her words stirred the young man to great virtue and the two then shared a meal.

In Norwich one woman was especially impressed by Kempe's weeping before a pieta. When a priest told Kempe that Jesus has been long dead, she in turn replied that His death was as fresh to her as the day he passed and that "'we ought ever to have in mind of his kindness and ever think of the doleful death that he died for us.'"[27] The woman stepped forward and asserted that this was a good example to her and others that the grace of God was at work within Kempe before inviting her home.

There are several accounts of Kempe's attempts to comfort women, especially widows, who, despite their dislike of her, accept her as a spiritual authority. Two widows, were encouraged by Kempe to pray for their husbands. The first woman refused to believe Kempe, who stated the woman's husband was in purgatory. The woman then tried to convince Kempe's confessor to abandon her. He refused though and told Kempe "God loves you and that you shall be right sure of heaven for what you have had before, for tears with love is the greatest gift that God may give you on earth, and all men who

[26] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 179.

[27] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 109.

love God ought to thank him for you."[28] The second widow asked Kempe to pray for her deceased husband. When Kempe replied that his soul would remain in purgatory for thirty years unless he had better friends on earth and that the widow should give greater alms, the woman ignored her advice.[29] Despite their refusal to acknowledge Kempe's advice, the fact that both women came to Kempe for advice to begin with reflects an acknowledged public reputation as a spiritual authority held by Kempe.

Later, Kempe once again discusses her positive pastoral work in her parish. She convinced a vicar to keep his curacy and benefice, and again prayed for two women who were on their deathbeds, along with two men. Kempe states that these accounts were written to "show the homeliness and the goodliness of our merciful Lord Christ Jesus and for no commendation of the creature," yet Kempe frequently made her presence known within her community in order to be involved in such practices as caring and praying for the sick and dying.[30]

Near the end of her book, Kempe comments that she was "desired by many people to be with them at their dying and to pray for them, for, though they loved not her weeping nor her crying in their lifetime, they desired that she should both weep and cry when they should die, and so she did."[31] Kempe then describes women who sent for her to hear about her love for God and why she cried. These women became supporters of Kempe after speaking with her personally, much to the chagrin of their parish priest. She

[28] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 34-35.

[29] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 35.

[30] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 39-41.

[31] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 126-127.

also kissed sick women and recounts counseling a woman who went mad after giving birth, all of whom recovered after Kempe prayed for them.[32]

The animosity Kempe encountered was typically due to her defiance of established social norms. She dressed as though she was a maiden, often wailed loudly, refused to eat standard meals, and was an abrasive personality to deal with. The fact that she was different is what scared many away from her. Other deeply religious people often accepted Kempe because they understood her, and many on their deathbeds sought her prayers because of her believed connection to God. Kempe was not a stark contrast to Woodville, because both worked towards the betterment of those around them; however, Woodville was significantly more traditional in her methods as opposed to Kempe.

Clerical Interactions

The evidence available regarding Kempe's public interactions with the religious sphere is much greater than that known about Woodville's. What is accessible about Woodville, however, reflects her piety and shows that she fulfilled her expected duties beyond what was required. She often chose religious settings for the important events in her life and continuously supported ecclesiastical foundations during her tenure as Queen, helping further her popular image with the people. A large portion of Kempe's autobiography is devoted to her interactions and disagreements with members and leaders of the clergy. She was not afraid to lecture them when she believed they were not fulfilling their roles properly, and even lectured the Archbishop of York when he disapproved of her actions. Despite the stigma attached to Kempe's behavior, she was consistent, and never wavered in her faith, which often led her to win over her harshest

[32] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 126-131.

critics. Woodville maintained clerical support throughout her life and continuously supported the Church as long as she was able, further enhancing her reputation because these actions not only fit her roles as queen, wife, and mother, but also benefitted the people. While Kempe was frequently rejected because she did not embrace her expected gender roles, her steadfastness in her faith, which is reflective of Woodville's devotion to her family, is what earned her a reputation as a spiritual authority amongst locals and often garnered the grudging respect of the clerical hierarchy.

As queen, Woodville fulfilled the traditional role of filling religious offices and supporting their activities. On 5 March 1466, Woodville founded a fraternity for sixty priests in London, called the "fraternity of the Holy Trinity and the Sixty Priests of London."[33] In July of the same year, London gave Woodville permission to build a chapel or college on Tower Hill, though nothing ever developed. She would also found a chapel of St Erasmus in Westminster Abbey.[34] She had been granted the next presentation to the hospital of St Anthony in London in November 1468.[35] In 1472, she received the disposition of the vacant canonry and prebend of St Stephen's at Westminster Palace, and in 1474 she became patron of the chantry of Flaunsworde.[36] The following year she presented her choice, George Duane, for the confirmation of his new

[33] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV 1461-1467* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1897), 516.

[34] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 74.

[35] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV, Henry VI 1467-1477* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1900), 115.

[36] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV, Henry VI 1467-1477*, 360, 414.

position as chaplain at St Stephen in Westminster Palace. In 1476, she was once again granted the next vacant canonry and prebend.[37]

During the height of her tenure as Queen, Woodville chose to retreat from the political turbulence at court to give birth to her sixth child with the King at the Dominican Friary in Shrewsbury. Okerlund argues that this represents not only her desire to be closer to her son Edward at Ludlow, but also a deep trust in the Blackfriars. They preached against avarice and gluttony, and believed the accumulation of great wealth was a wicked act unless used to help the less fortunate. By retreating to the Blackfriars to give birth during the high point of her career most certainly indicates that Woodville embraced such ideas to some degree, ideas that were rarely present at court.[38] This may have been a silent commentary on court life, but certainly reflected to the public the Queen's piety and the importance of religion.

Woodville was also particularly interested in the order of the Carthusians and in 1477 obtained a special license to attend services at any Carthusian monastery founded by the monarchy. Her own manor at Sheen enclosed a charterhouse where Carthusian monks lived, prayed, worked, studied, and slept in private cells, gathering only for Vespers and Sunday dinner. On 1 April 1479, Woodville granted the Prior John Ingleby forty-eight acres of her land in West Sheen, and in 1492 she made Ingleby the leading executor of her will.[39]

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[37] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV, Henry VI 1467-1477*, 547.

[38] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 250-251.

[39] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III 1476-1485* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1901), 156.

In 1486, Woodville chose to settle at Cheneygate Manor within Westminster Close and signed a forty-year lease. After the political turbulence she had experienced a Queen, she chose to escape to a more religious setting as Queen Dowager that still kept her close to her family at court. The following year she transferred her dowry to her daughter, Elizabeth of York, now Queen of England, and retired to Bermondsey Abbey where she remained until her death in 1492. Her retirement reflected her personal preferences within a religious piety that had been present in all of Woodville's public and private activities, and the piety that was expected amongst women. Woodville had successfully fulfilled her expected roles of wife, mother, and queen consort, and continued to maintain a positive public reputation by demonstrating her continued Christian piety and retiring to Bermondsey Abbey.

As discussed in the first chapter, Woodville and Kempe's interactions in regards to the religious sphere differed because of their social positions and personalities. Both interacted with important clergymen during their time, but the tone and type was drastically different. Kempe's was antagonistic as often as it was positive, yet her ability to speak out, let alone converse with the upper levels of authority, reflect the agency she was able to exercise.

As previously discussed, Kempe was actively involved with the clergy and many were strong supporters of her activities. In a vision, Kempe told Jesus that she would rather have her confessor, Master N, with her in heaven as her companion as opposed to her father or husband.[40] These positive interactions with various clergy members throughout her travels reinforced her commitment to her peculiar lifestyle. One of these men was Richard of Caister, vicar of St. Stephen's church in Norwich from 1402 to

[40] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 16-17.

1420.[41] When Kempe first met him and spoke of her desire to express her love of God he did not believe that a woman could speak of God for more than an hour. She proved him wrong and Caister became one of her strongest supporters. Despite "the rumor and grudging of the people against her," Caister "ever held with her and supported her against her enemies."[42] When Kempe was called to appear before officers of the bishop, the vicar "preferring the love of God before any shame of the world, went with her to hear her examination and delivered her from the malice of her enemies."[43]

In addition to Caister, Kempe also recorded several encounters with well-known religious figures of the time, all of which encouraged her behavior. Kempe met William Sowthfeld, a White Friar living in Norwich, who told her "'dread you not of your manner of living, for it is the Holy Ghost working plenteously his grace in your soul.'"[44] These words comforted Kempe greatly and she then continued on and met Julian of Norwich. Kempe records that Julian counseled her "to be obedient to the will of our Lord God and fulfill with all her might whatever he put in her soul if it were not against the worship of God and profit of her fellow Christians."[45] Kempe then noted that she displayed her manner of living to

> Many a worthy clerk, to worshipful doctors of divinity, both religious men and others of secular habit, and they said that God wrought great grace with her and commanded that she should not be afraid; there was no deceit in her manner of living. They counseled her to be persevering, for her greatest dread was that she should turn and not keep her perfection. She

[41] Margaret Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1995), 86.

[42] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 30-31.

[43] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 31.

[44] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 31.

[45] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 32.

> had so many enemies and so much slander that it seemed she might not bear it without great grace and a mighty faith. Others, who had no knowledge of her manner of governance, save only by sight outwardly, or else by the jangling of other persons, perverting the judgment of truth, said full evil of her and cause her to have much enmity and much trouble, more than she should have otherwise had, had their evil language not been.[46]

Through this discussion in the eighteenth chapter of her book, Kempe demonstrates that she is justified in her actions not only by God but also religious figures of her day, including the famous anchoress Julian of Norwich. She was encouraged to continue her endeavors, despite the slander and backlash she might encounter. Kempe claimed religious authority through her prophecy and was an independent woman, which enabled her to continue to live her unconventional lifestyle, unlike Woodville who was always bound by her position as Queen.

Kempe's actions and devotion to God also influenced her local priest to explore his faith further after being amazed by her piety. After their first encounter he remarked, "'I marvel much at this woman…and I desire greatly to speak more with her.'"[47] Kempe then recorded that "she caused him to examine much good scripture and many a good doctor which he would not have looked at that time had she not been."[48] Through their friendship, the priest read to Kempe for over seven years, increasing both their knowledge. He also suffered "many an evil word for her love inasmuch as he read her so many books and supported her in her weeping and crying."[49]

The desire to express her faith led Kempe to interact with the clergy not only on the lower levels of the ecclesiastical structure, but bishops and archbishops as well. These

[46] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 33.

[47] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 106.

[48] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 106.

[49] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 106.

higher-level men received Kempe with various attitudes; some supported her and were sympathetic while others found her irritating and troublesome. One of Kempe's greatest acquaintances was Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury. Their first encounter was positive and they talked from the afternoon until the stars came out in the evening. After Kempe confided her secrets to him Arundel "found no default therein but approved her manner of living and was tight glad that out merciful Lord Christ Jesus shower such grace."[50] He granted her request to select her own confessor and receive communion every Sunday. Further, Arundel granted Kempe a letter of authority to carry with her in Canterbury to receive weekly communion and would take no payment in return. When Kempe arrived at Lambeth Castle with her husband, they encountered many of the Archbishop's men who "swore many great oaths and spoke many reckless words."[51] She rebuked them and said that they would be damned if they did not change their ways. When she spoke with Arundel about these men, she stated that he would have to answer for them unless he corrected them or put them out of his service. He responded favorably and meekly hinted that things would improve.[52]

While awaiting a ship to take her on pilgrimage, Kempe was in Bristol and summoned to appear before Thomas Peverel, the Bishop of Worcester, who was acquainted with Kempe's father. As she waited for the Bishop the next morning, Kempe encountered several of his men who were dressed quite fashionably. Angered, Kempe stated that they were more like the devil's men. Upset, the men chided her until she "suffered them well and meekly." Afterwards, Kempe "spoke so soberly against sin and

[50] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 28.

[51] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 27.

[52] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 28.

their misgovernance that they were in silence and held themselves well pleased with her dalliance."[53] The Bishop then asked Kempe to eat with him and to pray for him because he knew he would die within two years and wished to do so "in charity."[54] The Bishop blessed Kempe and gave her gold before sending her on her way.

In York, Kempe was accosted by one priest who took her by the collar of her gown and asked what cloth she had on. Kempe refused to answer him until he started to swear many great oaths. She then stated, "'Sir, you should keep the commandments of God and not swear so negligently as you do.'"[55] The priest eventually left her and went away secretly.

Later, during that same time in York, Kempe was brought before Henry Bowet, the Archbishop of York, who was well known for his stern stand against Lollardy and heresy. Upon observing Kempe's white clothing, the Archbishop asked her if she was a maiden and commanded that she be fettered as a false heretic when he learned that she was a wife. Kempe boldly stated that she was not a heretic and he could not prove her one. The Archbishop and other churchmen examined Kempe, who then had a crying spell while praying for help. Kempe knew the Articles of Faith well enough and the Archbishop was unsure of how to proceed with her. He then decided to make her leave his diocese, to which Kempe replied she would not until she saw her confessor in Bridlington. Angered, he then told her she must not teach or challenge the people in his diocese. Again, Kempe refused to comply, and stated,

[53] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 80.

[54] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 80.

[55] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 89.

> 'No, sir, I shall not swear, for I shall speak of God and reprove those who swear great oaths wheresoever I go, unto the time that the pope and holy church have ordained that no man shall be so hardy to speak of God, for God almighty forbids not, sir, that we shall speak of him. And also the gospel makes mention that, when the woman had heard out Lord preach, she came before him with a loud voice and said, "Blessed be the womb that bore you and the teats that gave you suck." Then our Lord said again to her, "Forsooth so are they blessed that hear the word of God and keep it." And therefore, sir, I think that the gospel gives me leave to speak of God.'[56]

When a clerk read from a letter of Saint Paul that women should not preach, Kempe asserted that she did not preach because she never entered a pulpit, but simply used communication and good words. Kempe next told the group of men a tale about a bad priest. The Archbishop commended the tale, but then asked for a man to lead this woman away from him. He gave a clerk five shillings to do so, and blessed Kempe before she departed.[57]

Chapter sixty-nine of Kempe's book recounts several religious supporters, demonstrating once again where Kempe derived her ability to act as she did. These men included Thomas Hevingham, prior of St Margaret's Church; John Wakering, Bishop of Norwich; Roger Spryngolde, Kempe's main confessor; and Master Alan of Lynn. Master Alan was eventually pressured into distancing himself from Kempe, to both of their dismay. A new priest arrived soon after to Lynn and Kempe quickly befriended the new man.[58]

God often directed Kempe in her travels, and on one occasion early in her book she met with several monks. One asked whether he would be saved, and Kempe told him

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[56] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 92.

[57] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 90-95.

[58] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 123-124.

they must go to Mass. Jesus told Kempe that the man had committed lechery, in despair, and in the keeping of worldly goods, but would be saved if he repented. Surprised, the monk fed Kempe a great dinner and gave her gold to pray for him. When she later returned, the man had repented his ways and was turned from sin.[59] Kempe was recognized as an authority by this man because she was able to correctly tell the monk what sins he had committed, rather than having him accept her claims as a servant of God.

In Rome, Kempe met a German priest at St John's Church Lateran, who was amazed by her tears. He administered communion to her away from others to test whether her tears were true, and quickly believed them to be the work of the Holy Spirit. The man continued to support Kempe despite "many evil words and much tribulation" he received as a result. The priest also forsook his office because he continued to support Kempe, even when "all her countrymen had forsaken her, for they were ever her greatest enemies and caused her much heaviness in every place where they came, for they wished that she should neither have sobbed nor cried."[60]

Kempe's agency is significant in these episodes—unlike most women, she not only meets and discusses her faith with a variety of clergymen, she is also able to argue with them. She is often accused of heresy and Lollardy, but typically talks her way out of the accusations or escapes with the help of a friend. It is especially interesting that, despite the hatred she attracts because she does not conform to society, Kempe is freer than most for the same reason. Her faith does not differ from the typical orthodoxy of the day; she is just more vocal and active in her expression, which allows her a greater

[59] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 20-21.

[60] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 61.

amount of agency in that expression. Woodville, in contrast, was much more typical in her expression, but was able to use her role as Queen to live it on a grander scale than the average woman.

Secular Involvement

The evidence available for Kempe and Woodville's secular involvement is switched from the amount available regarding their ecclesiastical. Much more is known about Woodville because she was the Queen of England, and one who exercised considerable agency because of the great faith her husband had in her during their marriage, and then her use of her economy of makeshifts after his death. Kempe does not spend a great deal of time reflecting on her interactions with secular authorities; she is more concerned with clerical authority. However, what evidence is available shows that they were similar to her ecclesiastical encounters.

The involvement of Woodville in placing her relatives in advantageous marriages has been discussed in the previous chapter, and was a source of considerable malcontent by her enemies. She was also blamed by Warwick's faction for Edward's alliance with Burgundy, due to Woodville's familial connections to Burgundy. MacGibbon harshly comments, "Like *la Pompadour* after her, Elizabeth made her influence felt even in the foreign policy of the time, and it would appear that more credit should be given to her for the Burgundian Alliance and all this it entailed than has hitherto been the case."[61] However, MacGibbon has no sources to support this assertion. Certainly Warwick, who had been sent to France, felt the same way though, and continued a campaign to defame the Queen amongst the people.

[61] MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, 65.

Woodville was active in supporting both Queens' College and encouraging her husband to support Eton College. In 1461 Edward had revoked all endowments to the College, in 1463 a bull from Pope Pius II authorized its abolition, and by 1465 all of its furnishings were ordered moved to Windsor. In 1467, however, the King restored the College lands and in 1469 petitioned the Pope to revoke the bull merging Eton and Windsor.[62] Woodville's work to save Queens' College is credited with changing Edward's mind and by 1471 the royal couple was visiting frequently, including three visits between July and September. Woodville's contribution to the College is acknowledged in an epitaph by Provost Henry Bost: "Illius auspiciis elemosina conjugis uncti Edward Quarti larga pluebat opem."[63] Woodville is also known to have visited Queens' College in 1468 during the Cook and Desmond affairs.[64] In March 1473, the College received the sum of thirteen marks yearly, and two months later all offences committed before 30 September 1471 were pardoned by Edward IV. Letters from the Queen and King to the town of Cambridge resulted in the transference of a large plot of common land to Queens' College to expand the area.[65] Eton College was also granted several priories, messuages and cottages at the same time.[66] The tributes from the two institutions credit Woodville as the intercessor who worked to save the struggling colleges, reflecting her ability to influence her husband to support cause that were of interest to her.

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[62] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 73. *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV 1461-1467*, 446.

[63] "For his benefit, the abundant generosity of the wife of the anointed Edward IV showered wealth." Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 73.

[64] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 106.

[65] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV, Henry VI 1467-1477*, 394.

[66] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, Edward IV, Henry VI 1467-1477*, 394.

Woodville issued the first set of statutes to Queens' College on 10 March 1475, which formalized the administrative structure of the institution, "providing for such essential details as the election of the president, the establishment of his residence, office and authority, the supervision of the land, and the designation of stipends for the president and scholars."[67] At this point, Queens' College had grown from four fellows to twelve and the new college seal incorporated Woodville's coat of arms with those of England, replacing those of Margaret of Anjou. While Margaret was the "fundatrix nostra prima," Woodville was the "vera fundatrix," as written in a 1484 history of the college.[68] Woodville's involvement in such matters is significant because Edward was focused on war and invading France and had little time for such things. Woodville amply fulfilled her role as a "benevolent queen," working to improve the country's educational and domestic matters while the King was preoccupied with foreign affairs.

One situation that appears to have affected Woodville's reputation negatively through propaganda by Warwick is her involvement in the Cook affair when she requested her share of a fine known as the "Queen's Gold." Accused of treason and held in prison for several years, Thomas Cook was ultimately released but fined £8,000. The "Queen's Gold" was a ten percent assessment added to fines paid to the King and dates back to Eleanor of Aquitaine, who obtained most of her income through this statute. In recent years it had become harder to collect. Margaret of Anjou's account books from 1452-3 show that of fifty-nine assessments, several were unpaid and forty-three were still uncollected. Woodville's records show she had improved on Margaret's record and

[67] Okerlund, *Elizabeth*, 159.

[68] MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, 74.

collected on ten of eleven.[69] This statute was still in effect in 1534, when Anne Boleyn collected on several assessments.[70] Despite the precedent, Woodville's efforts to receive her Queen's gold are cited in Fabyan's *Chronicle* as evidence of her greedy nature. However, *The Great Chronicle*, a more reliable source, states that Woodville forgave the fine, "by the favour of one master page, then solicitor unto the Queen, had his end, how well there was no open speech of it after."[71] This episode reflects not only the negative attention the Queen was susceptible to by her enemies, but also that her forgiveness of the fine ultimately reflected positively on her reputation because of her perceived forgiving and benevolent nature.

Warwick also negatively implicated Woodville in the execution of Thomas FitzGerald, Earl of Desmond, Deputy Governor of Ireland. A memoir by the Earl's grandson, as well as the 1938 biography of Woodville by David MacGibbon, further indict Woodville as the main figure in Desmond's execution. His grandson claimed that Woodville was angry with Desmond for telling the King to annul his marriage in exchange for a foreign bride. In revenge, Woodville allegedly stole the King's signet ring and sealed an execution order for Desmond and sent it to Ireland. MacGibbon writes that when Desmond was replaced as Deputy Governor by the Earl of Worcester, the man's new office "had been obtained for him by the Queen, who intended through him to avenge herself on Desmond…In everything he did in Ireland Worcester appears to have been acting for Elizabeth, who is said to have secretly procured a privy-seal warrant for

[69] A.R. Myers, *Crown, Household and Parliament in Fifteenth Century England* (London: Hambledon Press, 1985), 142.

[70] Retha Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 133.

[71] The *Great Chronicle of London* (London: George Jones, 1938), 208.

Desmond's arrest and execution."[72] MacGibbon's only source in this statement is Desmond's grandson. This story is dismissed by Charles Ross, Edward IV's biographer, Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs in their article on Elizabeth, and Arlene Okerlund, Woodville's biographer. Both the Cook and Desmond affairs, however, show how, as Queen, Woodville was a target for blame by her political enemies, during and after her death.

Woodville had a notable positive relationship with the city of Coventry and its citizens, one that was mutually beneficial. When the city fathers arrested one of the King's servant for disrupting the peace, Woodville sent a personal letter of thanks endorsing their actions: "We intended not in any wise to maintain support nor favour any of my said Lord's servants, nor ours, in any riots or unfitting demeaning among you, nor elsewhere to our knowledge."[73] Further, she thanked the city for their devotion to "our dearest son, the Prince; and in like wise to all our children…and namely unto our right dear son, the Duke of York, in this time of our absence from him."[74] The letter was accompanied with a gift of twelve venison from her forest at Fekenham, stating that they be divided equally with six bucks to the Mayor and his brethren and the other six to their wives.[75] The relationship between Woodville and Coventry is also modeled in other towns and institutions that Woodville took care to support.

The queen was not only expected to look after religious and secular institutions, but also participate in entertaining foreign visitors. Woodville's churching and the

[72] MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, 42-43.

[73] *The Coventry Leet Book: or Mayor's Register* (London: Early English Text Society, 1907-13), 407.

[74] *The Coventry Leet Book*, 407.

[75] *The Coventry Leet Book*, 405-406.

impression it left on Tetzel and Rozmital was successful, as was the impression she left on Louis de Gruthuyse and his companion, Bluemantle Pursuivant. The Queen entertained the visitors in her apartment, where "'she had there her ladies playing at the morteaulx, and some of her ladies were playing at Closheys of yeury, and Dausinge. And sum at divers other games, accordinge. The which sight was full pleasant to them. Also the King danced with my lady Elizabeth, his eldest daughter.'"[76] The Queen personally furnished the bedding in Gruthuyse's apartments, which were hung with white silk and linen cloth and covered in carpet. The Queen was an active participant in entertaining the foreign visitors and ensuring their comfort, ultimately benefitting her husband's image, which in turn positively impacted Woodville's agency as she was granted greater influence by her husband.

As previously discussed, Woodville was entrusted as one of the primary executors of her husband's will. After Edward's death, Woodville worked as a peacemaker and argued at the King's Council that an army should be commissioned to bring the new boy King to London as quickly as possible for his coronation. The Croyland Chronicle records that the Queen "most beneficently tried to extinguish every spark of murmuring and disturbance, and wrote to her son, requesting him on his road to London, not to exceed an escort of two thousand men," for fear of alarming opposing factions.[77] The future Richard III worked against Woodville and quickly arrested several of her relatives and took Edward V into his custody. Woodville quickly went into sanctuary at Westminster once more. Panicked, the Archbishop of York came to Woodville in

[76] MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, 113.

[77] "The Croyland Chronicle," Richard III Society, http://www.r3.org/bookcase/croyland/croy7.html (accessed December 12, 2011). MacGibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, 139.

sanctuary and brought with him the great seal, which he presented to Woodville to "use and behalf of your son."[78] Though he requested it back the following day because Woodville had no authority to use it, the action shows the great trust the Archbishop had in the ability of the Queen. Woodville was ultimately stripped of all power given to her by her husband's will on 7 May 1483, in a meeting at Baynard Castle between the King's leading prelates and the powerful nobles. Richard undoubtedly feared the control Woodville possessed and resorted to whatever means possible to slander the Queen's name.

In an effort to secure his position and turn the people against Woodville, Richard quickly accused the Queen of plotting to murder him and his supporters. He also accused her of witchcraft, along with Jane Shore, a claim that Thomas More eloquently dismissed as preposterous: "The Queen was too wise to go about any such folly. And also if she would, yet she of all folk least make Shore's wife of counsel, whom of all women she most hated, as that concubine whom the King her husband had most loved."[79] The following year Richard's Parliament approved *Titulus Regius: An Act for the Settlement of the Crown upon the king and his issue, with a recapitulation of his Title*, a document that declared: "that the said pretended Marriage betwixt the above named King Edward and Elizabeth Grey, was made of great presumption without the knowing and assent of the Lords of this Land, and also by Sorcery and Witchcraft, committee by the said Elizabeth, and her Mother, Jacquetta Duchess of Bedford."[80] As a result, King Edward

[78] Thomas More, *More's History of King Richard III* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1883), II: 21-22.

[79] More, *More's History of King Richard III*, II: 46.

[80] "Titulus Regilus," Richard III Society, http://www.r3.org/bookcase/texts/tit_reg.html (accessed January 14, 2012).

and Woodville had been living in sin and adultery and their children were illegitimate and unable to claim any inheritance. The numerous logical inconsistencies were overlooked by Parliament—the main purpose of the decree was to humiliate the Queen and force her out of sanctuary, along with her daughters. The Elizabeth Woodville presented in Thomas More's *Richard III* is quite powerful, despite her situation. Several lords and the Cardinal Bourchier are sent to persuade her to release her son into the custody of Richard. Woodville is quick-witted and not afraid to speak back to the men who are trying to take away her two sons. While the account is secondhand, one can infer that based on her previous works and the trust placed in her by Edward IV, Woodville was capable of handling such a retinue.[81] As mentioned in the previous chapter, Woodville was also involved in the betrothal of her eldest daughter to the future Henry VII.

Woodville's ability to handle secular affairs resulted in a significant amount of agency. Through her husband she frequently acted as intercessor, and was able to advance her family and organizations and causes she considered worthwhile. Her enemies used her power to slander her name, which in several cases led to a negative reputation in history. Woodville was representative not only of the power women were able to wield, but of what happened when men disapproved and feared they were growing too powerful. Kempe was often at odds with the men she encountered and never hesitated to tell them if she disapproved of their actions.

When visiting York, Kempe was accepted by many good men and women, who "prayed her to meals and made her right good comfort and were right glad to hear her

[81] More, *More's History of King Richard III*, 25-31.

dalliance, having great marvel at her speech, for it was fruitful."[82] However, she notes that she still had many enemies who despised and scorned her. When clerks in the Minister examined her in her faith, the people protested the decision to keep her in prison, and stated that they would accompany her to see the Archbishop. The clerks then dismissed Kempe, and one approached her after the others departed to apologize for their treatment. He asked for her prayers, which Kempe gladly offered.[83] Though many persecuted Kempe because of her unconventional behavior, she is willing to forgive those who sought it and pray for them. This aspect of her piety often endeared her to those she encountered, thus strengthening her ability to continue her lifestyle.

During a visit to Canterbury, Kempe was "greatly despised and reproved because she wept so hard, both by the monks and the priests and by secular men."[84] One monk stated, "'I would you were enclosed in a house of stone so no man could speak with you,'" while another claimed, "'Either you have the Holy Ghost or else you have a devil within you.'"[85] In reply, Kempe told a tale of a man scorned because he was worthy of God. The men followed her out of the monastery, calling her a false Lollard and threatened to burn her. Fearful of her life, Kempe prayed for help and was saved by two men who helped her find her inn.[86]

Chapter sixty-eight of Kempe's book illustrates the acknowledgement by doctors of her religious devotion. Master Custawns, a doctor who Kempe had known for several

[82] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 88.

[83] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 90.

[84] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 21.

[85] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 22.

[86] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 22-23.

years, confirmed her crying and weeping as a gracious gift from God. Master Custawns then told another doctor of divinity who was about to preach that if Kempe began to weep during his sermon, the man was to ignore her. The man did so and told Kempe that she was always welcome in his home of Norwich. The third man discussed in this chapter is an Austin Friar, who admonished the people when they banned and cursed Kempe for weeping during his sermon. He told the people, "'Friends, be still, you know full little what she feels.'"[87] All three men confirmed Kempe's spiritual connection and supported her, despite the backlash she experienced from her contemporaries. The confirmation of secular and clerical male authorities was what continuously allowed Kempe to maintain her unconventional lifestyle.

While in Leicester, Kempe was interrogated by the Mayor, who called her a "'false strumpet, a false Lollard, and a false deceiver of the people.'"[88] After cursing and questioning her, the Mayor ordered her to be imprisoned, though the jailer took her to his own home out of pity. She was interrogated by the steward of Leicester the following day, who exclaimed "either you are a right good woman or else a right wicked woman," before returning her to her jailer.[89] Kempe was then questioned by the abbot of Leicester, along with the dean of Leicester, the mayor, and other lay men about her belief in the Eucharist and white clothing. Kempe told the Mayor he was unfit for his position. In return he stated that he believed Kempe had come to lead away the towns wives with her behavior and clothing. Eventually he sent her to the Bishop of Lincoln for a letter of

[87] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 122.

[88] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 82.

[89] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 83.

approval.[90] This episode is especially interesting because of the Mayor's remark about Kempe leading away the towns' wives. Her eccentric behavior is not only worrisome because it is an individual woman's defiance of typical gender norms, but also because it may spread to other women and convince them to abandon their lifestyle. Many men, and women, feared that Kempe was attempting to break the status quo, which was often the reason for their harsh reactions to her.

Conclusion

Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville, once more, were exceptional women of their time. However, their actions often reflected what was typical of society of the time and the reactions their expressions of agency would elicit if a woman properly fulfilled, or failed to fulfill, her expected role in society. The actions of these women had a significant impact on their reputations and public images, as well as that of their families. When Woodville properly followed the expected norms of her position she was praised and beloved by all except her enemies, who feared the influence she held as a result of her competence. Kempe provoked the opposite reaction in many cases, and men feared her because of the influence she potentially had on other women. Their interactions with the public at large, along with ecclesiastical and secular authority, reflect the acceptance of women who worked within the "correct" sphere of authority, and the rejection of those who refused to operate within it.

[90] Staley, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 83-86.

As argued by Kim Phillips, "a woman's identity was always contingent, secondary and relative to a man's, even when reaching an ideal of femininity."[91] This is evident in the reactions to Woodville and Kempe—both were regarded in relation to their families, especially their husbands. It was through their patriarchal bargaining that they could operate within society, and pushing the limit too far resulted in negative response, as can be seen most prominently with Kempe. Kempe and Woodville often used the cracks between men to enlarge their agency and secure their positions. Kempe did so by playing minor clerics against their superiors and invoking God and Christ to protect her from earthly men. Woodville used her position as Queen to fulfill the roles of wife, mother, hostess, and intercessor to advance her own causes and protect herself and family. Both are subject to the patriarchal society they live in and it is through their clever maneuvering and bargaining that they are able to expand their agency and operate within it.

[91] John Arnold and Katherine Lewis, eds., *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 32.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

As shown through Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville, women of different social classes were able to maneuver within the limitations of patriarchy and exercise agency through the patriarchal bargain and the use of an economy of makeshifts. This thesis falls between two different arguments: that patriarchy dominated women's lives, as argued by Judith Bennett, and that women of the upper class were able to escape the bonds of patriarchy, as argued by Barbara Harris. Instead, it argues that women of both the middle and upper classes were able to exercise agency to a certain degree using what was available to them. Although women's methods differed, this thesis demonstrates that the agency afforded women by the patriarchal bargain and economy of makeshifts was not limited to the aristocracy.

Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville, though exceptional women of their day, serve as ideal case studies because of the sources available about them and their status as role models among their contemporaries. Men and women rarely fulfill their expected gender roles perfectly, and these two women are no exception. Yet their disregard of social norms enabled them to exercise significant agency. While Kempe's actions seem to represent a conscious rejection of her expected role in society, Woodville's actions seem less consciously rebellious and more expedient as she reacted to political and family situations. Nevertheless, as this thesis demonstrates, both women

were able to maneuver within the patriarchal bonds of wife, mother, and even queen to exert considerable control over their life choices.

Kempe and Woodville certainly lived in a time that is different from our modern world today; one that was governed by different rules and ideologies. However, this thesis shows that understanding the past is important for understanding the present, as Kempe and Woodville demonstrate. This thesis is also an effort to further gender the master narrative, by showing how Kempe and Woodville were important actors in history. Kempe was a rare woman in late medieval England who represents both the deep piety of the period as well as the dominance of patriarchy which she routinely defied. Woodville, who predominantly fulfilled her expected roles as wife, mother, and Queen, demonstrates the powerful influence these roles exerted over women's lives. Yet, the agency she demonstrated in her political, familial, and charitable choices had lasting effects on English society. By telling the story of these women, and highlighting the significant role they played in late medieval England, this thesis enhances the master narrative by adding them into the overall picture.

This work examined Woodville and Kempe in the three major spheres that dominated life in the late medieval period: religion, domestic, and public. The second chapter, by focusing on religion and examining the practical piety of the two women, asked: are women equally constrained by gender when practicing their faith, and do elite women practice their faith differently because of their class? It concluded that the faith of Woodville and Kempe was the same and that the differences in their practical piety stemmed mostly from their difference circumstances. Both women, however, exercised agency within the practice of their faith through patriarchal bargaining with their

husbands and religious men, while the use of the economy of makeshifts determined how they participated in their faith and gave back to the Church. Thus, despite the significant differences in their class status, both Woodville and Kempe in order to travel on pilgrimage needed permission from their husbands to do so.

In short, female piety was similar in the varying social classes but the practices were determined by social status. Both women actively lived their faith, above and beyond what was expected of them. The way they participated in acts of piety appears to have been similar to what other women were doing, but on a grander scale. Woodville was able to perform greater monetary acts of piety because of her wealth as queen, but she was unable to travel as a poor pilgrim for the same reason. Kempe was able to do the opposite because she was a middle class woman. Kempe stood out because of her dialogues with and visions of Christ, but the other women she encountered in her travels appear to be participating in their faith in similar ways of pilgrimage and devotion to Christ. As a whole, based on case studies of Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe, women seem to have practiced their faith in similar manners, and their social class determined the extent they could practice their faith in certain areas (monetary, communal and personal), rather than how it was practiced as a whole.

The third chapter focused on the domestic sphere and examined how Woodville and Kempe exercised agency through the use of the patriarchal bargain during their lifecycle stages of wife and widow. Despite their different social status and their financial situations, both women were held to similar domestic and gender roles. They employed similar strategies to gain some degree of autonomy within the patriarchal dominant world of medieval England. This chapter demonstrates that women held the greatest degree of

agency during their widowhood, which was typical of women during this period. Further, the life cycle stage of a woman was more significant in determining agency than social class.

The use of patriarchal bargaining and the economy of makeshifts was especially evident in the lives of Margery Kempe and Elizabeth Woodville. After successfully bearing fourteen children and maintaining her husband's household, Kempe, who held money in her own name, was able to barter with her husband to gain independence from him to travel and set up her own household in order to live a chaste life devoted to God. Woodville also provided the children her husband desired and earned his trust through her competent raising of his children and ability to run the family when he was away. While Woodville was more traditional in her operation within the system of patriarchy, she still exercised a considerable amount of agency during her marriage and widowhood. Despite their class differences, Kempe and Woodville employed similar methods of bargaining to gain some autonomy within their lives. They held a considerable amount of agency in their marriages and widowhoods, and this power was different during these two life stages. Their lifetime careers as wives and mothers allowed for considerable power over their families and enabled them at times to outmaneuver the men in their lives—such as Kempe preaching to the Archbishop of York or Woodville marrying her son to Anne Holland as a power play against the Earl of Warwick. In effect, these women were able to successfully manipulate the system to their benefit. Though they tended to accept and operate within the system, their vibrant personalities allowed them to stand up to the men in their lives when challenged and assert their own form of female power.

The fourth chapter examined Woodville and Kempe in the public sphere and how they expressed their agency through interactions with the public in general, as well as with religious and secular authorities. Their actions often reflected what was typical of society of the time and the reactions their expressions of agency would elicit if a woman properly fulfilled, or failed to fulfill, her expected role in society. When Woodville properly followed the expected norms of her position she was praised and beloved by all except her enemies, who feared the influence she held as a result of her competence. Kempe provoked the opposite reaction in many cases, and men feared her because of the influence she potentially had on other women. Their interactions with the public at large, along with ecclesiastical and secular authority, reflect the acceptance of women who worked within the "correct" sphere of authority, and the rejection of those who refused to operate within it.

A woman's identity was always tied to a man's—whether it is her father, husband, or son—an idea that is evident with Kempe and Woodville. The negative reactions to Kempe often led to questions about why her men folk were not controlling her. Woodville was very closely associated with her family, most of whom quickly benefitted from her position as Queen. Kempe and Woodville often used the gaps of male control in their lives to enlarge their agency and secure their positions. Kempe did so by playing minor clerics against their superiors and invoking God and Christ to protect her from earthly men. Woodville used her position as Queen to fulfill the roles of wife, mother, hostess, and intercessor to advance her own causes and protect herself and family. Both were subject to the patriarchal society they lived in and it was through their

clever maneuvering and bargaining that they were able to expand their agency and operate within it.

The significance of this thesis is twofold. First, it demonstrates that women in late medieval English society were similar in how they lived their lives despite class differences. They practiced their faith similarly, were held to the same gender roles and domestic expectations, and lived in a society dominated by men. However, through patriarchal bargaining and the use of the economy of makeshifts, women were able to maneuver within a system that sought to control them in order to exercise some autonomy over their own lives. Elizabeth Woodville and Margery Kempe show that while there were different methods of using these tools, there was still a significant degree of similarity which can be applied to women of the upper and middle classes in general. Second, this thesis demonstrates both the extent and limits of patriarchy in late medieval England. It shows how women were able to both act outside of the patriarchal system as well as maneuver within it to make their own life choices. Kempe, for example, illustrates the dominance of patriarchy through the fearful reactions her nontraditional behavior elicited. At the same time, Kempe continued to publicly defy gender expectations and act in nontraditional ways. Moreover, Woodville and Kempe both became role models to their contemporaries and even later generations. Their strategic maneuvering within the patriarchal world of late medieval England thus potentially served as a guide to other women.

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